

Hill Top School

Wealcroft, Felling, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, NE10 8LT

Inspection dates 14–15 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- Good leadership and management, with effective support from governors, have ensured students make good progress and the quality of teaching is good.
- Staff and governors are ambitious for Hill Top. They are committed to further improving all students' learning and development when they soon move to their brand new school building.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have very good relationships with students.
- Behaviour is good throughout all areas of the school, in lessons and at the start or end to the school day.
- Students are safe at school because safety procedures are robust.
- Attendance is above average, demonstrating students' good attitudes to learning.
- Leaders are ensuring that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well within the new curriculum which appeals to students.
- From entering the school, students develop their skills of literacy, communication and numeracy well at each key stage of learning. For some students, outstanding progress is made from their individual starting points since joining the school.
- Students' personal, social and health education is developed well. They grow in confidence and self-esteem which is notable to themselves, their parents and staff.
- The impact of teaching on the learning and progress of all groups of students over time is good.
- Students in Key Stage 4 make good progress towards their examination courses and are well prepared for the next stages of learning.
- The sixth form is good and students make good progress because staff and the courses they follow prepare them well for their next steps in life.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- At times, staff do not set challenging enough tasks.
- Students do not always know how to improve their work when their books are marked.
- Middle leaders are not consistently checking that teachers are marking books well and that work is sufficiently challenging for all students' abilities.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by 12 teachers. Inspectors jointly observed two lessons with members from the senior leadership team, including the headteacher. An inspector examined students' work across the school with the headteacher.
- The inspectors had discussions with the teachers, senior leaders, students, parents and members of the governing body.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at and analysed a range of documentation, including the school development plan, the school's self- evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings, students' work and the school's system for checking on progress and teaching over time.
- The inspectors looked at the responses from parents. There were insufficient responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and so the school's recent parental survey was considered along with discussions with parents. Inspectors also took account of the 17 questionnaires returned from staff.

Inspection team

Michele Crichton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sue Smith

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hill Top is a secondary school for students with moderate learning difficulties and with Autistic Spectrum, including severe Autistic Spectrum.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The vast majority of students are boys and are of White British origin.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- More than half the students are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium. This is additional funding for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority. This is well above the national average.
- Since the last inspection, the school is now part of a hard federation with Dryden School, there has been a change in the headteacher, a new Chair of the Governing Body and a revised designation of the sixth form. Students and staff are to move imminently into a new school building on the site.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the overall quality of teaching to outstanding in order to raise students' achievements further by:
 - ensuring that there is consistent and useful feedback in books so that students know exactly how to improve their work
 - consistently challenging students of all abilities to make the best possible progress.
- Strengthen leadership and management further by:
 - developing the role of middle leaders to ensure they have the necessary skills to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning more effectively, especially the challenge set to all students, and the quality of marking and feedback provided by staff to students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- There is strong and purposeful leadership from the headteacher. She is ably supported by the enthusiastic senior leadership team and an overall effective governing body. This results in a culture where leaders expect and pursue effective teaching and students' good behaviour can flourish.
- The school works well in partnership with parents. The school's ethos is inclusive, promotes equality of opportunity well and ensures there is no discrimination. A typical parental comment, 'My child is a different child since he came here; he's allowed to be himself'.
- Effective provision, practice and tracking of progress by leaders ensures there are no marked differences in the progress of any group of students. Leaders are also ensuring that those disadvantaged students who receive pupil premium funding make as much progress as any other student. Funding has been used, for example, to promote students' reading skills across Key Stages 3 and 4. Consequently, tracking shows that students are making and maintaining good or better progress in reading. In discussion, they know their reading is improving.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Leaders complete regular checks on the quality of teachers' lessons and provide them with a clear analysis of their performance and how they can improve further. There are good opportunities for development through further training or tailored in-school support.
- The local authority has been greatly involved regarding the new build, cementing the federation as well as challenging and supporting Hill Top, for example, through teaching observations and analysing students' progress.
- Leaders are ensuring the curriculum is interesting and relevant and develops students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, as well as effectively promoting an understanding of British values and other cultures. For example, students experience trips abroad, work with local sculptural artists at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts in Gateshead and attend patriotic First World War commemorative events.
- The school has key partnerships with a range of agencies. These provide very good advice and guidance to students and their families to make informed choices in their next steps.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Governors play their part in making this so, for example, by checking the record of people who work with students in the school.
- Middle leaders are generally effective overall, but could be more rigorous in ensuring some aspects of marking improve and students are always given work that challenges them to make the best possible progress.
- Overall, leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance. The school development plan shows achieved targets and clear priorities for further development. Consequently, the school continues to improve.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very active and makes a good contribution to the school's work. Since the last inspection, governors have worked closely with senior leaders to form a hard federation with Dryden School and support the new build on the school site. Governors bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their role and members gain information about the school for themselves through regular visits.
 - The governing body ensures that the school is financially stable and keeps a watchful eye on the impact of spending, including the use of pupil premium funding. Senior leaders share information regarding the management of teachers' performance and the quality of teaching and learning. From the minutes of governing body meetings and through discussion with governors, it is sometimes apparent that they do not have the same very deep knowledge they had at the time of the last inspection of the school's performance.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They are polite, courteous and respectful to staff and visitors. Staff are skilled in managing a range of behaviour and there are sound procedures in place for dealing with those whose conduct can be more challenging, including for those with severe autistic spectrum disorders.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning which make an important contribution to their progress. These

aspects of learning are as a result of an initiative implemented by leaders to credit students' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. This initiative has had the additional impact of a reduction in the number of times when another member of staff might have been called to a classroom to support with behaviour.

