

Highgate Wood Secondary School

Address: Montenotte Road, London, N8 8RN

Unique reference number (URN): 102154

Inspection report: 27 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

School leaders have embedded the ethos of 'everyone matters, everyone achieves' effectively to drive high standards of attendance and behaviour.

Pupils' attendance rates are above the national average, with very few pupils persistently missing school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and those facing barriers to learning feel included and supported. This contributes to attendance for these groups that is above the national average. When pupils find it difficult to attend, leaders provide tailored support, working closely with families and other professionals to reduce barriers and ensure pupils' needs are met so their attendance improves.

Staff, pupils and parents recognise the significant and sustained improvements in behaviour. Courtesy, consideration, contribution and cooperation, known in school as 'the 4 Cs', underpin 'The Highgate Wood Way'. Leaders have embedded this approach successfully to promote a positive culture of behaviour and harmonious relationships. The school is safe and welcoming and provides pupils with a supportive environment. Staff ensure that pupils follow the school's expectations for conduct consistently, enabling pupils to learn successfully. Interactions between pupils and staff are polite and highly respectful. When necessary, leaders take appropriate action to support pupils who do not consistently meet the school's behaviour expectations.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Pupils achieve well over time, including in public examinations. The proportion of pupils who achieved standard and strong passes in GCSE English and mathematics in 2025 was significantly higher than the national average. Pupils also achieve securely across the curriculum.

Published outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are broadly in line with national averages. While barriers for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are typically removed, on occasions aspects of their academic progression are not as consistent as they could be. The school has clear plans to strengthen the quality of teaching so that pupils consistently achieve highly.

Post-16 students generally achieve outcomes in national tests that are in line with national averages. This supports them to progress to ambitious destinations to continue their studies.

Pupils are well prepared for their next steps, particularly those continuing in education.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is suitably broad and ambitious. Leaders have carefully designed it so that pupils practise and embed important knowledge. For example, in history, pupils learn about the achievements of two American leaders. They develop their understanding of similarities and differences and use their knowledge to write an evaluative response. In English, pupils develop a secure understanding of poetic devices through purposeful talk, which enables them to analyse poems successfully. However, expectations for pupils' verbal responses and explanations are not consistent between subjects. As a result, pupils are sometimes not supported to learn as deeply as they could.

Leaders have taken effective steps to improve the quality of teaching. Staff demonstrate secure subject knowledge and typically explain new concepts clearly. Teachers usually make appropriate adaptations for pupils who face barriers to learning. Leaders identify pupils who need additional support with reading and they help them to catch up quickly. However, leaders' checks on the effectiveness of teaching do not routinely focus on how well key groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, learn across subjects. Leaders are aware of the strengths and areas for development of staff and have a clear plan of how to support improved classroom practice where needed.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders at Highgate Wood School prioritise pupils' sense of belonging. They place inclusion at the heart of the school's ethos. This is underpinned by the motto, 'Everyone matters, everyone achieves.'

Leaders identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) promptly and accurately. They ensure staff receive appropriate training so they can help pupils overcome any barriers to learning they experience. Pupils receive pastoral and academic support to help them access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. Leaders monitor the impact of this extra support carefully. Pupils with SEND typically achieve well. Leaders place significant importance on securing pupils' emotional wellbeing, mental health and behavioural support. The school's Maya Angelou centre provides a range of counselling and therapy services, alongside targeted support provided by the school, which has had a positive impact on pupils' learning and wellbeing.

Leaders use additional funding thoughtfully to support disadvantaged pupils. This strategy is generally effective, particularly in improving pupils' reading. However, the teaching of the curriculum is not as consistently effective as it could be. For example, there is some variability in how effective teachers are at checking how well disadvantaged pupils are learning the curriculum to ensure that any barriers are swiftly addressed.

The school works constructively with parents and other professionals to ensure pupils' needs are met. Leaders commission alternative provision carefully and use it appropriately to support pupils' engagement with education.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

The long-serving and experienced leadership team has established a clear and purposeful direction for the school. Leaders consistently place the best interests of pupils and staff at the centre of their decision-making. They understand the school's strengths and use a strategic, informed and targeted approach to drive improvement, focused on strengthening staff expertise and consistency in teaching. Those responsible for governance fulfil their statutory duties appropriately. They offer school leaders a balance of support and challenge.

Leaders have taken highly effective action to re-engage pupils, following the disruption caused by the pandemic. They prioritise high-quality pastoral support and rebuilding pupils' confidence, which has led to improvements in behaviour and attendance. Leaders have embedded initiatives such as 'The Highgate Wood Way,' and the shared belief that 'everyone matters and everyone achieves'. Staff, pupils and parents understand and uphold these aspects of the school and staff apply the behaviour policy consistently.

Leaders actively promote a positive and inclusive culture across the school. They have responded thoughtfully to the school's changing context, particularly the recent increase in pupils joining with education, health and care plans. Leaders ensure that staff receive effective training, enabling them to understand and meet pupils' needs, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils known, or previously known, to children's social care.

Staff speak very positively about leadership, recognising leaders' openness and their careful consideration of workload pressures. Parents and carers also express positive views, with a significant proportion recommending the school to others.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The 'Highgate Wood Way' underpins the school's personal development programme. Leaders have designed a coherent personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, that pupils typically understand well. Pupils learn about important aspects such as healthy relationships and online safety in an age-appropriate way. They engage maturely and respectfully with sensitive and challenging topics, including online harm, misogyny and inequality. For example, pupils recently took part in workshops on masculinity, where they learned about positive identity, healthy relationships and how to challenge harmful stereotypes.

