

Inspection of The Heights Academy

Auckland Drive, Solihull B36 0DD

Inspection dates:	20 and 21 May 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Nicola Redhead. This school is part of Forward Education 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), Simon Dilkes, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Catherine Canty.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a warm and caring welcome to pupils at this school. Many pupils have had negative experiences of education. Some have missed significant chunks of their education before joining The Heights Academy. The school's aim to help develop 'confident individuals, respectful citizens and successful learners' is the foundation of the work here.

Pupils work hard and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They appreciate and benefit from the support they get from staff. The school has high expectations and ambitions for pupils. Staff are dedicated to providing support. However, current inconsistencies in how the curriculum is being delivered mean pupils are not achieving as well as they could be.

Behaviour around school is mostly positive, but sometimes pupils find it difficult to meet the school's high expectations. There are times when the behaviour of some pupils causes upset to others.

Pupils are safe because staff are vigilant and supervise them closely and sensitively. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Staff get to know pupils well and genuinely have their best interests at heart. There is a positive, happy atmosphere around the school and in lessons.

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

The school has designed an ambitious curriculum across the subjects of the national curriculum. This ensures that pupils get a breadth of curriculum similar to that in a mainstream school. The curriculum is carefully designed to ensure that pupils learn the foundational knowledge that enable them to study for formal qualifications.

Reading has a high focus here, and pupils typically love to read and do so widely and often. Pupils usually read very well. For those who find reading more of a challenge, well-trained staff provide targeted support. This support targets pupils' individual barriers to reading and helps them to become confident, fluent readers.

Learning in classes is typically characterised by pupils' calm and purposeful behaviour. However, there are times when, because of their individual needs, pupils become anxious or are unable to settle in lessons. Staff are very caring and provide pupils with support when this happens. However, there are times when this support does not help pupils to settle as quickly as they could. This means more learning is missed than necessary.

Teachers know the curriculum content well. They strive to adapt activities and teaching approaches so that pupils can fully access the curriculum. However, sometimes, activities do not match pupils' learning needs because teachers do not understand these needs well enough. Chosen activities sometimes do not focus closely enough on the most important learning, or do not provide pupils with the chance to learn at the depth they could.

The school monitors pupils' absence effectively. Despite the efforts of staff, some pupils are absent from school too often. These pupils miss out on important learning, both in terms of their academic and social communication needs.

Pupils have access to a wide menu of personal development opportunities. A variety of regular trips and visitors enhance the curriculum. Theatre professionals work with pupils to build their confidence and self-esteem. Football is a passion for many pupils. The school ensures that there are opportunities for pupils to join a football team that plays against other local schools. The personal development offer is well structured but is at an early stage of implementation. The school is unclear about the extent to which pupils take advantage of the opportunities on offer.

Staff at The Heights Academy are proud to work at this school. They know that leaders at all levels care about their well-being, and they appreciate this.

In recent months, the school's engagement and communication with some parents and carers have not proved effective. A number of parents are dissatisfied with several aspects of the school's work. The academy trust acknowledges parents' concerns and is aware there are improvements needed. They recognise the importance of fostering and maintaining positive relationships to ensure that parents are active partners in their children's education.

The school has not been successful in how it checks the impact of its work. This means that some weaknesses have not been identified and addressed. The trust acknowledges that necessary improvements are needed to provide the very best education for pupils. Across the trust and within the school, there is a passion and a tangible moral imperative to achieve this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils are absent from school too often. This means they are missing learning. The school should work with parents and carers to reduce absence so that pupils fully benefit from the education the school offers.
- There is variability in how well teachers understand the learning needs of pupils. As a result of this, some activities are not well matched to the needs of pupils. This impacts on how well pupils achieve and the extent to which they engage with their learning. The school should provide staff with the necessary support to ensure they match activities closely to the learning needs of pupils so that pupils achieve well.
- Some pupils miss learning and parts of lessons too frequently. The ways in which staff help pupils to re-engage are well meaning but vary in effectiveness. This means that

some pupils miss more of their learning. The school should ensure that staff have the expertise to implement a consistent approach to helping pupils reduce levels of anxiety so that learning time is maximised.

- The school has not been successful in how effectively it communicates with parents who have concerns about how well their children are provided for. This has led to some parents feeling dissatisfied with aspects of the school's work. The school should seek ways to develop and foster positive relationships with parents so that they are active partners in their children's education.
- The school has not been successful in checking the effectiveness of its own work. This means that areas needing improvement have not been identified as well or as quickly as they could. The school and trust should ensure that appropriate checks are made to identify where school improvements are necessary and that swift actions are taken to address these.

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	149753
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10393979
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Catherine Canty
CEO of the trust	Simon Dilkes
Headteacher	Nicola Redhead
Website	www.heights.fet.ac
Date of previous inspection	6 June 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2023. It is part of Forward Education Trust. There are six other special schools in the trust.
- The school provides education for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions, and all have education, health and care plans. Some pupils have other needs including social, emotional and mental health needs, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- The school admitted pupils in Years 3 to Year 7 when it opened in 2023. There are now pupils in Year 8 and the age range is planned to increase year on year. When full, the school will have capacity for 116 pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form

provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school’s educational 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.
- The headteacher was not present during the inspection.
- Inspectors held meetings with the deputy headteacher, director of education and other leaders.
- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work.
- An inspector listened to some pupils read to school staff.
- An inspector held a meeting with the chair of the academy trust and the CEO.
- Inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour in lessons, at different times of the day and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They spoke formally with groups of pupils, as well as talking to pupils in lessons and around school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including parents’ free-text responses and other correspondence with Ofsted. Inspectors also took account of responses to Ofsted’s staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including school improvement plans and the school website.
- Inspectors spoke with some parents and school transport drivers at the school gate.

Inspection team

Gareth Morgan, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Emma Gater	His Majesty’s Inspector
Ann Pritchard	His Majesty’s Inspector

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