

Hednesford Valley High School

Stanley Road, Hednesford, WS12 4JS

Inspection dates 17–18 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Hednesford Valley High is a good school, where students make good academic and personal progress. Good leadership has led to accredited awards for its work with students with autism and dyslexia and this reflects how well it enables students with complex learning needs to achieve.
- Since the previous inspection the school has established a separate sixth form at a nearby comprehensive school. This provision is good and improving. Sixth-form students who attend the satellite unit and those who remain at Hednesford Valley High make good progress.
- Most students make good progress and some achieve nationally recognised qualifications by the time they leave school.
- The behaviour and safety of students is good. A few students have difficulty in managing their behaviour, but over time most make good improvements and develop their maturity. They are proud of their school and keen to talk to visitors about their work.
- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding. The positive and encouraging learning climate does much to enable students to thrive and achieve well.
- Senior leaders and governors have shown vision in setting up the satellite sixth form class. They have ensured that the school is challenged and continuing to improve through the use of external people to validate the school's work and provide further challenge and rigour.
- The school strongly promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The subjects and experiences prepare students well for life in modern Britain.
- Assessment of students' progress is good and allows the school to identify quickly any under achievement and provide extra help.
- Leaders' and managers' careful checks on the quality of teaching are improving teachers' skills and leading to students' good and improving achievement.
- The governing body provides effective support and challenge.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some students' progress is sometimes limited by lack of challenge, as some do not move quickly enough into new areas of learning, spending too much time on skills that they have achieved already.
- Learning is not always matched closely enough to students' individual abilities and this slows their rate of progress.
- The marking of students' work is inconsistent as it does not always tell them clearly enough what they need to learn next.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 10 lessons, most of which were joint observations with different members of the senior leadership team.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, teaching staff, students, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspection team took account of 12 responses from parents and carers to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and also considered the school's recent survey of parents' and carers' views. 12 staff responses to a questionnaire were also taken into account.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation including the school's information on pupils' progress, its self-evaluation, development plans and information relating to the safeguarding of students and scrutiny of their work.

Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Carol Deakin

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hednesford Valley High educates secondary-aged students with a wide range of needs.
- All the students have a statement of special educational needs, or education, health and care plans. The statements are most commonly for moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, or autistic spectrum disorders. A small proportion of students have complex learning difficulties or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.
- Just over half of the students are known to be eligible for additional funding known as pupil premium funding.
- Students are mainly White British.
- A group of twenty sixth form students are educated on the campus of Cannock Chase High School.
- The school has achieved dyslexia and autism accreditation awards since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable students to make faster progress by:
 - sharpening the match of learning activities more closely to their individual abilities
 - helping students gain skills and knowledge as rapidly as possible
 - extending the best practice of marking of students' work so that it is consistent across the school and students know how to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, in conjunction with senior leaders and the governing body, has established a strong and widely shared culture within the school which promotes good teaching and a climate where students thrive and make good and sometimes outstanding academic and personal development.
- Students' progress is carefully tracked and this ensures that any under-performance is identified and acted upon, for example providing additional reading sessions for students who are struggling. This information is used to set challenging and realistic targets for students.
- The school has considered the way it measures students' progress and has decided to keep to the present arrangements, but has started to look at, in conjunction with some other special schools, other ways the progress of more able students can be tracked. This work is in the early stages of development.
- The school has an accurate understanding of its work and this is shared with governors. Senior leaders and governors have taken the decision to use an external professional to check the work of the school and to provide further challenge and improvement. Senior leaders set high expectations of staff and students and as a result the school is improving well.
- The school has reviewed the subjects it offers to students to ensure they receive broad and balanced experiences. There has been a stronger focus on preparing students for life in modern Britain for example through history, geography and citizenship, by studying how democracy works, celebration of diverse cultures and faiths and promoting tolerance and respect. The school is a harmonious community where achievements of students are celebrated by all. Information relating to how British values are promoted on the school website is not prominent enough for parents to be fully informed about this.
- All staff with allocated responsibilities have a clear view of the strengths of their areas of responsibility and areas for development. They have reviewed the range and depth of subjects taught and meet with members of the governing body to make themselves accountable for their subjects.
- Procedures to ensure that students are kept safe are good, although some risk assessments on independent travel by students are not always shared with parents. All staff and governors have received training in safeguarding and the safety and well being of students across the school is a high priority.
- The grouping of students in classes is considered carefully. Some classes have been divided into smaller groups to help meet the needs of students more effectively. For example Year 7 and Year 8 classes are organised differently because they are not yet ready to receive more subject based teaching.
- Students receive impartial careers education guidance. This means that when they reach the age of 16 they have a number of pathways they can follow, with the school's post-16 provision being one of the options. Students are well prepared for their next steps of training or education.
- Additional sources of funding for disadvantaged students and Year 7 catch-up money have been used well to help speed up the progress of students who may be struggling, and as a result they perform at broadly similar levels to their peers. It has increased students' attendance and has helped to fund additional help for students to improve their numeracy and literacy skills.
- The local authority has confidence in the school and has helped the school to achieve an award for its work in dyslexia. The authority values the strong links the school has forged with a number of other schools and this is illustrated by the innovative satellite sixth form provision and effective partnership working with schools and is an indication of the capacity of the school to improve further.
- The work of teachers and support staff is checked closely and this has ensured that teaching is at least consistently good across the school. Training needs are identified so staff can keep their knowledge and skills up to date, although this has not yet given rise to sustained outstanding teaching or achievement. Staff are keen to share good practice with each other so that whole school improvements can be made.

