

Highcliffe School

Parkside, Christchurch, BH23 4QD

Inspection dates

12–13 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve high results that compare favourably with those of students in similar schools. Students make good progress from their starting points.
- Teaching is consistently good. Teachers plan well-structured lessons with many opportunities for students to think about how well they are doing.
- The sixth form is good and provides a wide range of academic courses. Students are ambitious and work hard to achieve good results. They are prepared well for the next stage of their education, including places at top performing universities.
- School leaders are relentless in seeking ways to improve the school. The headteacher and her senior team are completely committed to the school, its place in the local community and celebrating the personal development and growth of every student.
- Behaviour is good in and out of lessons. Students are courteous and friendly. There are strong and mutually respectful relationships between students and staff. Students appreciate the extra help and support provided by staff. The school is a calm and happy place.
- The school provides an impressive range of extra activities and opportunities for students to participate, including links with schools and students in other parts of the world.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students are not achieving exceptionally well because there is some variation in the quality of teaching. In a small number of lessons teachers miss opportunities to challenge students or match activities to the abilities of the students.
- Some students do not make enough progress in mathematics. Some girls and students supported at school action plus do not achieve well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons, including seven joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at students' work and listened to some students read.
- Inspectors met with groups of students across the age and ability range to discuss their views on progress, teaching and behaviour and safety in the school.
- Inspectors met the leaders of English, mathematics and science to discuss teaching and progress.
- Inspectors met the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, three other governors, the school's self-evaluation partner, a group of middle leaders and a group of teachers.
- Inspectors took into account the 108 responses to the on-line parent survey (Parent View) and the 33 responses to the paper-based staff questionnaire. The lead inspector received two letters from parents.
- Inspectors checked the school's records on safeguarding and child protection. They looked at the school's records of students' current results and progress. They also considered the school's behaviour records and figures for attendance and exclusion.
- Inspectors considered school evidence of performance management and teachers' pay rewards over the last three years.
- Inspectors looked at minutes from governors' meetings and a range of documents including information about teachers' training and professional development.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Brown	Additional Inspector
Anne Looney	Additional Inspector
Faysal Mikdadi	Additional Inspector
Marian Marks	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Highcliffe School is a mixed 11 to 18 school. It is larger than the average secondary school.
- The school converted to academy status in June 2011, keeping the same name as the predecessor school. When the predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2008 it was judged to be good.
- The proportion of students supported through school action, school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average for other secondary schools.
- The majority of students are White British. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is below the national average.
- A small number of students are eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding from the government for students known to be eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority or with parents in the armed forces).
- A small number of students attend alternative courses such as construction and hairdressing at a neighbouring secondary school or attend courses at Sparsholt Agricultural College. A very small number of students attend courses away from the school site at Christchurch Learning Centre and Forest Centre.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve results and progress in mathematics by:
 - ensuring that lessons are planned to match the ability of the students
 - providing a range of varied materials to help students explain their work and understand what they need to do to make progress, including key terms and the wording used in examination questions
 - ensuring that teachers mark students' work regularly, providing meaningful targets and that students follow their teachers' advice about how to improve their work
 - checking that students across all key stages, including girls and those students supported at school action plus, are learning the required skills and gaining more confidence.
- Increase the proportion of consistently good and outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan lessons and provide materials and activities to challenge all students including the most and least able
 - establishing consistent principles for teaching, including effective use of questioning and frequent checking of progress during lessons
 - promoting more opportunities for all students to take the initiative and be responsible for their own learning
 - ensuring that all middle leaders maintain a consistent approach to checking the quality of teaching, marking and feedback in their subject areas.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with higher than average attainment. They go on to achieve above average results, comparing favourably with those of students in other schools.
- Students attain above average results for A level and improve upon their AS level performance in most subjects.
- Students' results at GCSE in 2012 were lower than in previous years. School leaders analysed the reasons for the underachievement and have taken action to improve teaching and ensure better progress for current year groups.
- Students who are eligible for extra support and funding from the pupil premium make good progress and their average points scores including in English and mathematics (based on their GCSE results) compare well with those of other students in the school.
- Students with special educational needs who are supported at school action or have a statement of special educational needs make good progress. Students supported at school action plus do not always make enough progress to catch up with other students in the school, particularly in mathematics.
- Students' results and progress in mathematics are not consistently good. Students achieve well at A level, but GCSE results and rates of expected progress are disappointing, particularly for girls. School leaders responsible for mathematics are taking decisive action to ensure that progress improves and that GCSE results increase.
- Students read fluently and accurately. Students are encouraged to use the library and to read for pleasure. Older, more-able students and students in the sixth form do not read as widely or deeply as they could to support their studies and increase their general knowledge.
- Teachers provide regular opportunities in all lessons for students to practise their literacy and numeracy skills. These skills were highlighted in lessons and tutor times observed during the inspection and there is a weekly focus for the whole school. For example, during the week of the inspection it was 'Apostrophe Week'.
- Students who attend alternative courses away from the school site make good progress with their learning and achieve good results.
- The school enters some students early for short GCSE courses in citizenship and preparation for working life. Students entered for these courses achieve good results.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good. Teachers plan well-structured lessons with clear targets for the students to achieve. Effective teachers include opportunities for students to answer challenging questions and think about their own progress. For example, in a Year 7 citizenship lesson students were pressed to explore stereotypes and question their own ideas about the kinds of people who commit crimes. This was a very successful approach and forced the students to review their learning throughout the lesson.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Sixth form students benefit from the excellent subject knowledge of their teachers and have very positive working relationships founded on mutual respect. In the best lessons, teachers achieve a highly effective balance of direct teaching and a more collegiate approach, so that students can debate at a high level.
- When the teaching is good or better, students have productive conversations with their teachers about the topics studied. In these lessons, students make good progress and are active and enthusiastic. For example, in the science lessons observed during the inspection, students demonstrated high quality discussion with the teacher, to ensure deep understanding of challenging topics.

