

Inspection of Didsbury High School

4 The Avenue, Didsbury, Manchester M20 2ET

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 January 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Katie Houghton. This school is part of the Laurus 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), Linda Magrath, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Anthony Little. There is also an executive headteacher, David Woolley, who is responsible for this school and a school that is proposed to open.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from the school's aspirational approach to their education. The school prioritises pupils' academic excellence and their personal development. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), experience an exceptional curriculum that enables them to learn and to achieve exceedingly well.

Pupils recognise that the school has high expectations of their conduct. They understand the connection between positive behaviour and learning well. Pupils are extremely attentive to their teachers during lessons and behave sensibly around the school.

Pupils are incredibly proud of the diversity in their school. They enjoy sharing information about their backgrounds and their experiences with each other. For example, pupils organised a 'culture day' to learn about their different cultural heritages and to celebrate these. Pupils value that they see themselves reflected in the curriculum. This sense of belonging helps pupils to feel happy in school.

Pupils take an active role within the school community. They embrace the extensive leadership opportunities that are on offer. For example, pupils help to organise a wide variety of charity events. One pupil proudly stated that, 'we are a real force for change'.

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

The trust works closely with the school to provide an education of the highest quality. This is enhanced by a strong emphasis on staff's professional development. For instance, subject specialists across the trust engage with educational research about how to design and deliver an inspirational curriculum. Staff particularly value these opportunities, as well as the time that they are given in their subject teams to continue to develop their own expertise. Staff are immensely happy to work here.

The school is determined that no limits are placed on what pupils can achieve. This ambition is evident in most pupils, including those with SEND, taking a modern foreign language GCSE at the end of Year 9. The results that they achieve are remarkable. The school ensures that there are opportunities for pupils to continue their language learning in key stage 4. This means that pupils are well prepared for key stage 5, should they wish to take their studies further.

Staff have a strong shared understanding of their subject curriculum. They know precisely which essential information pupils should learn. Staff expertly design activities that help pupils to understand new content. Frequent checks on what pupils know and understand enable staff to address any misconceptions as soon as they arise. This helps pupils to build rich and interconnected bodies of knowledge in each subject.

The school has robust processes to identify the additional needs that pupils may have. Staff are adept at using the information that they receive about pupils' needs when they design learning activities. This helps pupils with SEND to learn the curriculum well alongside their peers.

The school wants all pupils to experience the joy of reading. Most do. Reading is the bedrock of the curriculum. Skilled staff quickly identify pupils who struggle and provide highly effective support that helps them to develop into fluent and confident readers. Students in the sixth form begin to access academic literature. This helps to prepare them well for higher education.

The school provides a comprehensive programme of personal development. Meticulous thought has been given to designing the school's 'beliefs and values' programme to assist pupils in acquiring the knowledge that they need to be ready for life in modern society. The school's extensive careers programme ensures that pupils are well informed to make appropriate and ambitious choices regarding their next steps.

Pupils benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities through the electives programme. These include creative activities that enable pupils to develop new interests and talents, such as participating in school productions and learning to play steel drums. Other activities prioritise building pupils' skills and experiences so that they have the confidence to fulfil their own aspirations. For example, some older pupils learn the art of effective debating.

The atmosphere in the school is calm and orderly. The school expertly supports a very small number of pupils who struggle to regulate their own behaviour. Some of these pupils become mentors for their younger peers, helping them to learn the value of making better choices. Students in the sixth form are particularly diligent and studious. They are very positive role models for younger pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	143729
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	10294400
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
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	1096
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	29
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Anthony Little
CEO of trust	Linda Magrath
Headteacher	David Woolley (executive headteacher) Katie Houghton (head of school)
Website	www.didsburyhighschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in 2019 for pupils in Year 7 only. Each year, the number of pupils on the school roll has increased. From September 2023, the school has had pupils from Years 7 to 11 in attendance.
- The school opened a sixth form in September 2023. The sixth form currently provides education for 29 students in Year 12.
- The school uses 5 registered and 2 unregistered alternative providers 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.
- 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 spoke with the headteacher, other leaders and staff.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the academy trust and of the local academy committee.
- An inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, modern foreign languages, art and physical education. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- 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 considered the responses shared through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and staff.
- The inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including records relating to pupils' behaviour and minutes of trust board meetings.

Inspection team

Sally Rix, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Rigby	Ofsted Inspector
Stephanie Gill	Ofsted Inspector
Dympna Woods	Ofsted Inspector

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