- Attendance is above the national average for similar schools and there have been no permanent exclusions. Unusually, there were a very small number of fixed-term exclusions last year. The school has now returned to its usual nil track record.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. They feel safe in school and benefit from the secure and supportive relationships with staff.
- In discussion with students, it was clear that they understand what forms bullying may take and how to keep themselves safe, for example, when using computers or mobile phones. Importantly, students also related the importance of good behaviour, not only in school but in later life too. As one stated, 'if you're well behaved you can get and keep a job'.
- School documents and records show that all staff training regarding child protection and safeguarding is up to date.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The impact of teaching on the learning and progress of all groups of students over time is good. Observations of learning in lessons, scrutiny of books and files and reviews of the school's own tracking of students' progress confirm this. There are examples of even better practice.
- Overall, teachers provide equally good attention to different groups of students, including the most able and disadvantaged students. They use a range of strategies and techniques to match the different learning styles and needs to pupils. For example, there were many good-humoured comments made between staff and students during sessions where it was obvious that students enjoy their learning because it is fun.
- There are some missed opportunities for more students to achieve the very highest levels because not all staff consistently give effective feedback on students' work to let them know specifically how to improve or ensure that their work is even more challenging regardless of their ability. This is clearly reflected in their work.
- Students' literacy, reading and mathematical skills are equally well developed. There are many opportunities for students to read in other subjects apart from English. For example, to read written mathematical problems or read texts in music lessons or in art.
- Staff know students well. Mostly, teachers ensure all learning that takes place is appropriate to students' individual development. Sometimes learning is fast paced and interactive, whilst at other times a student may need a calmer more structured approach. For example, in one lesson students quickly answered mathematical problems, as a soft ball was thrown speedily from one person to another.
- Students concentrate well in lessons and are keen to learn and participate. Teachers and teaching assistants have very good relationships with students and this is tangible throughout all lessons.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- From low starting points due to students' disabilities and special educational needs, in all key stages, including in the sixth form, attainment and progress is good for non-disadvantaged students. Evidence from pupils' files and books, school data and observations of the impact of teaching over time show that students achieve well and some make outstanding progress from starting points in Year 7.
- There is no gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students in the school. This is because the school's tracking system focusses on the individual, the group or class, the subject and the key stage. It demonstrates that each student attains well and makes good and sometimes outstanding progress in their learning and personal development from their individual starting points.
- The most able students make good progress. In the main, they are challenged well to do their best, especially in the sixth form. In relation to their particular special educational needs, they attain well.
- In all key stages, including the sixth form, students make good progress in reading, communication, writing and mathematics. There are students throughout the school who do better than this, especially in reading and their personal, social and emotional development.

- At Key Stage 3, there is a strong focus on developing reading, writing and mathematics. Students' communication and personal development is also well promoted. Attention to the key components of learning provides a solid base for students' future understanding and studies.
- At Key Stage 4, pupils access a range of qualifications, including GCSE and Entry Level Certificate, and a wider range of courses are on offer since the last inspection. For example, arts, humanities, plant and animal care and other vocational subjects are available.
- All students leave the school with some, and frequently a range of accreditations and qualifications.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form is now in its second year of being led and taught by staff within the school. Courses are suitably focused on the individual which involve personal, social and life skills qualifications, or may involve more vocational studies. Students enjoy developing skills in, for example, performing arts, physical education or child care.
- The sixth form is led and managed well. Leaders have developed two very distinct aspects to the school's provision to reflect the very different approaches needed for its student population. One aspect provides for students with severe autism, the other aspect provides for the rest of students in the school who continue with their learning.
- Each aspect of the sixth form provides teaching and courses which are appropriate to the different needs of students. For others, there may be a focus on independence skills.
- All students, regardless of their special educational needs, develop a good range of skills to aid them in their next steps in life. The school closely tracks their progress to make sure they achieve well.
- The quality of teaching is good. Work is well matched to the individual student. Scrutiny of students' course work shows that staff have high expectations and challenge is evident if they find that students are not making the best possible progress.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes are good. Attendance, as in the rest of the school, is above average. Students are keen to talk about the new facilities they are soon to have in their new school building which would give them much more space and facilities to practise their independence skills.

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	130942
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	431576

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	106
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Sergison
Headteacher	Rebecca Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	15 February 2011
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