

Holywell School

Red Lion Close, Cranfield, Bedford, MK43 0JA

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students in Year 8 achieve standards above the levels expected for their age, making good progress because they work hard and are well taught.
- Achievement in Key Stage 2 is good; students' progress has improved over time in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because the support provided is well-matched to their needs.
- Disadvantaged students achieve well because the extra funding to support them is used effectively.
- Students' behaviour and safety are good. They are keen to learn and to do well and there is a good working atmosphere in lessons. They say they feel safe. Students enjoy school, attend well and arrive punctually to their lessons.
- Support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effective.
- Teaching is good and improving because the school identifies and meets staff training needs well. Teachers use their good subject knowledge effectively to plan activities that interest and challenge students.
- The school offers a good range of subjects which promote students' academic and personal development well. Arrangements for tracking their progress are well-founded and used effectively to help them improve.
- The headteacher and senior leaders provide effective leadership within a caring school ethos. They track the progress students make regularly, monitor teaching carefully and have a clear and accurate picture of the school's strengths and development areas.
- Governors use their experience and expertise well to hold the school to account. They monitor the expenditure of school funds regularly and review information about students' performance carefully.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers give clear guidance to students on how to improve their work or provide sufficient opportunities for students to act on it.
- Some teachers do not explain carefully enough what students are expected to learn in lessons.
- Not all staff fully implement the school's homework policy and some parents and students are not clear what is expected of them.
- There is not enough emphasis on improving students' grammar, spelling and presentation.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons, including six joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made short visits to other lessons and tutor group sessions. They looked at samples of students' work, interviewed groups of students and heard students read from across the age range.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, subject co-ordinators, year heads, teachers, and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, school development plans, behaviour records, safeguarding records, governing body documents, and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 36 questionnaires returned by school staff, and 142 responses submitted by parents to the on-line 'Parent View' survey. They also considered the comments made by 112 parents in response to this survey.

Inspection team

Roger Waddingham, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Additional Inspector
Anthony Felsenstein	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school, catering for students from Year 5 to Year 8.
- It converted to Academy status in October 2012. When the predecessor school, Holywell CofE VA Middle School, was last inspected by Ofsted in July 2011, it was judged to be good.
- A significant number of students come from overseas each year to be with their parents at a local university.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is below average. This is additional funding allocated by the government for groups of students, including those looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to most schools of this size and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs receiving extra support through school action is well below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average. No students are currently supported by an education, health or care plan.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to outstanding by making sure that all teachers:
 - give clear guidance to students on how to improve their work and provide appropriate opportunities for students to act on it
 - explain carefully to students what they are expected to learn in lessons.
- Improve achievement across a range of subjects by:
 - placing greater emphasis on the improvement of students' grammar, spelling and presentation in all subjects
 - working further with students, parents and staff to make sure that the homework policy is understood and implemented effectively.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and senior leaders provide effective leadership. They successfully promote high expectations for achievement and behaviour, with good support and care for students individually. They know the school's strengths and development areas well and have clear plans for further improvement.
- The school's arrangements for evaluating and improving teaching, and particularly its impact on reading, writing and mathematics, are good. Senior managers and subject leaders are involved in gathering a wide range of evidence to identify points for development. Staff report that their professional training needs are met very well by what the school provides.
- Leaders and managers at all levels are making increasingly good use of regular tracking information about students' attainment and progress. Senior staff use this information very effectively to check progress in each class and make sure any extra support needed is put in place. The school has planned carefully for the future development of its assessment practices.
- Subject leaders use tracking information and evidence from students' written work well to identify areas for improvement; although this has not been the case in all subjects in the past.
- The school offers well-planned learning experiences for students, catering well for their academic, personal and physical development through both school subjects and out-of-school activities. Support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. However, homework policies are not always followed consistently and not enough emphasis is given to improving students' spelling, grammar and presentation across the school as a whole.
- Students say that they feel well-prepared for the transfer to Upper School in Year 9 because of the opportunities they have to develop their learning skills, the information provided about future career paths and the topics they study relating to life in modern Britain. These promote tolerance and respect for people of other cultures and faiths. As a result, the pupils are quickly acquiring positive attitudes about living in a modern democratic society. The option choice in Year 8 is also an effective part of this preparation.
- The support for disabled students, those who have special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium is well-managed and the progress of both groups of students is good. Setting arrangements in English and mathematics are successful in ensuring that the most able students are given demanding work and the least able are supported well in smaller teaching groups.
- Leaders have made good use of the Year 7 'catch-up funding' to develop students' skills and to ensure any who had been slipping behind improve. Primary sports funding has been used effectively to expand the range of sports activities the school offers and improve their quality. The school is committed to ensuring students all have the same opportunities to succeed.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet current national requirements, with staff well-trained in both welfare and safety procedures.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors use their experience and expertise well to hold the school to account.
 - They make good use of local training opportunities to update their skills and are confident in the use of performance data for analysing teaching effectiveness and students' progress.
 - They have a good grasp of the key school development priorities and use reports from senior managers and first-hand evidence from their own school visits to monitor progress towards the planned outcomes.
 - Governors are well informed about the school's expenditure of pupil premium funding and sports funding, and know what impact they are looking for.
 - They are aware of the school's evidence from the monitoring of teaching and for managing teachers'

performance and ensure that appointments to the upper pay scale reflect teachers' effectiveness and represent value for money.

