Assessment for reaccreditation

School name and postcode:	The Highcrest Academy, HP13 7NQ
Assessment date:	20th March 2026
School Head Teacher:	Glen Burke
School More Able Coordinators:	Oliver Lugg and Jordan Edwards
NACE Lead Assessor:	Rob Buck
NACE Support Assessor:	Jack Sims

School context

The Highcrest Academy is a mixed 11 to 18 comprehensive school in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. The school is the only school in The Highcrest Academy single academy trust, with approximately 1072 learners on roll.

The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above national average at 35.4%. 23% of pupils have a first language that is not English and 14.35% of pupils are eligible for SEN support. 5.07% of pupils have a SEN Education, Health and Care Plan.

In February 2020, Ofsted confirmed that the school continues to be a good school. Then, in December 2024, Ofsted carried out an ungraded (section 8) inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

In the Excelling Pupils Policy, the school uses the terms High Prior Attainment (HPA), Most Able (MA) and More Able as part of their identification process.

The academy moto is 'Aspire and Achieve' and is built around six virtues: ambition, sensitivity, purpose, integrity, resilience and eloquence.

This is the school's third Challenge Award accreditation following successful accreditations in October 2017 and May 2022.

Since the previous accreditation, there is a newly appointed Assistant Headteacher (Challenge for All), who supports the Challenge Coordinator.

Progress towards previously identified key action points

- Revisit the school's approach to learning objectives to ensure that these make the highest level of learning the goal for all pupils, providing appropriate scaffolds and success criteria to enable them to attain that goal. **Whole-school CPD and department-level development work has meant that CONNECT teaching and learning observation data demonstrates a strong and measurable impact on planning and pupil progress following a revised approach to learning objectives and success criteria. Evidence was collated via learning walks, lesson observations, pupil voice and classroom dialogue, work scrutiny and staff feedback.**
- Continue to further develop the quality of teaching and learning for More Able pupils, ensuring that challenge is embedded throughout the lesson through a focus on enduring concepts and an

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increase in planned opportunities for independence, deep thinking, collaboration and risk-taking. **This has been evidenced through the implementation of a whole school 'Active 8' approach to teaching and learning, designed to provide stretch and challenge and increase classroom engagement. 'Active 8' emphasises mental participation and engagement, removing opportunities for lesson passivity. It also provides structured opportunities to collaborate, investigate and solve problems, based upon 8 key principles.**

- Further develop the use of the Challenge Maps as an opportunity for flipped learning and collaborative work for More Able pupils. **The school has refined the Challenge Maps to provide a more targeted and streamlined approach for Year 7 High Potential learners, ensuring challenge is established early. All pupils have access to Challenge Maps with Year 7 learners attending after school sessions to support with independent, higher-order learning. The school has integrated Challenge Maps with flipped learning and collaborative opportunities, and the school has aligned the Maps closely with curriculum content to ensure that challenge supports subject mastery**.
- Provide information and support for parents to ensure they understand the characteristics of More Able learners and can provide or access appropriate support for their child as required. **This is evident through an enhanced parental engagement approach including half-termly newsletters and parent bulletin, and a dedicated virtual session each term for the parents of High Potential learners offering targeted advice and strategies. Other approaches include the Student Learning Zone (online Hub to support parents), information evenings and use of the school website.**

In summary, good or better progress has been made against each of the key issues identified at the second accreditation.

