

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

Stonehouse Lane, Birmingham, B32 3AE

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
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 exemplary, both in lessons and around the school. They are polite and welcoming, and those from different faiths and backgrounds get on extremely well together.
- Outstanding care, support and guidance ensure that students feel extremely safe and well cared for.
- The headteacher, senior team and governing body take a strong lead in driving improvement in teaching and achievement.
- Students' achievement is good because attainment is often below the national average when they start in Year 7 and, over time, students make good progress so that, when they leave, attainment is above national averages.
- The sixth form is good and students make good progress on their post-16 courses. They do especially well in vocational subjects. Students receive first-rate information, advice and guidance, which help them to make well-informed decisions about future employment, education and training.
- 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, staff do not make clear enough to students exactly what needs to be improved in their work.
- In a few lessons, teachers take too long to explain to students what they need to do to improve.
- Students are not given enough opportunity to respond to the advice given when teachers mark their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 29 lessons, including joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors observed two school assemblies, listened to several students read and looked at samples of recent work.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, heads of subject departments, teachers, and members of the governing body. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation; the school development plans; behaviour records; safeguarding records; governing body documents; and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors also considered the views expressed in 26 questionnaires returned by school staff. Responses of parents and carers to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were not sufficient to trigger any results. Inspectors took account of parents' and carers' views from the most recent surveys taken by the school.

Inspection team

Steven Cartlidge, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Terence Payne

Additional Inspector

Balbir Kaur-Pierpoint

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Almost all students are from minority ethnic heritages. The largest groups are of Caribbean, Pakistani and African backgrounds. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is also high.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- 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 government's current floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The sixth form share facilities with seven other local schools as part of the Oaks Collegiate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that the quality of teaching is consistently good and increase the proportion that is outstanding, so that progress rates rise further, by:
 - checking that staff always involve students in the assessment of their work, so that they are clear about what they need to do to improve
 - giving students time to respond to the advice given
 - ensuring that the organisation of lessons is effective, so that students are fully involved throughout
 - ensuring that teachers' explanations are not too long, so that students have more time to work independently.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start at the school with levels at or below average levels in the basic skills of reading, writing, communication and mathematics. The headteacher and senior leaders have done a great deal since the last inspection to improve the organisation and use of assessment information to track the progress made by individuals and groups. As a result, Year 11 students, including the more able, achieved above-average levels of attainment in their GCSE courses in 2013. This is a notable improvement on 2012.
- Teaching and learning in mathematics have traditionally been a relative strength of the school. Since the last inspection, the school has built on the success in this specialism so that students now learn just as well in English.
- The improved standards and rates of progress are reflected in younger year groups.
- There is no significant difference between the achievements of students from different ethnic backgrounds or those who speak English as an additional language.
- Lesson observations showed that students are extremely well motivated and keen to do well in all their lessons, resulting in their positive progress. For example, in a Year 11 physical education lesson, students showed great excitement as they took part in small-group demonstrations on passing skills in basketball to show what they already knew. They then became totally engrossed in their groups, where they identified and corrected their own mistakes.
- 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 students, 66% of whom gained grade C or above in 2013. The school is ensuring that students, including the more able in mathematics, have the opportunity to improve even further by offering extra tuition and homework clubs.
- 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 has narrowed to less than half a grade.
- For the students in Year 7 who are eligible for support through the 'catch-up premium', the school has accurate tracking systems which are used to direct specific support. As a result, school data show that these students 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.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and results are improving strongly. By the end of the sixth form, results are at least in line with, and often above, the national average for most subjects. Students are making good progress. Results are typically stronger in vocational subjects, in

which students are making outstanding 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.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Teachers are successful in motivating their students. They provide a range of tasks that encourage students to want to succeed. Students are also keen to live up to the expectations of the adults around them and this helps them to make progress. This was particularly noticeable in a drama lesson, where students in Year 11 had the opportunity to practise their acting skills. The students gradually added more and more complex features to their characters and showed a clear understanding of the strategies needed to develop their work to reach the highest level.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work together effectively and help is matched well to students' needs. This ensures the students make good progress in all subjects.
- 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 10 where teaching was outstanding, students worked cooperatively in pairs and groups to develop their understanding of character analysis. They clearly enjoyed the task and responded positively to the teacher's probing questioning. Occasionally, teachers' introductions to learning go on for too long when students are capable of moving on more quickly. This reduces the time available for independent 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 in most subjects to enable students to respond to advice by practising skills, correcting mistakes or being set an additional challenge.
- Occasionally, lessons are not as well organised and activities not closely enough matched to the students' individual abilities. As a result, some pupils do not understand clearly what they need to do and others, mainly the most able, have to undertake tasks that are too easy for them before moving onto more challenging work.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers ensure that students understand key subject ideas in the level of depth that will enable them to achieve the higher grades. The sixth form share facilities with other local schools and students take responsibility for monitoring their own progress and collaborate well in helping each other to achieve. Consequently, sixth formers are making good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is typically excellent in and around the school. Students are consistently polite to each other, to staff and to visitors. This is shown in the very calm arrival of the students each morning and the sensible way that they move around the school site. The school's strong focus on the personal development of the students supports their social and moral development very effectively.
- Students take great pride in the school, have highly positive attitudes to learning and are very