- Increasingly, teachers are planning lessons that will suit all learners in their classes. However, in less effective lessons, teachers are not planning different activities or creating different levels of challenge for their mixed-ability classes. Some work is too easy for the more-able students in the class and students who need more help have to wait for one-to-one support instead of being provided with helpful resources to encourage independent learning.
- Students value the support and help that the teachers provide. Teachers create a very positive learning environment and there is clear respect between students and staff. Students have confidence in their teachers and know they are there to help them make gains with their learning. Students across all key stages told the inspectors that there were very few areas in which they felt that teaching was not good.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers do not check carefully enough the progress students are making. In these lessons students are not reminded to pay attention and give their full concentration. Students are ambitious and willing to learn but not all teachers use this advantage to encourage all students to be independent and participate actively.
- School leaders have quite rightly identified that teachers needed to improve their skills in questioning and this has been a key focus for improving results. In the best lessons teachers are persistent when asking students questions; they allow time for students to respond and they involve the whole class in the process. In less successful lessons, teachers miss opportunities to deepen questions or to target more passive students in order to build up their confidence.
- The work of teaching assistants is a real strength of the school. Teachers involve teaching assistants in their planning and choice of materials for lessons. Teaching assistants have a thorough knowledge of the students they support and they show impressive skills in questioning and encouraging students. Inspectors also noted the teaching assistants' highly effective use of tablet computers to support students and provide detailed knowledge of the students' areas of special educational needs.
- Marking of students' work is not consistent. Some teachers set targets for students that are too general and there is not enough time given for students to act upon comments to improve their work. A very few books seen during the inspection had not been marked for several weeks.
- The school has introduced a new approach to homework, namely: 'home study'. For example, students are able to complete homework via 'My Highcliffe' (the school's interactive virtual learning environment). Parents can also keep track of their children's home study record. This facility also enables students to communicate with their teachers in a secure and helpful way, creating a conversation about their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour is good and often outstanding. Students conduct themselves in an orderly manner around the school site and are polite. They say that 'this school is a friendly school'. This view is endorsed by parents who are extremely positive about their children's safety and the care and guidance they receive.
- Students attend well and persistent absence is rare. There are well-established and effective systems for ensuring good attendance and punctuality.
- Students are adamant that they feel safe and are well supported in the school. They told inspectors that bullying was rare, but that when any incidents were reported, teachers dealt with them well. The school rarely has to exclude students for unacceptable behaviour.
- Students identified a very small number of lessons in which behaviour is less than good. This was confirmed by inspectors who observed a minority of lessons in which students were distracted and did not settle to work quickly enough. In some other lessons students were too passive and resorted to day-dreaming because the teaching did not interest them.
- Students value the support they receive and the support they give each other. For example, students really appreciate the peer mentoring programme and other opportunities to celebrate each other's success.
- Students benefit from a well-taught programme of personal, social and health education.

