

The Hillcrest School and Community College

Simms Lane, Netherton, Dudley, DY2 0PB

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers provide lively and exciting tasks that enable students to build their learning step by step.
- Students' behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school. Students are polite and welcoming, and keen to talk positively about their school.
- The Principal, senior team and governing body take a strong lead in driving improvement. Rigorous checks on teaching, with good training and support where it is needed, maintain the quality of classroom practice.
- Students' achievement is good because attainment is well below national average when they start in Year 7 and, over time, students make good progress so they leave with attainment broadly in line with national average.
- The range of subjects that students follow is good and subjects are well matched to students' individual needs.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the centre of the school's work.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, teaching is not fully effective. Not all teachers plan tasks at the right level of difficulty to match individual students' needs.
- In a small number of lessons, students do not always fully understand how they will be assessed or how to achieve their targets.
- The quality of written marking is inconsistent, and too few opportunities are provided for students to respond to the advice given.
- Leaders have not done enough to share the good and outstanding practice on marking and lesson planning which exists in the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 lessons, seven of which were jointly observed with one of the school’s senior leaders. Inspectors also listened to several pupils read and looked at samples of recent work.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and staff including subject leaders.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at policies, self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring records, minutes of meetings of the governing body, information about students’ progress, safeguarding documents and samples of students’ work.
- The views of the 20 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire were taken into account. Inspectors also took account of the 71 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Steven Cartlidge, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Terence Payne	Additional Inspector
Tracey Lecointe	Additional Inspector
Thomas Walton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Most students are of White British heritage and almost all speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is above the national average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Alternative provision at Making Learning Work Wolverhampton, EDSU Dudley, West Bromwich Albion Football Club and Meadow Road offers a small number of students additional support and education.
- The majority of students are entered for mathematics GCSE prior to Year 11 and all have the opportunity to resit in Year 11 to gain their highest possible grade.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or outstanding by ensuring teachers:
 - expect students to respond to teachers' marking and their advice on how to improve their work by attempting a new challenge or practising skills
 - consistently plan work of the right level of difficulty to match the individual needs of students, so that all are appropriately challenged or supported
 - promote students' independent learning by making sure that they fully understand what they will be learning during a lesson and how they will be assessed.
- Improve the leadership of the school by:
 - sharing the good and outstanding practice on marking and lesson planning that is already in the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students typically start the school with attainment well below national averages. Over time, they make good progress and their attainment, including the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics, is in line with national average when they leave.
- Standards at the end of Year 11 fell sharply in 2012 in English and mathematics, and students also failed to make the expected progress. Leaders have rigorously addressed this underperformance, and recent assessments, together with results already received, indicate that the current Year 11 are on track to reach above-average levels of attainment by the end of their courses.
- Lesson observations during the inspection showed that students are extremely well motivated and keen to do well in their lessons. For example, in a French lesson in Year 8 where teaching was outstanding, students were able to stand and demonstrate their ability to use new vocabulary to describe their holiday and then extend their learning by justifying their opinions in French.
- Well-established strategies help accelerate reading. Catch-up courses are provided for the weakest readers, establishing a systematic approach and providing effective individual support throughout Key Stage 3. These result in these students making good progress.
- The school has entered students early for GCSE examinations in mathematics in order for them to gain their best possible grade. This has been successful for the present Year 11, 57% of whom have already gained grade C or above. The school is ensuring that all students in mathematics have the opportunity to improve their results even further by offering extra tuition and homework clubs. Students are on track to achieve their highest results in mathematics in 2013.
- The school is making very good use of its pupil premium funding. Extra staffing, one-to-one tuition and funding for additional educational resources, for example, are helping students to make good and sustained progress. As a result, the gap of one GCSE grade in English and mathematics between these students and their classmates in 2012 is now closing very quickly.
- For the students in Year 7 who are eligible for support through the 'catch-up premium', the school has accurate tracking systems in place to ensure they are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to other students because staff have identified students' individual needs and arranged the right additional help. Teachers and teaching assistants support students, providing challenge and encouragement and helping them with subject-specific vocabulary.
- The small number of students who use alternative provision as part of their education are gaining appropriate qualifications and making good progress.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- The quality of teaching is good. The vast majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good or better, and records of leaders' checking show that this is typically the case. However, there is some variation, both within and across subjects. As a result, some students' achievement is inconsistent.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to motivate their students. They provide a range of tasks that encourage students to want to succeed. This was particularly noticeable in an art lesson, where students in Year 8 had the opportunity to practise their design skills making masks. The students gradually added more and more complex features to their masks and showed a clear understanding of what strategies to use to develop their work to reach the highest level possible.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers use questioning well to check students' understanding, asking searching questions and encouraging discussion. For example, in an English lesson in Year 7 where teaching was good, students worked cooperatively in pairs and groups to develop their understanding of the use of syllables in limericks. They clearly enjoyed the task and responded positively to the teacher's probing questioning.
- There is some inconsistency in the quality of teachers' planning. Activities are not always sufficiently well matched to students' individual abilities. As a result, some lower-attaining students simply copy information because they do not understand clearly what it is they have to do, and higher-attaining students are sometimes expected to undertake tasks that are too easy for them before moving on to more challenging work.
- Although teachers often provide clear feedback for students during lessons on how well they are doing, not all provide clear written feedback on how students can improve their work and reach their targets. Opportunities are being missed across most subjects to enable students to respond to advice by practising skills, correcting mistakes or being set an additional challenge.
- In lessons where teaching requires improvement, teachers sometimes do not define exactly what is going to be learned during the lesson. In these lessons, students do not always understand how they are to be assessed, so that they can independently take responsibility for improving their work to achieve the highest grades possible.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good**

