

Bexhill High School

Gunters Lane, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN39 4BY

Inspection dates 27–28 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Inadequate 4
Achievement of pupils	Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching	Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Students underachieve. Their progress is too slow. The standard of their work is below average in all year groups and in most subjects.
- Students with special educational needs are not well enough provided for in lessons.
- Students do not attend school regularly enough.
- The school analyses in only a very limited way how it spends pupil premium funding. It cannot show the impact of this expenditure for the students concerned.
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- Teaching is not of sufficient quality, or improving with enough urgency, to enable students to make up the ground they need. Teachers expect too little of students.
- Teachers' assessments of students' attainment are unreliable. Their marking of students' work does not sufficiently help students to improve their learning.
- The content of subjects taught, although interesting, is not well planned. What students learn about in Key Stage 3 does not prepare them effectively enough for Key Stage 4.
- The senior leadership team is small and not effective enough. Subject heads are not held sufficiently accountable. School leaders do not show the capacity to make the main improvements that are needed.
- The governing body does not ask demanding enough questions of the school. Governors are too accepting of low standards.

The school has the following strengths

- Students behave respectfully towards each other and adults.
- The new building provides an attractive and stimulating environment for learning. Students enjoy, for example, participating in arts events in the drama theatre.
- The Principal's leadership ensures the school looks after the students well.
- Some students benefit from very well-organised vocational courses. These enable the students involved to gain employment or undertake further education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the school at work, including 32 lessons in many subjects. Many of these lessons were taught in the school's 'pods', or other large spaces, by two or more teachers, with 60 or more students present. The number of teachers observed was much higher than the number of lessons observed.
- Inspectors observed the school at break and lunchtimes, and heard some younger students reading.
- They held discussions with the Principal and many members of staff, senior governors, students and two representatives of the Prospects Academies Trust. They also considered 86 on-line responses about the school from parents through Parent View, on the Ofsted website.
- Inspectors looked in detail at samples of students' work, in different subjects. They scrutinised school documents such as plans, evaluations and minutes of meetings.

Inspection team

Robin Hammerton, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Glenn Mayoh	Additional Inspector
Janet Simms	Additional Inspector
Jenny Usher	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- This is a large secondary school, serving the coastal town of Bexhill. It became an academy, sponsored by the Prospects Academies Trust, on 1 November 2012.
- The predecessor school (which existed before the academy) met the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has a senior leadership team comprising the Principal and two vice-principals. It also has an extended leadership team of fifteen, which includes the heads of subjects.
- Most students are White British.
- The school has a small, local authority funded, unit for students with autism (ASPIE).
- The proportion of students eligible for support through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, service children and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is average.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs being supported by school action is average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Some higher-attaining students in Year 11 take their GCSE in mathematics early in the year.
- Some students attend courses at local colleges; the school also provides vocational courses of its own, some of which are offered to students from other nearby schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching considerably, so that by the summer of 2014, attainment at GCSE is broadly average and that, in the year between March 2013 and April 2014, at least an average proportion of students in Key Stage 3 make the expected progress, by:
 - increasing the pace and challenge in each lesson
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can and should achieve
 - ensuring all students are given work which precisely matches their assessed needs
 - improving the marking of students' work, so that it provides guidance which helps students to improve their work more quickly
 - not accepting work which is poorly presented.
- Enhance the curriculum, ensuring that the current interest and breadth in the curriculum are not lost by:
 - closely addressing students' needs in literacy and numeracy right from the start of Year 7
 - making sure the curriculum for Key Stage 3 students is appropriately planned, preparing them well for Key Stage 4
 - making sure that learning in Year 9 is more productive and used effectively to prepare

students for the next phase of their education.