Summary of strengths for provision and outcomes

- The many strengths of the school's provision are clearly demonstrated within the self-evaluation which shows continued evidence of a commitment to improve both provision and outcomes for more able learners, and to embed high quality teaching and learning.
- Evidence confirms that this area is well led and managed by the More Able Coordinator, Assistant Headteacher (Challenge for All) and other SLT colleagues. The work continues to be an intrinsic part of the whole school culture, supported by a clear ambition to challenge all to achieve and flourish.
- Learners have independent access to the Student Learning Zone, library and digital platforms to ensure opportunities to develop wider skills in creating, evaluating and applying knowledge.
- Careers education is strong at the academy. Students are supported by a Careers Curriculum with access to Unifrog, and a wide variety of events such as a Careers Fair, work experience, the Bucks Skills Show, UCAS Show and the Bridge to Employment Programme by Johnson and Johnson. Pupils spoke confidently about how well they feel supported for the next phase of their learning and the positive impact the Careers Adviser has made on the school.
- CPD is considered a forte. Staff voice described professional development in terms of pedagogical and subject specific input. Teaching and Learning CPD is delivered every Wednesday morning where best practice from across the academy is disseminated. A weekly CPD bulletin shares targeted strategies to support challenge and more able learners.
- In 2025, 11% of the Year 11 cohort were identified as High Prior Attainment students. Of these, 85% of the HPA students achieved 5+ grades 9-4 including English and Mathematics. 9.5% of total grades were awarded 7+. In Key Stage 5, 12.9% of students achieved A*-A grades and 34.1% achieved A*-B grades.
- High Prior Attainment students attend Saturday school sessions specifically designed to consolidate learning and reinforce higher-order skills to maximise attainment.

- The school effectively uses Challenge Maps for those identified as Most Able in a specific subject area. These provide opportunities for students to be involved in extra-curricular projects and take responsibility for their own learning journey.
- The inclusive peer mentoring project captured by the case study has been instrumental in raising high attainment through developing whole school challenge, metacognition and aspiration. This approach has helped to improve academic progress for underachieving Key Stage 3 learners and helped to embed metacognitive and self-regulatory behaviours.
- The school has an Excelling Pupils Policy to identify and define High Prior Attainment (HPA), Most Able (MA) and More Able learners.
- There is a dedicated 'Excelling Students' area on the school website, including subject specific information for parents about how they can support their child at home e.g. characteristics, reading lists, activities and trips.
- Governors have a strong understanding of the school's 'Excelling Students' provision and are able to articulate the school vision.
- Display work in classrooms and around the school site is effective in signposting routes into a wide range of careers and helping to raise aspiration.
- The school's self-evaluation and improvement plan are reviewed regularly to ensure that progress is made and any further areas for development are identified, supported by a robust quality assurance process.
- Ambitious targets for 'Excelling Students' are embedded and used to drive high standards of progress and achievement.
- The school offers an impressive range of clubs before school, during lunchtime and after school. These include a wide range of sporting clubs, drama, art and fashion, Lego, word games, dance and music ensemble.
- This is further complemented by providing opportunities for young people to participate in competitions and external events, trips and extra-curricular clubs e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Young Enterprise, EPQs, drama and theatre productions, Go Ape, Imperial War Museum, Ski trip, Parliament and university visits.
- The school provides structured opportunities for recognition and celebration of talent through leadership opportunities including Head Boy and Girl, prefects and ambassadors and masterclasses and enrichment pathways.
- There is a forensic approach to data analysis. The school's robust monitoring of standards ensures that all more able learners are scrutinised, and underachievement is tackled promptly before it becomes a problem. 'Know your class' sheets include strategies to identify and address underachievement for more able learners, supporting all staff in planning adaptations to teaching and interventions.
- The academy induction programme for new staff effectively communicates the Excelling Pupils Policy and equips teachers with the skills to teach 'to the top' and ensure appropriately challenging provision from the outset.
- Pastoral support is strong. The mental health and safeguarding lead, school counsellor, inclusion team and Assistant Heads of Learning in each year group coordinate a planned programme of mentoring and support for learners, including individualised support for the most vulnerable students.

Summary of strengths for teaching and learning

Years 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 lessons were visited during the assessment process. Subjects observed included Mathematics, Chemistry, English, French and Spanish.

- At the heart of the school's offer is quality first teaching which is planned to ensure that students are challenged whilst being provided with a variety of opportunities to excel. Classroom

pedagogy includes questioning, modelling, carefully designed tasks to encourage opportunities to think deeply about learning, independence and self-regulation and 'Active 8' strategies.