- Students are keen to learn in almost every lesson. Their behaviour during lessons is almost always good and this has a positive impact on their learning.
- A strong anti-bullying culture has been created throughout the school. Students say that there is almost no bullying in the school and that they are very well supported on the rare occasions it occurs. They are well informed about different forms of bullying and other aspects of safety, including internet safety.
- The school works effectively to maintain good behaviour and attendance and there are clear procedures in place to monitor and support students who have difficulties in these areas.
- The three-year trend for attendance shows that the school has maintained attendance in line with national averages throughout. Leaders are effectively maintaining this and are focusing on families who struggle to get their children to school and to make clear the effect absence has on

their children's progress and attainment.

- Students conduct themselves well. They are polite and courteous to visitors. They willingly talk to adults and are honest about their feelings about the school. The school promotes positive relationships between students, and they get on well together.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal is supported well by the senior team and the governing body. She has established rigorous procedures to check on the quality of teaching and provide support for those identified as underperforming. Leaders have been quick to address the fall in achievement in 2012, including the provision of well-focused intervention classes.
- Students' progress is checked regularly and underachievement is identified and tackled. Subject leaders and form tutors provide well-organised support and mentoring. Leaders are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development, and appropriate priorities for action have been identified. Despite this, the school's self-evaluation is, in parts, generous in comparison with the requirements of the current inspection framework.
- Leaders have not done enough to share the good and outstanding practice on marking and lesson planning that is in the school and, as a result, some students have not achieved the highest standards they can.
- Performance management procedures are well established and link salary increases to the quality of teaching. Teachers are closely held to account for the progress made by their students.
- The school's leaders ensure that the funding from the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up programme is appropriately focused on providing support for these students and checking that it is being effectively used.
- The school provides extensive consultation and support for the parents of disabled students, those who have special educational needs, and other students who may need support. This ensures they are fully included in school life and that all have equality of opportunity.
- The range of subjects and topics taught has been carefully designed around students' interests and meets their needs to prepare them well for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- The Parent View responses indicate that parents have positive views about the school, with a large majority saying they would recommend the school to another parent.
- The local authority is fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has worked well with senior leaders.
- The new school building is light and airy and, with excellent display work, provides an inspirational learning environment. Recently, as part of their English course, students have worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company and performed on stage in Stratford-upon-Avon. The school has also, through charity fundraising, raised money to support a school in India. This, and many opportunities to work as part of a team, enhance students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is well informed. It challenges and supports the school and compares its performance with schools nationally. Governors have a deep insight into the quality of teaching. They ensure that the use of additional funds from the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up improves the achievement of the students for whom the funds are intended. The governing body oversees the management of finance and resources expertly and ensures that the salary progression of staff is justified. Governors rigorously check safeguarding practice and, as a result, safeguarding procedures meet current legal requirements.

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	103863
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	412317

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	965
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Taylor
Headteacher	April Garratt
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2007
Telephone number	01384 816500
Fax number	01384 816501
Email address	info@hillcrest.dudley.sch.uk

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