- Extend significantly the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring the senior leadership team has the capacity and necessary expertise to bring about the improvements needed, particularly in the key areas of teaching and the curriculum
 - holding middle leaders to account much more closely for the quality of provision and students' progress in their areas of responsibility
 - managing more robustly the school's work with disabled students, those with special educational needs and those supported by pupil premium funding, and checking carefully the impact of this work on the students concerned
 - evaluating the work of the school accurately, more regularly and in greater detail.
 - sharpening school improvement planning
 - making sure that the monitoring of teaching focuses on the impact it is having on the progress students make and helps each individual teacher to improve, even where lessons are taught by more than one teacher
 - ensuring that teachers' assessments of students, and the school's data used to track students' progress, are well moderated, accurate and reliable
 - improving the effectiveness of the performance management of staff
 - undertaking an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Students join the school from their primary schools with attainment in English and mathematics that is well below average. They then make slow progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, and do not catch up the lost ground. The school's interventions and Year 7 catch up programmes do not contribute well enough to accelerating students' learning and progress.
- In Key Stage 3, inspectors saw several examples where students' work had become worse, rather than better, over time. Teachers had failed to deal with this and, in some cases, assessed the work much too highly.
- Inspection evidence indicates that teachers' assessments of students' work in mathematics are often more accurate than those made in English. Students make better progress in mathematics than they do in English, although progress in mathematics is still too slow.
- When working in the predecessor school, the senior staff expected there would be improvements in the GCSE results in 2012. However, these improvements did not happen. Fewer than half of students gained five good GCSEs, which is well below average.
- Again, the senior staff anticipate better GCSE results in 2013. However, they are aware that the assessment data they are using to make this prediction are unreliable. Inspection evidence shows that older students' work remains below average in many subjects.
- The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is lower than the other students, although school data suggest the gap is beginning to reduce. The school makes some suitable extra provision for these students but does not have accurate information about the impact of this, or how staff members in day-to-day lessons are held accountable for the progress of these students.
- The school does not check carefully enough the progress of students entitled to support through pupil premium funding. There has been a considerable gap between the attainment of these students and the others. The school does not have reliable evidence that the attainment gap is closing.
- There are pockets of good achievement. For example, inspectors saw some high-quality work by some students in GCSE art lessons. Students are well served by the courses at local colleges.
- Students working in the vocational skills centre achieve well in disciplines such as construction and hairdressing. Through the realistic working environment the centre provides, students readily overcome past difficulties to gain employment or take further education. However, many of them try to avoid writing, as they find it difficult.
- The number of students taking GCSE examinations early has reduced significantly and the practice is being eliminated. It does not notably affect overall GCSE outcomes.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Although it has some strengths, teaching is inadequate over time because it does not enable students to make sufficient progress. The school's work to improve teaching lacks urgency and senior leaders are unsure of exactly what needs to be done. The quality of teaching depends too much on choices made by individual staff, and groups of staff, without clear enough guidance or leadership.
- In too many lessons, teachers' expectations of students are low. In the large teaching groups, students often have very different needs, and levels of attainment, from each other. However, the work set for them is often poorly matched to these differing needs. Too often, all students do much the same work or activity as each other.
- When, as is often the case, there are two or more staff present in a lesson, opportunities are missed for these staff to work separately, in a focused way, with groups of students at different

attainment levels. There was little evidence in the inspection of suitable provision in lessons for disabled students and those with special educational needs.

