

Inspection of Helen Allison School

Longfield Road, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0EW

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 June 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel very happy at school. Pupils who communicate verbally say that they enjoy school because staff understand their needs so well, and work to ensure that every pupil learns in the right environment. The school supports pupils who are not yet communicating verbally to share their views and preferences in a range of ways. Staff are very attentive to all pupils' communications. In this way, staff build positive and trusting relationships with pupils.

Pupils across the school have highly positive attitudes to their learning. Those pupils who were able to talk to inspectors were keen to share their positive views of learning and how they are supported to become increasingly effective learners. Pupils at an earlier developmental stage learn within a less formal environment with an emphasis on play, engagement and their education, health and care (EHC) plans. As a result of the careful support provided by the school, and pupils' own commitment to their learning, pupils across the school achieve well.

Pupils enjoy the very wide range of enriching opportunities the school provides. They learn a range of musical instruments and have opportunities to perform within school and in the wider community. For many pupils, performing publicly would have been unimaginable when they first joined the school. However, as pupils progress through the school, their confidence in themselves builds, and they learn to take great pride in their talents and interests. Pupils across the school attend well because they enjoy coming to school.

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

The school's educational offer has been developed collaboratively, with teachers, support staff and the schools' expert therapy teams. Their vision is for a holistic programme that supports each pupil to develop vital foundations. Pupils become successful and well-rounded learners with a positive sense of their role within the wider community.

The school has recently redeveloped aspects of their curriculum to take account of pupils' changing needs. More pupils joining the school in recent years have needed a highly specialised curriculum that supports them to learn to engage with the adults in and out of school, and to learn to communicate and to ensure that their physical development is carefully supported. The curriculum for these pupils is centred around their EHC plans.

To ensure that there is a clear understanding of pupils' starting points, and areas of need, when they join, staff work closely with families, and carry out a range of informative assessments in collaboration with the therapeutic team. This ensures that staff know exactly what to focus on for each pupil, and how to adapt the learning environment to ensure that pupils feel safe, happy and comfortable. As a result, pupils demonstrate increasingly positive engagement with the world around them and achieve well, with many becoming increasingly able to engage with

learning in key areas such as communication and interaction, early reading and mathematics.

For pupils who are ready to follow a more academic pathway, the school has developed an enriching and broad curriculum. Younger pupils are taught by a form teacher throughout their day, which provides invaluable social and emotional support. When they are ready, normally in Year 10, pupils begin to transition to 'The Hub', which is a separate school site, where pupils are taught by subject specialist teachers, and supported to work towards a range of appropriate qualifications. In many subjects, the curriculum is having a highly positive impact on pupils. They enjoy learning, and retain the important knowledge that they require to continue to make progress through the school's planned curriculum.

The school recognises that there is some inconsistency between the curriculums that are delivered to pupils at the different stages of their journey. Leaders are continuing to refine learning so that, for example, the mathematics curriculum taught in the main school specifically prepares pupils for the mathematics curriculum that is delivered within 'The Hub'.

The school is ambitious for every pupil to learn to read. The school has a clear approach to phonics, and it ensures that the wider English curriculum is underpinned by high-quality texts that support pupils' engagement with reading. The school recognises that staff have varying levels of expertise in relation to phonics teaching. Some staff are more adept at adapting the phonics curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. As a result, some pupils' achievement in reading is stronger. Additionally, there is less effective oversight of the early reading programme, and other aspects of the curriculum, at 'The Hub'. Leaders do not assure themselves fully that older pupils, and students in the sixth form, are achieving the best possible reading outcomes.

Each pupil is carefully assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are achieving their targeted next steps. This work is very precise in relation to pupils' EHC plans. However, assessment is less precise across the subject-specific curriculums, and leaders do not have a precise understanding of how well pupils are progressing through the school's planned curriculum in every subject.

The school has developed a strong personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. Pupils receive appropriate relationships and sex education that is carefully adapted to take account of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school provides highly effectively for pupils' mental health and well-being, including when pupils have very complex and specific needs.

The school's wider personal development programme and effective careers programme prepare pupils extremely well for life beyond education. Staff take very careful account of the lived experiences of pupils and their families, and the school's personal development programme has a highly positive impact on pupils' lives now, as well as on their future lives. For example, the school recognises that many pupils might struggle to attend birthday parties in unfamiliar environments without careful

support. Staff plan birthday parties to prepare pupils to successfully attend birthday parties in the future.

Governance of the school is effective. Together, school leaders and those responsible for governance ensure that the independent school standards remain consistently met. The welfare and education of pupils sit at the heart of all decisions made by the school. Since the last inspection, the proprietor body has worked with a new director of education, to further sharpen governance. The school no longer has a governing board. Instead, a new governance committee has been established, which is chaired by an experienced trustee. This governance committee is recently formed; however, it is anticipated that it will further strengthen governance arrangements. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Not all staff are expert in the teaching of phonics. As a result, some pupils and groups of pupils receive less effective teaching than others. The school should continue their work to ensure that all staff are expert in the teaching of early reading so that all pupils are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes in reading.
- Assessment information is not gathered and used consistently well by the school to ensure that pupils are achieving the best possible outcomes across the academic curriculum. The school should continue their work to develop a clear approach to assessment across the curriculum so that leaders can be fully assured that all pupils are achieving highly across the subjects they learn.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	118993
DfE registration number	886/6046
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10322062
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Proprietor	National Autistic Society
Chair	Steve Ladyman
Headteacher	Adam Wadey
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63,794 to £105, 515
Telephone number	01474 814 878
Website	www.autism.org.uk/helenallison
Email address	helen.allison@nas.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 to 10 June 2021

Information about this school

- The school specialises in supporting and educating pupils with autism. All pupils have an EHC plan and are placed by their local authorities at the school. Many pupils have a range of additional and complex needs and diagnoses.
- In November 2022, an emergency inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education because of concerns raised about the welfare, health and safety of pupils. All of the independent school standards were found to be met during this inspection.
- The school uses no alternative provision, but does use local schools and colleges to supplement the educational offer of a small number of older pupils.
- The school operates a separate site for older pupils and students in the sixth form. The address of this site is The Hub, Brickfield Farm, Longfield, Kent DA3 7GA.
- The Director of Education was appointed to his role in March 2023, and plays an integral role in governance and quality assurance.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. The lead inspector met with senior staff from the National Autistic Society, including the director of education. The lead inspector spoke with the trustee who chairs the schools' governance committee.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction and early reading, mathematics, the arts and PSHE. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum, visited lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also held discussions about the personalised curriculum plans for a number of pupils.

- The inspectors considered pupils' behaviour and attitudes throughout the inspection and discussed the school's analysis of pupils' behaviour and attendance with leaders.
- The inspectors considered personal development through all deep dives. They met with leaders to discuss the school's personal development programme. The inspectors talked to pupils about the school's personal development programme.
- 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.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

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