

Inspection of Helena Romanes School

Parsonage Downs, Great Dunmow, Essex CM6 2AU

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

The executive headteacher of this school is Catherine Davis. This school is part of the Saffron 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, Caroline Derbyshire, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Barrs.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils appreciate that the school is improving. Most pupils enjoy attending Helena Romanes School. They benefit from a diverse range of visits and visitors, and trips such as to battlefields in Belgium, theatres and the Millennium Seedbank. These trips develop pupils' knowledge and interest in the wider world. There are many clubs, including art, music and a range of sports. Pupils have opportunities to develop their leadership skills. They can become prefects or join the school council.

The vast majority of pupils behave well in this school. They treat each other and staff with respect. Pupils say that there is some bullying, but that teachers take action which makes it stop. Staff are skilled in providing support and guidance for pupils who need help with their well-being or behaviour. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe.

Pupils, including those in the sixth form, follow a curriculum which is adapted to meet the needs of all learners. The school expects pupils to do their best in all key stages. As a result, pupils achieve well over time.

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

The school has thought carefully about the curriculum. Leaders have identified the key knowledge that pupils need to learn. The school has planned so pupils build their knowledge over time. In lessons, information from previous lessons, including key vocabulary, is regularly revisited so that pupils remember it.

Teachers know the needs of their pupils well. They adapt their teaching to ensure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), can access the learning. They often use effective questioning to check pupils' knowledge. Pupils receive useful feedback on their work and use it to make improvements. As a result, pupils build up knowledge well.

On occasion, opportunities for discussion, debate and sharing of knowledge are limited. Pupils are not always able to explain their ideas clearly and confidently when speaking in lessons, or to adults. Pupils do not get enough chances to build their confidence and skill through practice.

Weaker readers in both the primary and secondary phases of the school are supported well. This helps them improve their fluency and accuracy. Although pupils encounter a range of texts across the curriculum and read in form time, many do not read widely or often enough for pleasure. The school is aware of this. Plans to promote a wider love of reading are in place. However, they are not fully developed.

Children in reception make a very secure start to their education. They learn how to work and play with each other. Children develop an interest in the world around them. The curriculum is carefully planned and adapted to their needs. Consequently,

they make substantial progress in the early steps of learning to read and in their understanding of number.

Students in the sixth form enjoy studying here. Increasing numbers of Year 11 pupils opt to stay on into the sixth form. This is because the sixth form is friendly and supportive and offers a wide range of subjects. Students are taught how to study effectively and organise themselves. If they find this difficult, they are helped to improve. They say that teachers have strong subject knowledge and that they push them in lessons to do their best. As a result, students in the sixth form learn and achieve well.

The school has high expectations of behaviour, and these are consistently enforced by staff. Teachers use approaches that focus on preventing inappropriate behaviour. Pastoral leaders work persistently with pupils who find it hard to meet expectations that teachers and staff have of them in order to help them improve. Lunchtimes have been shortened. These steps have substantially reduced disruption to learning and improved behaviour out of lessons. Pupils increasingly attend well.

The school's personal, social and health education curriculum is well planned and taught. Pupils in all key stages learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They learn about the importance of kindness and the importance of respecting those who are different to themselves.

Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education or employment. The school has a comprehensive careers programme which develops their knowledge of the labour market. Year 10 pupils take part in work experience. Students in the sixth form also visit universities.

The school increasingly uses its all-through provision to enhance pupils' learning. Teachers from the secondary school teach subjects such as physical education and Spanish to pupils in the primary school. Primary school teachers train secondary school staff in teaching phonics. Sixth-form students help in the primary school as part of their enrichment programme.

The school is highly ambitious to be the best that it can be. Governors and the trust share this desire to continue to improve. The trust provides the school with useful support, such as high-quality training for staff. Governors check on the progress of the school and check safeguarding. Staff, including early career teachers, say that the school is considerate of their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils do not typically read widely or often for pleasure, and as a result, they do not develop their literacy, curiosity or acquire the knowledge of vocabulary as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that reading is promoted and celebrated through the school to ensure that pupils develop a love of reading.
- Some pupils do not communicate their ideas clearly or confidently when speaking. Leaders should review the curriculum so that regular opportunities to build pupils' oracy are built in to improve pupils' communication skills.

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 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	137975
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10288513
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1292
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	183
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Barrs
Headteacher	Catherine Davis
Website	www.helena-romanes.essex.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Helena Romanes School has been an all-through school since September 2021. The school is continuing to grow. It currently has pupils in the primary school up to Year 4.
- The executive headteacher, who also leads the secondary school, has been in post since September 2022.
- A deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2023.
- The school currently makes use of one registered alternative provision.
- 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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, languages, design technology and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, 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 the curriculum in some other subjects and visited a range of lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders, including the reading coordinator, and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust as well as members of the local governing body and trustees.
- An inspector met with early career teachers and staff involved in the induction of new teachers.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around school. They met with groups of pupils to discuss behaviour in the school.
- An inspector spoke with a representative from the alternative provision used by the school.
- 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 records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector considered the 260 responses and 249 free-text responses received during the inspection to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. He also considered the 90 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 169 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors also spoke to parents at the school gate.

Inspection team

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