

Hillcrest School A Specialist Maths and Computing College and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137346
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	395711
Inspection dates	17–18 May 2012
Lead inspector	Trevor Riddiough HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	660
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dee McIlmurray
Headteacher	Julie Davies
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2009
School address	Stonehouse Lane Birmingham B32 3AE
Telephone number	0121 4643172
Fax number	0121 4281075
Email address	enquiry@hillcrest.bham.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	17–18 May 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Trevor Riddiough

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Heppleston

Additional Inspector

James McAtear

Additional Inspector

Sean Thornton

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed 36 lessons taught by 34 teachers, of which four were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. They also sat in on three tutor groups and two assemblies. Inspectors carried out brief visits to a series of other lessons and held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, groups of students, and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at the tracking of students' progress, performance data, students' work, whole-school and subject development plans, numerous policies, school documents, incident logs and case studies. Completed questionnaires from 70 parents and carers, 140 students and 56 staff were received and analysed.

Information about the school

This school is smaller than the average-sized girls' secondary school with a mixed sixth form. Over two-thirds of students have minority ethnic heritage. Approximately one-third of the school population speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is double the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The school is a designated specialist mathematics and computing college. Hillcrest Sixth Form is part of the Oaks Collegiate which is based at seven campuses around south-west Birmingham. The school holds a number of awards including the International School Award, Artsmark Gold Award, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Healthy Schools Award. The school meets current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress expected by the government. The school converted to academy status in September 2011. The headteacher was appointed to the school in January 2012.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school, where individuals are valued and nurtured. Achievement has deteriorated since the last inspection; however this is now being addressed by good leadership. The school is not good because, although better teaching is having a very positive impact on progress, outcomes have not yet led to good achievement as measured by examination results. Monitoring of teaching and learning does not always give close attention to learning. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory. During the current academic year, progress has improved and is mainly good due to consistently good teaching. Outcomes have not yet been realised in students' higher attainment.
- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory and is improving.
- Most teaching is good and there are many examples of outstanding practice. Teaching usually provides a good variety of learning activities and fully engages students. Teachers' questioning is well informed by accurate assessment of students' abilities, and matches their differing learning needs well. These positive features are not always apparent and, consequently, some students are not challenged sufficiently and their pace of learning slows. Not all marking gives clear written feedback on how students might improve their work and achieve their targets.
- Behaviour around the school and in most lessons is good. There are occasional instances of poor behaviour in class when teaching does not excite or engage the learners. Attendance has improved and is above average. Punctuality is very good.
- Leaders at all levels demonstrate a deep commitment to improving achievement

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and attainment. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are secure and growing in strength, as is the management of school performance. Self-evaluation is thorough, but sometimes lacks focus on evaluating students' learning in lessons to plan for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching in the main school and in the sixth form, and ensure that any remaining satisfactory teaching becomes at least good by December 2012, by:
 - all teachers making effective use of assessment information to match tasks to students' needs and capabilities more accurately
 - always providing activities in lessons which inspire and engage students fully in their learning at a faster pace
 - encouraging all students to take responsibility for their own learning and develop their independent learning skills
 - ensuring that marking and feedback always make clear the steps students need to take to reach their target grades.
- Develop the effectiveness of monitoring carried out by senior staff and heads of department by ensuring lesson observations are focused more on the learning that takes place in lessons.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter school with levels of attainment that are, generally, below average. Since 2010, GCSE attainment has been at broadly average levels. During this time progress in most subjects has been satisfactory. Students with disabilities and those with special educational needs made similarly satisfactory progress to that of their peers. Students entitled to free school meals made better progress. While achievement in the specialist subject of mathematics remained above average, English performance fell.

Inspection evidence shows that consistently good teaching and use of additional out-of-lessons support and other interventions have effectively closed gaps in attainment and accelerated all students' progress to be consistently good. Students' literacy skills are developing well. Inspection findings are endorsed by the school's reliable performance data, which predict marked improvement in GCSE and sixth form examination results. However, these improved outcomes across the school have not yet been secured. Better learning and progress were observed in lessons and in students' work during the inspection.

Activities are usually well matched to students' ability and prior knowledge. Here,

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inspectors observed students engaging well with learning and working hard. They enjoy challenges, solving problems, discussing their ideas, conducting practical investigations and having the chance for self-expression.

At Key Stage 3 provision is made for weaker readers through special reading programmes and most now make good progress. A course developing personal learning and communication skills effectively supports literacy developments at Key Stage 4. These arrangements ensure that students for whom English is an additional language gain a good understanding of English to access the full curriculum and make good progress. Disabled students and those with special educational needs also benefit from this helpful support and make equally good progress to that of other students.

The sixth form is inclusive and students of all abilities are encouraged to apply. Latterly, students have entered the sixth form with prior attainment below that of most students beginning AS courses. Students make satisfactory progress in most courses at AS and A level. In vocational courses, students generally make better progress with course content well matched to their needs and interests. Students of higher ability have not always been challenged sufficiently to extend their learning but, currently, improved progress in the main school is being reflected in the sixth form.

Inspection findings that progress is currently good are endorsed by the very large majority of parents and carers, although not all fully appreciate changes since the previous inspection.

Quality of teaching

Teaching has improved and is good and often better. Parents, carers and students endorse inspection findings and have a generally positive view of teaching. In the past there was not enough good teaching to ensure students made consistently good progress over time. This situation has been turned around by leaders' decisive action. Inspectors agree with the few parents and carers who expressed concerns about teaching that, previously, did not challenge students sufficiently.

