

Inspection of The Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre

Parsonage Downs, Great Dunmow, Essex CM6 2AU

Inspection dates:

8–9 October 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at The Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form. They enjoy learning and coming to school. Relationships between pupils and adults are positive. Pupils are well mannered, friendly and respectful to their teachers and to each other. Pupils say that the behaviour in their lessons is better due to stricter rules. Staff now have a consistent approach to discipline.

Pupils want to do well and are focused in lessons. Pupils feel safe and learn about how to keep themselves safe, including online. This helps them to stay safe outside of school. Bullying is rare. Pupils do not worry about being bullied. They said if it happens, staff take it seriously and deal with it quickly.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are important to staff. Staff at the school care about pupils' welfare. Pupils are fortunate to have access to supportive services, such as counselling. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the many clubs and activities that the school offers. Pupils are also proud to contribute to the local community. They visit old people's homes, and older pupils take part in the Dunmow Flitch trials.

Sixth-form students are good role models for the younger pupils. They are courteous, polite and enthusiastic about their learning.

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

In a short space of time, the new headteacher has made key improvements to the school. The science department is now fully staffed. The new leaders for English and mathematics are improving the curriculum. Pupils no longer study an extra course in GCSE statistics. This means pupils can concentrate on their GCSE mathematics. Planning in English is now more focused on helping pupils develop their vocabulary and language skills.

In English, mathematics and science, the quality of teaching is improving. Teachers plan and sequence work with greater care than in the past. This is to make sure that pupils know more and remember more. Consequently, pupils speak and write more confidently about the topics they have learned. In some areas of the curriculum, the questions and tasks teachers set are too easy. To address this, leaders are providing regular training sessions for teachers.

Pupils start too many GCSE courses at the beginning of Year 9. Often, they study their GCSE courses over three years rather than the recommended two. Where this occurs, pupils do not have Year 9 as a preparation year for GCSE. As a result, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. This makes it harder for pupils to comprehend the more advanced GCSE content. It also limits the connections pupils make to prior learning. Leaders have also stopped the practice of pupils

unnecessarily sitting GCSE exams a year early in religious education (RE) and citizenship.

Most teachers plan well for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They take into account their differing needs effectively. Pupils who struggle with their reading are also supported well by staff in the school's library, which is called the Learning Zone. Reading is promoted in assemblies, tutor time and in lessons. For example, pupils regularly participate in 'drop and read' time. Overall, pupils enjoy their reading and they are encouraged to read widely and often.

Disadvantaged pupils now attend school more regularly. Yet, there is more work to do to help those disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent to attend and to ensure that they achieve as well as they should. Behaviour is improving for this group of pupils. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced.

Pupils understand well what it means to live in multicultural Britain. They appreciate diversity and are accepting of difference. The school has an active group who raise awareness about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. Personal development is supported through the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum, assemblies and tutor times. Less well developed is careers education.

Students like the fact that the sixth form is small. They are of the view that they get closer personal attention as a result. Students are well mannered, articulate and mature. They happily chat with visitors and are clear about their role as young leaders in the school. They are well organised, motivated and driven to achieve their best.

Teachers enthuse students and make sure the work they do is interesting. At the end of their time in the sixth form, students achieve in line with national expectations. Almost all students continue their studies or enter employment when they leave. Currently, leaders are reviewing the offer of qualifications to include more vocational choice. Leaders also recognise that students would benefit from further opportunities beyond their academic studies. There are plans in place to address this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors and those in charge of safeguarding take their roles very seriously. They make sure pupils are safe, especially those who are most at risk and in need of protection. Leaders work well with external agencies, such as social services, to make sure that these pupils receive the support they need. Leaders train staff routinely and keep them up to date about the latest national guidance, as well as any local issues. Staff know pupils well and make sure that they feel comfortable and cared for.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school currently organises the curriculum with a two-year key stage 3 and a three-year key stage 4. The rationale is to provide pupils with more time to practise the skills required for GCSE and so perform better in their exams. This does not work for all pupils. In subjects such as RE, for example, pupils finish key stage 3 and choose their GCSE options without studying all the required content. This denies them their entitlement to important areas of knowledge. The school should review its curriculum and ensure that it is similar in breadth and ambition to the national curriculum.
- Leaders need to ensure that teachers continue to develop their pedagogy and subject knowledge. This is so teachers can plan well sequenced, challenging tasks and questions. This, in turn, will help pupils to know more and remember more over time.
- Some disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly enough. This is affecting their learning as they are missing important lessons. While there has been some improvement in this area, there is still more to do. Leaders must make sure disadvantaged pupils attend school regularly so that they do not fall behind in their work.
- The development of careers education, information and guidance (CEIAG) is at an early stage within the school. The leader has evaluated the school's provision and knows the areas to develop. There is a clear and comprehensive action plan in place to fulfil the requirements for CEIAG. This action plan now needs to be implemented.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137975
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10110247
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1215
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	137
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Perry
Headteacher	Daniel Gee
Website	www.helena-romanes.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 March 2016

Information about this school

- The new headteacher took up post in September 2019. The senior leadership team restructured in July 2019. The governing body was restructured in September 2019.
- The school uses two alternative providers to provide some of the education for a small number of pupils. These alternative providers are Essex Youth Build and Wilderness Foundation UK.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- During the inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, key stage leaders and the literacy coordinators. We met with the chair of the trust, a

trustee, the safeguarding governor and the local authority representative. Inspectors also spoke with pupils.

- Inspectors focused on the quality of the curriculum in English, mathematics, science, RE and business studies. We met with the curriculum leader of each subject, visited lessons, spoke with pupils, scrutinised a sample of books and held discussions with subject teachers.
- Inspectors scrutinised the checks that the school makes on adults who work in the school and spoke with the leaders responsible for safeguarding, including the governor responsible for safeguarding. We looked at records of the actions leaders have taken to protect pupils at risk. Inspectors spoke to pupils to gauge how safe they feel and to what extent they know how to keep themselves safe. Inspectors also checked whether members of staff understand and abide by the school's safeguarding policy.
- Inspectors visited one alternative provider and spoke with another.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in the 106 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as comments received via the text facility on Parent View. They also considered the 82 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Diana Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector
David Hutton	Ofsted Inspector
Georgina Atkinson	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Lawrence	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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