

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Hilltop School

Larch Road, Maltby, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S66 8AZ

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 March 2025

Outcome

Hilltop School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Sam MacDonald. This school is part of Nexus Multi Academy 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), Warren Carratt and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Rachel Potts.

What is it like to attend this school?

Hilltop School develops pupils to be the best they can be. The school has high aspirations for its pupils. Developing pupils' communication and interaction skills is an important part of the school's work. Pupils experience lessons that prepare them well for their next steps in education and life. However, some parts of the curriculum are more embedded than others.

All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Pupils are happy in the school. They feel safe and well supported. Pupils benefit from the well-equipped school sites. They access a range of specialist resources and therapeutic interventions. These are used well to meet pupils' individual special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Staff know individual pupils well. They model positive behaviour around school. As a result, pupils engage positively with school. If pupils become distracted, staff swiftly intervene and support them effectively. This ensures that the learning environment is calm.

Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. The curriculum provides a range of development opportunities for pupils' broader development. Pupils enjoy the variety of activities available to them. For example, some pupils enjoy horse riding or work with a coach to learn sports such as cricket.

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

Pupils learn a redeveloped curriculum. Pupils, including those in the early years and post-16, follow a pathway curriculum. The range of education pathways have been developed to support pupils' learning needs well. The school makes further adaptations to the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs effectively. It carefully plans progression to formal qualifications, as appropriate, including entry-level qualifications.

Reading and phonics are important parts of the curriculum. The school has recently revised its phonics curriculum. Where teaching is most effective, staff deliver phonics lessons with confidence. However, the teaching of phonics is not consistent. Communication lessons strengthen pupils' reading skills and phonics knowledge. This ensures that pupils have repeated opportunities to develop their reading skills and phonics knowledge during the school day. To develop pupils' enjoyment of reading, pupils read books by well-known authors, such as Roald Dahl, and use biographical texts to inform their written work.

The school ensures staff have the right training to support pupils' learning effectively. Staff adapt lessons and classroom resources to take account of the needs of individual pupils. As a result, pupils' work follows the intended curriculum consistently well. Pupils organise and present their written work clearly. In many lessons, pupils revisit learning and practise skills such as writing. However, sometimes staff move lessons on too quickly without checking pupils' understanding or learning activities do not effectively enable pupils to secure the most important knowledge.

Pupils typically behave well. They know that staff are on hand to support them if they need help to keep focused. The school closely tracks pupils' attendance. In general, most pupils, including pupils with complex medical needs, attend well.

The school has developed a well-thought-out personal development curriculum. Pupils have regular opportunities to meet people from a range of different jobs and organisations. These carefully planned learning episodes mean that pupils strengthen their awareness of the wider world. They develop a secure understanding of work and next steps beyond school. These activities are highly targeted to meet pupils' individual needs.

Pupils effectively learn ways to keep healthy. This includes lessons and experiences to build knowledge about mental and physical health. Pupils participate in a range of activities to support their well-being. For example, pupils enjoy basic hygiene lessons. They learn to prepare for adulthood with lessons about healthy eating and how to cook independently.

Pupils take part in a range of educational visits to develop their cultural awareness and strengthen their understanding of their locality. For example, they visit the cinema and theatre to learn about performance and to make connections with stories they are

learning. They visit a local farm to learn about jobs and growing food. Pupils recognise that these activities help their mental and physical well-being.

Trustees have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and the areas which need development. They support and challenge the school to be the best it can be. For example, working to develop the school sites and to support leadership change. Staff, including early career teachers, feel well supported by the school. The school prioritises their workload and well-being. It ensures staff receive frequent coaching and training to strengthen their practice so they support pupils effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The delivery of the phonics curriculum lacks consistency. Some staff lack the confidence to teach it consistently well. This means that some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. The school should ensure that the delivery of the phonics curriculum is of a consistently high standard and addresses any variability by developing staff confidence and further strengthening their practice.
- Some staff move lessons on too quickly without checking pupils' understanding. In addition, some learning activities distract pupils from developing the intended knowledge. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that all teaching is of a consistently high standard across all areas of the school.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding,

behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2013.

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	142795
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	10323077
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Rachel Potts
CEO of the trust	Warren Carratt
Headteacher	Sam MacDonald
Website	www.maltbyhilltop.org
Date of previous inspection	3 May 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Hilltop School is one of 17 academies in the Nexus Multi Academy Trust. The school joined the multi-academy trust in June 2016.
- Pupils attending the school have a range of complex SEND. These include autism, severe learning difficulty and profound and multiple learning difficulty. All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan.
- The school's key stage 4 provision and sixth form is located off site. It is a shared provision with another school within the multi-academy trust.
- The school has provision for up to 12 two-year-old pupils.

- The school has an agreed capacity of 164 pupils. At the time of this inspection, 183 pupils attend the school.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The lead inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in this evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders in the school.
- The lead inspector also met with members of the board of trustees and the CEO of the trust.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils from different year groups reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. Inspectors spoke with groups of staff and pupils to gain their views about the school.

Inspection team

David Mills, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Christina Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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