In most lessons, the pace of learning is well judged. Students work well together and the level of challenge is appropriate to the learning needs of all. Teachers use varied methods, including the use of visual images, effective questioning and opportunities for students to actively engage in the lesson. Students have considerable confidence in teachers and participate actively. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on contemporary dance, students were trained by their teachers to teach and learn from each other. They responded positively to the high expectations set, and through clear modelling and criteria set by themselves, they were able to improve their own dance skills. In a sixth form lesson on thermodynamics, students were supported and encouraged by the teacher to provide clear explanations during discussions that other students listened to and learned from.

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In less effective lessons, activities are not always fully matched to students' learning needs, with little additional challenge for the more able. When teachers do not set high expectations for students, the pace of learning slows, students become passive and, occasionally, distracted from the work.

Assessment is usually used successfully in lessons to help students to critically assess and improve their own work. Where marking is most informative, teacher comments are detailed and include advice on how students could improve their learning and meet their targets. This good practice is not fully consistent across the school. At the previous inspection, the school was asked to support and develop students' independent learning skills. It has successfully addressed this, for the most part, but there remain some pockets of weaker practice, particularly in sixth form lessons.

Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively when supporting students with disabilities and those with special educational needs to ensure good progress. Support for literacy is particularly effective, for example with teaching assistants suggesting techniques to help students remember key words and phrases. Students show considerable enthusiasm when asked to read an extract or their own work in class, usually reading fluently and with expression.

Opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are well provided. For example, in a Year 8 music lesson, students were introduced to 'the blues' and its associated culture. In a Year 8 and 9 assembly, strong moral messages were reinforced using folk stories from India.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most parents, carers and students agree with inspection findings that behaviour is, typically, good. The quality of relationships between students and teachers is a strength. Students are typically courteous, polite and sensible. They show good respect for adults and each other and form a harmonious and cohesive community. Staff are very caring and students appreciate the support that they receive. This is summed up by comments made by students to inspectors such as, 'I came in Year 10 and everybody was so welcoming and I knew I was in the right school for me.' Another said, 'If you are behind, the school helps you to get back on track.'

The school has worked hard to maintain good levels of behaviour through effective pastoral intervention. Provision for students with disabilities and those with special educational needs makes a notable contribution to give students full access to the curriculum. The school's 'getting it right' policy is instrumental in managing the positive behaviour seen across school. Teachers are firm and make clear what they expect of students, who understand and appreciate what is expected of them. Inspectors saw very few instances of behaviour which slowed the pace of learning; these were always in lessons that did not stimulate interest. Attitudes to learning are almost always positive. Instances of bullying and racism or other forms of

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discrimination are very rare. Students are aware of different types of bullying and how to stay safe when using the internet and mobile phones. They know who to talk to if they have concerns. As a result, students overwhelmingly say that they feel safe, a view supported by parents and carers.

The school tracks individual attendance carefully and intervenes with families if problems arise.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team has acted decisively to improve achievement. Swift action has been taken to remove the barriers to progress. This has included improved tracking of progress and support for those at risk of missing their targets, improved teaching practices, consolidating the behaviour and attendance management systems and the provision of a wider curriculum. The impact is shown by better progress across all groups of students and the school's effectiveness in positive promotion of equal opportunities. Implementation of the school's policies ensures that there is no discrimination of any kind. Improved arrangements are making teachers fully accountable for students' achievement. Inadequate teaching has been virtually eliminated.

The headteacher and senior leaders clearly articulate their ambitious vision for the students in their care. They are well supported by the governing body which provides increasing challenge. Common goals have been established and an action plan reflects correct priorities with clear success criteria. The positive impact of these measures on achievement is evident in improved progress, supported by students' good behaviour and teaching that is largely good or better. These improvements have been sustained long enough to demonstrate the school's capacity to take improvement further forward. Systems are working well to maintain the school's strong rate of improvement. Accurate self-evaluation helps to focus development planning, although in some areas this lacks precision. While leaders at all levels monitor teaching and learning closely, the focus on learning is not always sufficient to inform the next steps for development.

The curriculum has an increasingly positive impact on learning in main school and sixth form. The wider range of qualifications available, including vocational, respond well to students' needs and interests, particularly in the sixth form. Consequently, students' attitudes and engagement in learning are more positive. The consortium arrangement with other sixth forms successfully contributes here.

Guidance and support are planned well from entry to the school, between key stages and into the sixth form. Very few leavers do not take up further education, employment or training. Students are enthusiastic about opportunities that enable them to develop and use their skills and interests in social and cultural learning. Spiritual learning and opportunities to develop their own thoughts are available through a series of 'personal learning and thinking skills' days at Key Stage 3, and

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the religious education programme at Key Stage 4. Students are enthusiastic about their involvement in charity fund raising, for example supporting an 'under-the-tree school' in the Sudan. Safeguarding arrangements are systematic and meet requirements.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Hillcrest School A Specialist Maths and Computing College and Sixth Form Centre, Birmingham, B32 3AE

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to inspect your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing you in lessons and around the school.

The inspectors judged that Hillcrest is a satisfactory school with a satisfactory sixth form. Your headteacher, staff and governing body are determined that you will all achieve above-average levels of attainment shown in your examination results. Attainment is currently average. Teaching has improved and is good, and your progress has speeded up. Consequently your attainment is rising, but we want to see much better results from you before we can judge your achievement to be good. We note that your behaviour is good, and you attend well. This bodes well for your future success.

To take things forward, we want teaching and learning to be outstanding so you achieve more and get better results. In particular, we want all teaching to challenge you as a learner at your own level, and make learning interesting with scope for you to learn independently. We also want marking to help you take your learning forward so you reach your targets. We expect school leaders at all levels to check carefully that you always learn successfully.

You have a part to play and you can by following up the comments and suggestions that your teachers make to help you to improve your work.

I wish you all success in the future and hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Hillcrest School.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector

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