Students' learning and development beyond the curriculum are enhanced by regular assemblies and activities designed to promote tolerance and harmony. For example, during the inspection students attended a powerful assembly about Hiroshima. Students were visibly moved by the presentation, which strengthened their emotional connection with their partner school in Japan.

- School leaders are aware that students' attitudes to learning determine their progress and have introduced a renewed and regular focus on students' attitude scores. This is beginning to have a very positive effect on learning and is helping students to take more responsibility for active learning.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and her senior team are visible, tireless and work with the common purpose of improving the school. The headteacher and her team have full respect from governors and the school staff. School leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They share a commitment to ambitious rates of academic progress and all-round personal development for every student.
- The school celebrates students' successes and creativity. The school buildings are filled with interesting and inspiring artwork, awards, sports trophies and displays showing students' work with international partners and the local primary schools.
- Following the conversion to academy status, the school sharpened its focus on improving teaching. Subsequent concerns about examination results have led to better systems for tracking and checking on progress and the quality of teaching. With support from the school evaluation partner, the school has introduced thorough subject reviews. These then set the priorities for staff training and development. This is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching. In particular, teachers are focusing much more on improving results for those students who are at risk of not doing so well.
- Some subject leaders check on the quality of teaching and take swift and effective action when teaching is less than good. However, this is not yet consistent across all subject areas. Some subject leaders also need to check progress at Key Stage 3 more closely to ensure that students make at least expected progress.
- The school is beginning to establish a set of guiding principles for teachers to use in every lesson. For example, school leaders are forcefully pushing teachers to use what the headteacher calls 'forensic' questions more effectively in lessons.
- When teaching is less than good, school leaders take prompt and effective action to improve performance. Teachers are set challenging targets and if their students do not do well they do not progress through the pay scales.
- The school offers a wide range of academic subjects to suit the needs and abilities of the students. Students also benefit from one-to-one teaching in mathematics and smaller classes when they need additional support. The timetable is flexible and designed to help students make progress from their different starting points. Teachers have the opportunity to teach younger pupils in the local primary schools, which not only helps to smooth pupils' transition to secondary school, but also extends teaching skills.
- Students appreciate the wide choice of subjects in the sixth form and all students receive helpful and appropriate careers advice, guidance and support.
- Students who attend alternative courses away from the school site are monitored carefully for attendance and progress. These students do well in all their courses and are extremely well supported by staff.
- School leaders make effective use of the pupil premium funding to improve the progress of students entitled to additional support. For example, the funding pays for one-to-one classes, mentoring and support for home study. School leaders can point to specific students who would not have gained such good results without this extra support.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory requirements, and all staff are actively committed to keeping students safe.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are ambitious, enthusiastic and dedicated to improving the school. They take their role very seriously as a combination of support and challenge. Governors visit the school frequently and are not afraid to ask difficult questions of the headteacher and her team. A governor described the role of governance as, 'we push; we don't just sit there'. Governors are fully informed about school development, including checking on progress measures and staff training. They take responsibility when results are disappointing. For example, they are working very closely with senior leaders and subject leaders to improve results in mathematics. Governors actively seek total justification for teachers' pay progression and are astute managers of the finances of the school, including decisions made about spending the pupil premium.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136763
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	403679

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1447
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Axton
Headteacher	Judith Potts
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01425 273381
Fax number	01425 271405
Email address	office@highcliffe.com

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