- Teachers use a positive, supportive style in lessons. However, they often dominate or control the lessons too much, reducing students' opportunities to think for themselves.
- Due to the timetabling, most lessons are long. This helps provide students with time to focus on tasks in detail. Too often, however, lessons proceed slowly, without sufficient challenge for students, and time is wasted. Opportunities are missed to include punchy discussions and short activities to enliven the lessons. As a result, students can 'switch off' for periods of time.
- A Year 10 GCSE geography lesson about international trade had interesting subject matter, clearly explained to students by the teacher. However, the lesson lacked pace; the teacher controlled the lesson too tightly and the work was not well matched to the students' needs. Many students became passive and many of their responses were too simple. In a Year 9 physical education lesson about basketball, students were inactive for extended periods, listening to the teachers or waiting for their turn to play.
- Inspectors observed a small amount of good and even outstanding teaching: in French, art and design and vocational subjects, for example. In a Year 7 French lesson for 80 students, the students learned together actively, independently, and with enjoyment. All six staff present contributed productively to well-planned speaking, reading and writing activities.
- Teachers' assessments of students' work too often lack rigour. Marking of students' work does not usually make clear enough to students how they can improve it. Most students who inspectors heard read had reading books which were too easy for them.
- The eight students in the ASPIE autism unit are appropriately supported, with many able to participate in a full timetable alongside their peers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' behaviour and safety are not yet good overall because students too often become passive and inactive in lessons. Their attendance, while improving, is below average.
- There are, nevertheless, many positive aspects in this area. Students are happy and settled in school. They behave sensibly and considerately and mostly arrive on time to lessons. They are polite and helpful.
- Students are ready to learn. However, where teaching is less engaging and challenging, which is common, they lose interest and motivation, sometimes distracting each other. Their effort and the quality of their work reduce.
- Students show pride in their school. Those who met with inspectors understand the school's 'ERIC' values: equality, respect, inspiration and commitment. However, in Key Stage 3, in particular, not all students complete their work with similar pride. Some of it is very scruffy and poorly presented, and this is too readily accepted by staff.
- The school's behaviour policy, led by the principal, shows growing success. Exclusion rates have decreased and fewer pupils need to be isolated from others. Most behaviour incidents are dealt with effectively, without needing the involvement of senior leaders. Students find staff approachable. The new, open, school building reduces opportunities for poor behaviour.
- Students say that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively by staff. This view is supported by the school's records and, for the most part, by the parents who responded to Parent View.
- In the vocational skills centre, students behave safely and are well motivated. No evidence was found of poor behaviour, or lack of safety, for students taking courses in local colleges.
- Attendance shows improvement this year, from the predecessor school, but remains below average. Too many students are persistently absent, despite the school's robust procedures.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- The leadership and management structure is poorly organised. The senior leadership team is very small; its members do not have the time or the range of expertise to lead and deliver the big improvements needed in all areas, especially in teaching, assessment and the curriculum. This is accepted and understood by the principal.
 - The extended leadership team is largely ineffective. Its members, including the teachers in charge of each subject and special educational needs, are not dealing urgently or successfully with the weaknesses. It is not clear enough how each leader is held accountable for standards in the subject or area for which they are responsible. This lack of effective oversight by senior leaders means that there is too much inconsistency and weak practice throughout the school.
 - Performance management of staff is ineffective as teaching is inadequate and there are too few signs of improvement. A few teachers have been promoted recently to the upper pay spine, not all in higher performing subjects. In view of the inadequate teaching and achievement by students, this does not represent good value for money.
 - Senior and middle leaders regularly observe lessons to work out how they can be improved, but this process lacks rigour. In particular, the impact of the teaching on students' progress is not checked carefully enough. This limits the school's efforts to promote equality of opportunity for all students.
 - The school's evaluation of teaching is too generous. Many lessons are taught by groups of staff, and observations of such lessons tend to focus insufficiently on what each individual teacher needs to do to improve the impact of their work on students' learning.
 - There is a managed programme of training for staff, but this is not well enough focused on the most important issues, especially improving students' progress.
 - As the academy is in special measures, it is strongly recommended that newly qualified teachers are not appointed.
 - The curriculum is inadequate. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is innovative and often interesting to students. It promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development suitably. However, despite these positive points, it is not coherently planned and does not lead to high enough expectations of students. This inhibits the progress of students in literacy and numeracy and does not prepare them adequately enough for the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and for their GCSE courses. Year 9 is used as a transition year into GCSE and is not demanding or challenging enough.
 - In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum improves somewhat as teachers focus on GCSE syllabuses. However, by this time, students are working at levels well below where they should be and the work they are set does too little to redress this.
 - Leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness too highly. However, during the inspection, the Principal recognised the weaknesses found and made no excuses. School improvement planning is focused on absolutely the right areas but without enough urgency or precision.
 - Leaders and managers tackle discrimination effectively, and students are appropriately safeguarded.
 - The Principal has established suitable systems for looking after students, improving behaviour and better involving parents and the community. He considered that the well-designed new building, which he oversaw, might in itself lead to better teaching and higher standards, but realises this has not happened, as hoped.
 - Prospects Academies Trust has noted the lack of capacity in the small senior leadership team, as well as other weaknesses identified in the inspection. It has made useful improvement proposals, although without significant impact yet. It rightly pledged to use this inspection to speed up the process of improvement.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have worked diligently to bring about the new building and academy status. The
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governing body is not scrutinising the work of the school sufficiently. Governance is ineffective in holding the school's leaders to account for the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Members of the governing body are insufficiently challenging and do not ask enough much-needed and demanding questions of senior leaders. They do not show sufficient understanding that the standards in the school are too low and have accepted reassurances about this, or promises of future improvements, too readily. Governors manage the performance management of the Principal but have not ensured that this process works effectively throughout the school.

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	138895
Local authority	NA
Inspection number	410491

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1400
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Kentfield
Principal	Mr Mike Conn
Date of previous school inspection	NA
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