keen to show a love of learning in class. The vast majority of parents and carers agree that their children are safe and happy in school and are very positive about behaviour.

- Students say that behaviour is always extremely well managed in all subjects. They have a clear understanding of the sanctions that will be used if they should fall below teachers' high expectations. Students' own expectations of what outstanding behaviour means are also high and they work very hard to live up to these. For example, during break and lunchtime, students' behaviour is outstanding inside or outside the building.
- Students have excellent attitudes to learning, and this has a positive impact on their achievement. They listen carefully to the explanations of staff and to the ideas of others. This was very well illustrated in a science lesson by Year 10 students, who avidly listened to each other's writing tasks and then animatedly joined in discussions in pairs about the strengths and areas for improvement each had.
- Work is usually neatly presented, and students take pride in themselves and their school.
- Students told inspectors that they feel very safe and well cared for. They value the fact that they are treated as individuals and that the school will listen to their views. Students from a wide range of ethnic groups work and socialise well together both in and out of the classroom. The school is a harmonious community that celebrates the diversity of its students' backgrounds.
- Students explain clearly that bullying is a repeated action and know that inappropriate behaviour is never tolerated in school. Students say bullying is very rare but, if there are any incidents, they are dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Students understand how to keep safe and can explain what cyber-bullying is and what to do if it occurred.
- Attendance is above average and pupils arrive punctually.
- Sixth form students receive outstanding information, support and guidance. They make an excellent contribution to the life of the school; for example, on the school council and in working with younger students in Key Stage 3 tutor groups.

The leadership and management are good

- Teachers and governors are ambitious for the school to do well. The headteacher provides very determined leadership, promoting a clear focus on continual improvement. She drives school improvement, with a clearly articulated vision for the future.
- During the past year, the leadership team has focused on developing the role of subject leaders; in particular, through the introduction of middle leadership courses and attending subject development meetings. As a result of subject leaders' improved management skills, standards in 2013 have risen considerably; for example, in modern foreign languages, geography and history. Likewise, in the sixth form, a strengthening of leadership and management has benefitted students, who have made considerable gains in all post-16 courses.
- The analysis of students' progress and accurate self-evaluation of the school's work provide all teachers, and the governing body, with a clear understanding of the school's performance,

including the sixth form. This ensures that improvement planning is sharply focused on identified weaknesses. This is seen, for example, in the successful action taken last year to raise attainment in English, and demonstrates the school's capacity for continued improvement.

- The leadership of teaching is good and the school places a high priority on improving teaching through good-quality training. Teachers' performance is checked and information is used from lesson observations and from information about students' progress to set teachers targets for improvement. There is a clear understanding that decisions about promotion and pay rates will be based on the impact of teaching on students' progress.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively and has helped develop the role of the teaching assistants. Students identified as in need of additional support, including those eligible for pupil premium funding, Year 7 'catch up' programme, and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are well supported. The school evaluates through data its expenditure on the support provided, which show that students are making similarly good progress to their classmates.
- School leaders ensure that different groups of pupils have an equal chance to succeed, and they tackle effectively any instances of discrimination.
- The school is well resourced for information and communication technology. Its computer facilities benefit learning both in its areas of specialism as well as in other subjects.
- The range of subjects and topics taught promote a positive attitude to learning among students in all subjects, and with all staff, and this leads to students achieving well. The curriculum has been carefully designed around students' interests and their needs. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effectively promoted by a broad range of arts, drama, music, science and sports activities, as well as by visits and visitors.
- The school commissions the support it needs very effectively. For example, the school improvement partner, an independent consultant, has provided well-targeted support for school leaders, who acknowledge that his practical advice, focusing them more on academic rigour, has led to the school improving its results.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well informed. It challenges and supports the school, and using the data available, 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 improves the achievement of the pupils 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	137346
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	427192

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	540
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dee McIlmurray
Headteacher	Julie Ann Davies
Date of previous school inspection	18 May 2012
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