

Inspection of an outstanding school: Harmonize Academy AP Free School

7 Phillimore Road, Kensington, Liverpool L6 6DL

Inspection dates:

14–15 January 2020

Outcome

Harmonize Academy AP Free School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

‘The best thing ever’. This is how pupils describe their experience at Harmonize Academy AP Free School. From their first day, pupils feel part of a happy school community.

At this school, everyone accepts and values each other for who they are. Pupils know that the staff and their peers care deeply about them. Staff offer exceptional support to pupils. Everyone feels safe and free from bullying at this school. Staff deal with any bullying effectively.

This school is exceptionally successful at helping pupils become ‘the best version of themselves’. Pupils really enjoy their lessons. Staff help pupils to transform their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to education.

The Harmonize Academy AP Free School is a hive of activity. Not a moment is wasted during the school day. Pupils work hard so that they can achieve very highly. Pupils know that they have missed lots of learning in the past. They are keen to make up lost ground and they do. They are motivated to attend the wealth of catch-up sessions on offer. Current pupils look up to former pupils. They want to emulate their achievements.

Through the comprehensive enrichment programme, pupils find new interests, such as photography. Pupils actively help in their community. For example, they play bingo with residents at a local care home or they deliver food parcels to families in need.

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

‘This school succeeds where no one else can’. This sums up the view of all those pupils who spoke with us during the inspection. Before joining Harmonize Academy AP Free School, many pupils and their families have lost faith in the education system. When they arrive at this school, pupils turn their lives around. They engage once again with education. They succeed in examinations and they move on to apprenticeships and

college courses. Former pupils have gone on to university, joined the armed forces or landed their dream acting job.

Staff know their pupils exceptionally well. Teachers plan interesting lessons that capture pupils' interests. They soon start doing things that they never thought they could or would. For example, some pupils who have never read a book before read their first full novel at this school.

Pupils find remembering what they have been taught easy here. This is because pupils know exactly what they are learning, why they are learning it and how it will help them in the future. Pupils feel extremely well supported. This is because teachers adapt the curriculum effectively so that pupils learn well.

Pupils settle in well, at whatever point they join the school. When pupils first start, staff give them the time to observe what goes on in school. This helps pupils see what is expected of them, such as standards of behaviour. Moreover, when they have not studied a subject before, such as drama, this helps them find out about it before they have their first lesson in that subject.

The school's curriculum puts the needs of pupils at its heart. First and foremost, pupils study essential academic subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Then pupils are able to choose options from across a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Finally, there is a fantastic enrichment curriculum. Pupils develop hobbies and interests, contribute to their community, and improve their health and well-being. Pupils are encouraged to work towards further qualifications as they pursue these interests. For example, they achieve certificates in photography or leadership awards. Regardless of when they join the school, pupils gain many qualifications, including GCSEs. Last year, over 80% of pupils left the school with five or more GCSEs. It is not uncommon for Year 11 pupils in this school to achieve an average of eight qualifications. This demonstrates significant achievement.

Pupils develop into respectful, caring and considerate young people. This is because the school prioritises pupils' personal development extremely well. Every aspect of the school's personal development programme is well considered. Recently, pupils have been learning about knife crime. Pupils told me about the profound effect that talks by a trauma surgeon and the daughter of a victim of knife crime had had on them. Pupils told inspectors how this had made them realise the significant risks of carrying knives.

Some pupils also met with a group of asylum seekers. Listening to these people's stories challenged pupils' assumptions about why people come to Britain. This motivated pupils to help people in their community who have been forced to flee their homes. For example, pupils provide food and toys to these families. They develop a strong cultural understanding.

Many pupils have experienced significant trauma in their lives. This school gives pupils the help that they need to cope better with the impact of these experiences. The school holds frequent events to promote pupils' positive mental health. There is also specialist therapeutic support, such as loss and bereavement counselling.

From the moment that they walk through the door, pupils conform to the school's high expectations. Behaviour around school and in classrooms is excellent. Pupils value their learning and respect their teachers and classmates. This means that they do not disrupt learning. Staff can focus on teaching and pupils focus on learning without any distractions.

Governors and senior leaders have taken the school from strength to strength since the previous inspection. They put the best interests of pupils at the forefront of their decisions. These decisions include the academic courses offered by the school. They are determined that every pupil will succeed regardless of what has gone before.

Staff are proud to work at this school. Many have developed their careers at this school. Some staff who joined as teaching assistants are now qualified teachers. Some teachers have completed leadership qualifications and they have gained promotion. Staff value highly the support that they receive from senior leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that staff have up-to-date safeguarding training. All staff are aware of the particular risks to pupils at this school. They know the signs to look for and what to do if they suspect that any pupil may be at risk of harm.

Staff record and report their concerns meticulously. The designated safeguarding lead follows up assiduously on these. The school works exceptionally well with pupils, their families, partner schools and other agencies. This means that pupils and their families get the help and support that they need.

Pupils trust the staff in school to look after them. They value the information and advice provided by staff. This helps them to feel safe both in school and in their local community.

Background

When we have judged a special school, pupil referral unit or maintained nursery school to be outstanding we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2015.

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 are the school and you are 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	139114
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10082117
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	12 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Modupe Omideyi
Principal	Marie McConville
Website	www.harmonizeacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	25–26 March 2015

Information about this school

- This is an alternative provision academy free school.
- The vast majority of pupils have special educational needs. Most of these are social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- All pupils have been permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream schools. Most pupils are registered on the roll of a mainstream high school and this school. These pupils' places have been commissioned by their mainstream school. A significant minority are only on the roll of this school. These single-registered pupils have been placed at this school by the local authority.
- Pupils join the school at different points between the start of Year 8 and the end of Year 11. Most pupils join the school during key stage 4.
- The school uses no alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, we held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders and class teachers. We spoke with the chair of governors and two members of the board of

trustees. We also spoke with the leaders of three schools whose pupils attend the school and with two local authority representatives.

- We spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. We considered the 22 responses to the school's own recent survey and a video capturing first-hand the views of six parents and carers.
- We considered the 19 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the seven responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. We met with a group of staff and a group of pupils.
- We met with the designated safeguarding lead. We scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including case files. We spoke with staff and pupils and considered the survey responses from staff, pupils and parents around safeguarding.
- We observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around school. We spoke with pupils about bullying, behaviour and leaders' expectations of them.
- As part of this inspection, we considered how leaders plan and organise the English, science and drama curriculums. We spoke to teachers and leaders. We visited lessons. We talked to pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books as well as other evidence of their learning.

Inspection team

Pippa Jackson Maitland, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Linda Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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