- All lessons and materials incorporate 'Active 8' strategies to promote independent thinking, collaboration, problem solving and reflection and metacognition.
- The curriculum is well sequenced, progressive and aspirational, including intentionally planned challenge opportunities. 'Challenge for all' is a non-negotiable classroom expectation. Teachers are expected to evidence how challenge is planned, delivered and adapted for different starting points.
- Teachers carefully design opportunities to embed learning by developing opportunities for recall, mastery and knowledge acquisition and skilfully connect prior learning. Lessons feature revisit, refresh and reflection time.
- Teachers encourage students to self-reflect by developing strategies to foster a metacognitive mindset and culture of challenge for all. Staff commented that they enjoy working at The Highcrest Academy because of the 'willingness of students to give something a go and in lessons they are not afraid to get it wrong.'
- Teachers are facilitators of learning, deliberately promoting student independence. In lessons, students work harder than the teachers and learners are empowered to discover and apply knowledge and skills.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a clear passion for their disciplines. Students have an excellent rapport with their teachers – they trust and respect them and feel confident to ask for advice and support (even outside of the classroom timetable). Student voice commented that 'teachers are passionate and go out of their way to help and support. We like that the teachers want to get to know us and our personalities.'
- There are opportunities in lessons for all learners to develop creativity, critical thinking and leadership skills.
- There is effective use of Tier 3 vocabulary as a vehicle to develop strong subject specific terminology.
- Students are confident and able to articulate their views to share and generate ideas, problem solve collaboratively and support one another.
- Students' behaviour for learning is excellent. In the lessons observed, students were positively engaged with and enjoying their learning with a mature approach to their studies.

Areas for development

- Further strengthen the Excelling Pupils Policy to include statements that reflect provision and identification for dual exceptionality and those who are neurodiverse. As part of a policy audit, review the current identification labels and include specific teaching and learning strategies for more able provision.
- Develop *The Highcrest Academy Way* to include an agreed menu of non-negotiables to support a consistent school-wide approach to classroom routines and pedagogy e.g. think, pair, share, turn and talk, use of mini whiteboards. Consider filming and sharing best practice with colleagues.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure that all teachers are regularly checking students' understanding in lessons by deploying a range of assessment for learning techniques. Review questioning strategies to encourage opportunities for whole class deep thinking e.g. think, pair, share – allowing all learners to grapple with progressively complex ideas and concepts and providing the relevant 'think' time to allow students to rise to the challenge.
- Further develop and formalise a sequenced in-house enrichment pathway for Excelling Pupils.
- Continue to strengthen direct parental engagement and mechanisms to capture stakeholder voice so that families can support and inform the school of talents. Strengthen the systematic

capture of talents beyond academic domains e.g. creative, sporting and leadership and ensure consistent and comprehensive recording and tracking.

Challenge Development Priorities *(key action points to be included on the school's Challenge Priorities Matrix)*

- Further enhance the Excelling Pupils Policy by including statements that address provision and identification for dual-exceptionality and neurodiverse learners. As part of a policy review, consider the current more able identification categories and incorporate specific teaching and learning strategies to support more able students.
- Develop *The Highcrest Academy Way* to include an agreed set of non-negotiables that promote a consistent, school-wide approach to classroom routines and pedagogy (e.g., think–pair–share, turn and talk, use of mini whiteboards). Explore the use of filmed examples to share and model best practice among staff.
- Establish clear systems to ensure all teachers routinely check students' understanding by using a broad range of assessment for learning strategies. Review and strengthen questioning approaches to promote whole-class deep thinking (e.g., think–pair–share), enabling all learners to engage with increasingly complex ideas and providing sufficient 'thinking time' for students to meet the level of challenge.
- Continue to strengthen direct parental engagement and the systems used to capture stakeholder voice, enabling families to both support the school and share information about students' talents. Enhance the systematic identification of talents beyond academic achievement (e.g., creative, sporting, leadership) and ensure these are recorded and tracked consistently and comprehensively.

Challenge check-in due *(+18 months)***:** September 2027

Next reaccreditation application deadline *(+3 years)***:** March 2029

School wishes to be assessed for Challenge Award Ambassador status at next reaccreditation:

Yes

NACE Lead Assessor signature:

Rob Buck