

Inspection of Hillside High School

Breeze Hill, Bootle, Merseyside L20 9NU

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 September 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Amanda Ryan. This school is part of the Wade Deacon Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Gary Kelly, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Fowler. There is also an executive headteacher, Simon Corner, who is responsible for this school and three other schools.

What is it like to attend this school?

Hillside High School is an accepting community. Pupils feel welcome and diversity is celebrated. For instance, pupils proudly took part in an 'around the world in eighty days' event to promote their culture and educate others about it.

Pupils benefit from high levels of pastoral support. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm. Pupils understand that staff only want the best for them.

The trust has supported the school to raise expectations of pupils' achievement. In addition, the school has improved the curriculum. As a result, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve better than they did in the past.

The school has set out clearly in 'the Hillside way' how pupils should behave. Pupils value the routines that the school has put in place to help them to conduct themselves appropriately. Pupils behave well and are respectful.

Pupils are happy at this school. They appreciate the safe space that the school provides for them to be individuals. Pupils enjoy the breadth of clubs and opportunities that are on offer, including sports and performing art clubs.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

In recent years, the school has focused successfully on improving the quality of education that pupils receive. In collaboration with the trust and with careful consideration, it has designed an ambitious and broad curriculum. The key stage 3 curriculum is a particular strength. This is because teachers have a clear understanding of how pupils' learning fits together. They have identified the key concepts and vocabulary that pupils should learn. However, the thinking behind the key stage 4 curriculum has not been as rigorous. As a result, the school does not have the same level of confidence in the curriculum. It has not fully considered the precise details that pupils need to learn. As a result, this hinders some pupils in being able to make connections in their learning.

Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding and swiftly address any misconceptions. They use assessment strategies effectively to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge and to adapt teaching. In some subjects, the approaches that teachers take and the activities that they design do not help pupils to embed knowledge. In addition, some pupils lack the resilience and confidence to move to more complex tasks. As a result, some pupils struggle to remember learning over time.

In lessons, pupils can learn free from distraction and there is rarely any low-level disruption. Pupils' attendance, including for those with SEND and those who are disadvantaged, has improved. However, some pupils still do not attend school as regularly as they should.

The school's approach to training has galvanised staff. Teachers are motivated to keep their own learning up to date and to draw on current research. As a result, their subject knowledge is strong. The school's investment in staff development has also improved staff well-being. Staff told inspectors that a review of the feedback policy has reduced their workload.

The school has a carefully designed programme for pupils' personal development. Pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy and the importance of good dental hygiene. They learn about the rule of law. Pupils hold positions of responsibility, such as head girl and head boy, school counsellors and prefects. Some pupils, including those with SEND, take advantage of the after-school clubs. The well-thought-out careers programme helps pupils to make informed choices about their next steps.

This is a school where, across the curriculum, reading is a priority. Staff and pupils share the belief that 'reading is power'. Staff are increasingly confident to support pupils effectively with reading. Pupils enjoy reading well-chosen ambitious and diverse texts. Many pupils read independently at home. The school has engaged well with parents and carers to increase their awareness about the importance of reading. It has made great strides to improve the support for those who struggle with reading. Those who struggle with reading are supported successfully to read fluently.

Governors and trustees support the school well in its aim of 'excellence in the community'. They ensure that the school is suitably held to account for its outcomes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, the key stage 4 curriculum is not as well thought out as the key stage 3 curriculum. This hinders some teachers in knowing what they should teach and when they should teach it. As a result, some pupils do not make links with what they have learned previously. The school should finalise its thinking around the key stage 4 curriculum, to help ensure that key knowledge is identified and that it builds on the strengths of the key stage 3 curriculum.
- On occasions, teachers do not make the most appropriate teaching or activity choices to embed new knowledge. This hinders some pupils from remembering what they have learned. The school should ensure that teachers are supported to design activities that help pupils to secure learning over time.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	141693
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	10290275
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	701
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Fowler
Principal	Amanda Ryan
Website	www.hillsidehigh.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 and 30 June 2021 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Wade Deacon Trust.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers and one unregistered alternative provider for a small number of pupils.
- The school runs an alternative provision on site for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector met with the CEO, executive headteacher, governors, including the chair of governors, and members of the trust board.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, physical education, history, mathematics, science and Spanish. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed pupils' learning in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation document, school improvement plans, minutes of trustee and governor meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils from Years 7 to 11 about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including any free-text responses. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

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