The link between salary progression and the quality of teaching is appropriate.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are an effective body and have overseen new initiatives of the school well. They know the strengths and areas for development of the school. Each governor has a link with a subject leader. They know how additional funding has been spent and the difference it has made in terms of disadvantaged students performing as well as other students. They know teaching is good and have ensured there is a suitable link between salary progression and the quality of teaching. They have enough information to enable them to understand how well students are progressing and to ask pertinent questions. They have undertaken relevant training to keep themselves knowledgeable and up to date, for example in relation to safeguarding. They provide an appropriate level of challenge and hold the school to account and have ensured that the curriculum is suitable to meet the needs of students and to prepare them for the future. They are working with senior leaders to develop new assessment arrangements in the light of recent changes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Most parents agree.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good and they are keen to learn. They settle well in class and work hard. Most take care in their written work and they sustain their concentration well. Some students with more complex needs respond exceptionally well to enthusiastic input.
- Students' behaviour around the school is good. Lunchtimes for example, are calm and orderly and provide good opportunities for students to develop their social and independence skills.
- A few students present some challenging behaviour which has led to a temporary rise in fixed term exclusions and some require sustained individual support to help them to make improvements to their behaviour. There are no permanent exclusions. Students' attendance is average and absences are followed up quickly.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The school has good security arrangements to check visitors to the school.
- Students report they feel safe. They are particularly attuned to online dangers and can articulate clearly what actions they must take to stay safe. Bullying is rare. Students have confidence in staff to take actions to address any concerns and displays around the school place a strong emphasis on promoting students' awareness of anti-bullying, tolerance and respect.
- The student leadership is an active body which makes suggestions for improvements, such as a new school uniform. They vote on membership on an annual basis.
- Students' spiritual, moral and cultural development is promoted strongly through lunchtime clubs, assemblies, which cover a wide range of cultural and religious themes, subjects and tutorial times. These all combine to provide a happy, safe and positive culture to which students subscribe.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers usually set high expectations for students. Bright classroom displays help to raise students' aspirations and help them develop as keen learners. Their positive attitude to learning mean they work hard to achieve and take pride in their work. Teaching is usually well planned and purposeful.
- Teachers and support staff work well together as a cohesive team. Staff are good at finding imaginative ways to engage students and to get the best out of them. They know potential 'triggers' that may adversely affect a student and know how manage difficulties sensitively.

- Staff are knowledgeable and well trained in the areas such as autism and dyslexia and they share their knowledge with each other freely to improve their teaching.
- Assessment information on pupils is used effectively and this boosts students' progress. For example, this information alerts staff to students who are not making the expected progress in literacy and numeracy and staff are allocated to provide additional help to accelerate progress.
- Questioning is used well to encourage students to extend their thinking and reflect more deeply and promote good learning.
- Where teaching is less effective, some students are not given the opportunity to make the most rapid progress because they are not stretched enough, and are not guided to move on to new learning when they have consolidated existing skills and knowledge. Work is not always matched closely enough to students' individual abilities, and this limits their rate of progress.
- Teachers have recognised that marking is an area for development, so that students receive clearer prompts for their next steps of learning. This has started to be addressed and there are some good examples, but it is not yet consistent across the school.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Nearly all students make good progress. There was a dip in 2013, when some Year 9 students, who joined the school late, did not do as well as expected. However, the 2014 Year 9 students achieved well. By the time students reach the age of 16 they have made good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Students with more complex learning needs achieve exceptionally well. They respond positively to well-chosen sensory activities and make excellent responses either verbally or through using signs or symbols.
- More-able students achieve well by the time they leave school. They undertake a wide range of courses and gain creditable results in GCSE, Functional Skills and Entry level awards. A few students are entered for early examinations and this has given them confidence to gain higher awards in later years. Some students develop their independence skills well through learning to use public transport to arrive to school.
- In English, students develop their skills for reading, writing and spelling well. Some students have been identified as needing extra support and this has improved their literacy skills. Students are generally confident communicators.
- Good progress in mathematics is made by students, as often it is practically based to prepare them for life, such as using money or telling the time.
- The school usually meets the wide range of learning needs well and this means that all students, irrespective of their different backgrounds, gender or learning difficulty achieve equally well, making the best progress when teaching is well matched to their abilities and activities make them think hard. The majority of disadvantaged students close the gap on their peers, through well targeted support made possible through additional funding. Pupils moving from primary schools are provided with transition days to help them settle into school more quickly. Some students in Y7 and Y8 are not able to cope easily with having different subject teachers, so they are provided with a more secure environment until they are more emotionally and academically ready.

The sixth form provision is good

- The sixth form provision is a new initiative, but has got off to a good start. Students make good academic progress in the sixth form. More able students achieve GCSE awards, with one student gaining a 'B' grade in hospitality and catering. Progress is tracked well and suitable targets are set. However, the progress of some students is limited by over-repetition of work.

- Students' personal and social development in the off-site provision is outstanding. One student commented, 'I have really grown up here'. Students enjoy the mature setting and use the common room and other social facilities with confidence. One student followed a course on health and social care within the mainstream school and some use the joint sports facilities. Some students have flexible packages where they divide their time between the sixth form and local colleges. Students run a market stall in the local community and this provides excellent opportunities for them to practice their academic and social skills in the real world. These opportunities prepare students well for life after school. The senior leaders of Hednesford Valley High are keen to develop this provision with greater access to mainstream lessons, where appropriate and the use of more space. The host school also reports benefits to other students in terms of raising and developing students' awareness of disabilities.

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	124508
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	447965

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
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	146
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol Felton
Headteacher	Anita Rattan
Date of previous school inspection	29 February 2012
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