- They are well-informed about the school's plans to develop the curriculum and assessment and ensure it strongly promotes key values, such as tolerance and understanding of the beliefs of others.
- Governors have good links with the local community and ensure that the views of parents are taken into account when developing school policies.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They say that they enjoy their work in lessons and they are happy at school. Their positive attitudes, confidence when tackling new challenges and readiness to work with others, contribute very well to the purposeful working atmosphere across the school.
- Behaviour in lessons is good and sometimes outstanding. Students arrive at lessons on time with the appropriate equipment and settle quickly to their work. They follow instructions carefully, concentrate well and sustain their interest right through to the end of a lesson. In one mathematics lesson, for example, students continued to discuss a difficult extension question even as they put their coats on to leave.
- Students move around the school in a calm and safe manner. They look after the buildings and displays well and they show a good degree of responsibility when playing together. The start of the school day and break times are orderly and students of all ages show good respect for each other and to adults.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Safeguarding requirements are met in full.
- Students have great confidence in the school's procedures to deal with any bullying incidents or incidents of a racial nature and say that such situations are very rare. The positive comments from students, staff and parents about the very low incidence of bullying are well supported by the school's records.
- The school provides well for students' understanding of equality, discrimination and respect for others through work in tutor periods and assemblies.
- Attendance is well above the national average because the school's systems to promote good attendance are highly effective, and students feel that school is a safe and enjoyable place to be.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and improving because the school has put in place effective arrangements for monitoring the impact of teachers' work on students' learning and the careful identification of staff training needs. As a result teachers know what is expected of them and plan work that is generally well-matched to students' learning requirements.
- Teachers show good subject knowledge in planning activities that interest and challenge students. They use visual resources well to provide engaging introductions to lessons. They ensure transitions between activities work smoothly; consequently, students are able to work productively at all times. Teachers establish consistent classroom routines with their students and, together with their high expectations for behaviour, this leads to students learning effectively.
- Teachers set tasks that take good account of the new programmes of study in English and in mathematics, with students completing demanding work on algebra and geometry in particular to a high standard. Many teachers explain carefully at the start of lessons what is expected of students, but occasionally progress is limited because students are not clear about what they are being asked to learn.
- Support staff use their expertise effectively to help individual students, asking questions and helping provide structure to their writing, while still giving students the responsibility to complete their own tasks.

- Teachers use short tests, group discussion and question and answer sessions effectively to monitor students' progress in lessons. Inspectors observed good examples of marking to indicate errors in students' written work. However, teachers do not always tell students clearly enough how to improve their work or indicate corrections needed in grammar, spelling or presentation and do not provide enough opportunities for them to act on this advice.
- A new school policy for setting and marking homework has been developed over the past two years. It is clear from the number of parental comments and some inconsistency seen in the marking of students' written work, that not all staff follow this policy as carefully and consistently as they should.

The achievement of pupils is good

- A significant proportion of students show levels of knowledge and understanding above those expected for their age on entry to the school. By the time they leave the school, students have made good progress and their achievement is good across a range of subjects.
- Standards and progress are rising in Key Stage 2. In 2013, students made good progress in writing. They made expected progress overall in reading, and mathematics, although the proportion of middle-attaining students exceeding expected progress was below average. The school's work on developing teaching and increased specialist teaching in these subjects has led to improved results in 2014, so that students' attainment was above average in all three subjects, and progress was in line with or better than previous figures for students across the ability range. The school's own information on current students' progress in Year 6, suggests that this trend of improvement is set to be maintained.
- Students achieve well in Years 7 and 8. Last year the students in Year 8 made good progress in English and mathematics and showed attainment above the expected levels for their age. This year, the picture of students' progress shown by the school's assessments is equally positive and this is confirmed by the work seen in lessons where good, and sometimes outstanding, attitudes to learning led to high standards of achievement. The most able students make good progress overall, especially in mathematics, where they responded with interest to demanding tasks, explaining their ideas well.
- The school has planned an appropriate range of strategies to support students eligible for the pupil premium. In 2013, the results of Year 6 students were, on average, six months behind the attainment of others in Year 6 in English and mathematics. The school's analysis for 2014 shows that these students made the same progress as their peers, both in school and nationally, in English and slightly below this in mathematics. In Year 8, the school's assessments show the great majority of pupil premium students make at least expected progress and that any gaps in English and mathematics between their attainment and other groups are closing over time.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because the support provided is well-matched to their needs. This is also true for students with English as an additional language. Support in class from knowledgeable teaching assistants is very effective. The extra funding provided for Year 7 students who have fallen behind in their work is used effectively to give them individually targeted support in literacy and numeracy.
- Students speak very highly of the school's provision for their physical development and their well-being. They enjoy the good range of outdoor activities and specialist coaching available to them as a result of effective use of the sports funding. The school ensures that all students have enough opportunities to reach the expected standard in swimming, for example.
- Students develop a range of communication skills well. They show good confidence in speaking in a variety of contexts and work well in groups to solve problems in mathematics and science. They use information technology resources well to find information and to improve the quality of their written work. They say they feel well prepared by Year 8 for the transition to Upper School. Some students, however, need more help in developing the accuracy of their spelling and grammar.

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 students' needs. This ensures that students 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 students' needs. Students 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 students 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	138844
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	449211

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	536
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Cook
Headteacher	Peter Haddon
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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