Leaders ensure that pupils receive high-quality pastoral care, tailored to meet their individual needs. Staff use a range of opportunities, including outdoor learning, to promote pupils' engagement with school and build their resilience. Leaders draw effectively on a range of professionals and their expertise to support the mental health and wellbeing of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. They place a strong emphasis on diversity. Events such as 'culture day' empower pupils to feel valued and included through the celebration of music, food and clothing from different cultures. This supports pupils' understanding of British values such as respect and tolerance, and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of opportunities that broaden their experiences. These opportunities help pupils develop confidence, resilience and an

understanding of life beyond school. For example, the school offers 25 different clubs, including the Maya Angelou breakfast club, Manga book club and newspaper club.

Leaders have established a clearly designed careers programme. This ensures that pupils are well informed and supported when considering their next steps. Pupils successfully secure places in further education, apprenticeships or employment at the end of key stage 4, with many choosing to remain in the school's post-16 provision.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

The curriculum and wider enrichment programme have been carefully designed by leaders to reflect the interests and experiences of students. A very broad range of academic and vocational courses is available. For example, students can participate in work-preparation courses that help them to develop the practical skills and personal attributes needed to succeed in employment and independent living.

Leaders maintain secure oversight of this highly inclusive sixth form. Subject specialists typically teach the curriculum effectively. Students typically achieve well, including in public examinations at the end of key stage 5. Teachers use considered strategies to support disadvantaged students. As a result, these students make secure progress from their starting points.

Leaders ensure that students are well prepared for their next steps. They offer independent careers advice and comprehensive information about higher education and apprenticeship routes. Students are expected and supported to organise their own work-experience placements, and the majority succeed. A bank of 40 placements is available as a contingency for those who cannot secure one independently. Students follow an age-appropriate personal development programme. For example, they learn about financial literacy and benefit from enrichment opportunities such as cooking basic meals and preparing for university life. Students are also encouraged to propose and lead charitable projects.

As a result of their academic success and the effective support for their personal development, students typically progress to ambitious next steps.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils feel a distinct sense of belonging at Highgate Wood School. They demonstrate the school's core values of courtesy, consideration, contribution and cooperation consistently. Pupils behave very well both inside and outside the classroom, showing respect for each other. Staff know, support and care for pupils. Pupils follow the 'Highgate Wood Way' closely. This makes the routines clear to pupils and sets out the high expectations leaders have of them.

Pupils' individuality is celebrated. This helps them feel safe and confident to be themselves. Bullying is rare, and, when it does occur, pupils trust staff to address it swiftly and effectively.

Pupils benefit from carefully designed curriculums that teachers deliver effectively, including at post-16. A broad range of courses prepare post-16 students for future study and careers. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and most achieve well.

Pupils eagerly explore new talents and interests, from mindfulness practice to cosmology. They embrace leadership roles that allow them to contribute to the school community, such as fundraising for charities. Pupils act as positive role models in form time, discussing sensitive topics like ableism with maturity. Most pupils engage fully with everything the school offers because they enjoy learning, behave well and attend regularly.

Inclusion underpins all aspects of the school's work. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, those known or previously known to children's social care and pupils facing additional challenges such as young carers receive timely, well targeted support. Teachers address gaps in pupils' knowledge effectively, enabling them to build a secure understanding across subjects. As a result, pupils typically make steady progress from their starting points and move on successfully to further education.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers develop pupils' oracy skills so pupils develop the skills to articulate their ideas fully and deepen their understanding consistently across subjects and year groups.
 - Leaders should strengthen checks on the curriculum and teaching to evaluate how well pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, learn, and use this information to target support and review its impact.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Mr Laurence Penn.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers, the other senior leaders, the chair of governors and the other governors during the inspection.

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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 3 registered alternative provisions.

Headteacher: Mr Patrick Cozier

Lead inspector:

Lisa Smith, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Hayley Follett, Ofsted Inspector

Alison Moore, Ofsted Inspector

Daniel Burton, Ofsted Inspector

Eliot Wong, Ofsted Inspector

Gareth Cross, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 27 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,543

Well above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,465

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

25.62%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

4.02%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

16.01%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	62.4%	45.2%	Above
2023/24 (final)	50.8%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	63.2%	45.3%	Above

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	56.2	45.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	50.8	45.9	Above
2022/23 (final)	53.9	46.3	Above

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.26	-0.03	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.15	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	27.6%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	27.1%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	31.0%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	36.7	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39.1	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	37.9	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.19	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	-0.39	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	27.6%	52.8%	-25.2 pp
2023/24 (final)	27.1%	53.1%	-26.0 pp
2022/23 (final)	31.0%	52.4%	-21.4 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	36.7	50.3	-13.6
2023/24 (final)	39.1	50.0	-11.0
2022/23 (final)	37.9	50.3	-12.4

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.19	0.16	-0.36
2022/23 (final)	-0.39	0.17	-0.55

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	91%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	93%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	95%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	34.21	34.99	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.11	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.28	34.16	Close to average

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	0.1	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	0.3	0.0	Above

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	5.1%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	6.9%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	7.4%	9.0%	Below

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	11.7%	21.9%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	16.6%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	19.5%	26.5%	Below

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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