

Hillcrest Academy

Cowper Street, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS7 4DR

Inspection dates

28–29 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The principal and associate principal lead the school with passion and determination. Although some leaders are new to their roles, all leaders have developed a culture where only the best is good enough.
- Outcomes for pupils are outstanding. All groups of pupils make very rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils leave Hillcrest Academy reaching standards from very low starting points that are close to those achieved by other pupils nationally. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Every lesson counts at Hillcrest Academy. Teachers are relentless in supporting every pupil to reach their full potential.
- Pupils are incredibly proud of their achievements. They value the education that they receive and say that they would not change anything about their school.
- Pupils' exemplary behaviour contributes substantially to the rapid progress that they make.
- Respect and tolerance are golden threads that permeate school life. Pupils have a deep understanding of their role in a diverse community.
- Pupils are confident, resilient and self-motivated. Their highly positive attitude to their learning helps them to achieve very well.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed very well through the rich curriculum. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The pastoral care for pupils is excellent. The bespoke support that they receive is very highly valued by pupils and their families.
- The teaching of phonics in key stage 1 is a significant strength.
- The impact of Gorse Academies Trust in transforming a long-standing legacy of underachievement has been remarkable.
- Senior leaders ensure that pupil premium funding is used effectively. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress.
- Governance is very effective. Governors have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They hold leaders to account effectively.
- The early years provision is outstanding. It is improving rapidly under the determined leadership of the early years leader.
- Robust systems are in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop the effectiveness of middle leaders who are new to their roles.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The outstanding leadership of the principal and associate principal, ably supported by senior colleagues, has resulted in consistently high-quality teaching across the school. As a consequence, pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve exceptionally well.
- Senior leaders have successfully cultivated an ethos of high ambition. Every lesson counts at this school. Pupils' very positive attitude towards their learning exemplifies the culture that permeates all aspects of school life.
- Leaders and governors have a clear and aspirational vision for the school. Staff are in no doubt as to what this is. As a result, everyone is working as a team towards the same goals. Staff work very effectively together to ensure that all children at the school achieve well academically and are supported in their life journey.
- Senior leaders' checks on teaching are rigorous. Teachers are observed in their classrooms and pupils' work is scrutinised. Leaders use findings to identify training needs and drive further improvement resulting in high quality provision across the school.
- A high proportion of middle leaders are new to their roles and still need time to settle into them. Nonetheless, they have quickly and accurately taken stock of the strengths and weaknesses of the subjects that they lead. They have already begun to plan and implement actions for further improvement.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed very effectively. A well-balanced and rich curriculum provides a wide range of experiences that contribute to pupils' clear understanding that they belong to a multicultural and multi-faith society.
- A strong emphasis on artwork is demonstrated by amazing displays around school. A diverse menu of after-school clubs such as gardening, art and crafts, film club and book club further enhance the curriculum provision.
- Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain and have a deep understanding of British values. School council members are elected at the start of each year and play a key role in developing the school. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the wider community through a range of family learning experiences.
- Senior leaders direct the use of pupil premium funding very effectively. The range of initiatives, including the employment of an additional inclusion leader and extra teachers, enables this group of pupils to achieve very well. In 2016, the progress of disadvantaged pupils was significantly better than that of other pupils nationally.
- Sports funding is used well to promote healthy lifestyles and increase participation in sport. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular sporting clubs such as football, netball, multi-skills and tag rugby. Pupils take part in a number of competitive inter-school events.
- The Gorse Academies Trust has provided exceptional support since the school became an academy in January 2014. The rapid and successful transformation of a once vulnerable school to a very successful academy has been achieved through determined leadership, a vision for excellence and the exceptional drive for improvement.

Governance of the school

- Governance is extremely effective and well organised.
- Governors share the passion of senior leaders to secure the best possible outcomes for the pupils of Hillcrest Academy. They give of their time generously to ensure that they have first-hand knowledge of what is happening at the school. As regular visitors to classrooms, they speak to pupils and staff to inform themselves about teaching and learning.
- Governors ask some searching questions of senior leaders and there is evidence of valuable discussion in meetings, which uses the expertise of governors well and helps decision-making.
- External expertise is used to further validate the reports that governors receive from the principal. As a consequence, governors have a very secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They determinedly hold leaders to account for the impact of their actions.
- Members of the governing body ensure that they know how the extra funding that the school receives is spent. For example, they review assessment information with the senior leadership team and, as a consequence, have a solid understanding of the impact that pupil premium funding is having on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Key policies and procedures are firmly in place. They are understood by all and robustly followed to ensure the safety of pupils.
- The school checks to ensure that all adults are cleared to work with pupils and training for all staff keeps them up to date.
- Staff and governors are regularly trained in safeguarding procedures, which they understand. Pupils feel safe and well looked after, and parents agree with this.
- External agencies are well involved alongside school staff and parents.
- The school understands very well, and acts on, its responsibilities to protect its pupils from extreme influences and to avoid radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time is outstanding, and as a result pupils make excellent progress.
- Lessons are interesting and stimulate pupils' learning very well. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons as teachers challenge them to do their best. In a Year 6 lesson for instance, pupils listened to a piece of haunting background music and were inspired by Walter de la Mare's poem 'The Listeners' to write emotive journal entries to reflect mood and feeling.
- Teachers ensure that the lessons they plan build effectively and progressively on pupils' prior skills and knowledge, making sure that all groups of pupils are challenged appropriately and consequently make rapid progress.

- Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour are very high. Throughout the school, teachers' excellent relationships with pupils make learning a positive experience because they rarely have to reassert expectations of good behaviour.
- These consistent strengths in teaching lead pupils to make rapid progress. Teachers make very good use of the wealth of information available about pupils' needs and consequently move pupils' learning forward briskly. The work teachers set for pupils deepens and extends pupils' learning and understanding. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Teachers explain things very well and check that pupils understand. In lessons, teachers provide specific help and support to ensure that pupils' different needs are met. As a result, high, low and middle prior attainers progress as well as each other, and disadvantaged pupils achieve at least as well as non-disadvantaged pupils. Parents express satisfaction about the quality of teaching and speak with confidence about the challenge and support that their children receive.
- The teaching of phonics is a very positive feature in key stage 1. It very effectively equips pupils with the basic reading and writing skills which are so essential for success in English. The consistency in the teaching of phonics and strengths in teachers' subject knowledge mean that they are quick to respond to the wide variations in pupils' phonics knowledge. With a very high proportion of pupils who are new to English, teachers use their skills effectively to correct any confusion or misconceptions which arise. The skilled and focused lessons ensure that pupils make secure and rapid progress.
- The teaching of mathematics is very effective. Teachers use a variety of techniques and practical resources to make mathematics engaging for pupils. A new calculation policy and a 'fluency, reasoning and problem solving focus' to mathematics teaching have had a profound impact on the development of pupils' confidence and abilities at all levels.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' writing are high. Teachers continually insist that pupils follow fundamental punctuation rules, such as using full stops and capital letters. Teachers stress the need for accurate spellings and choice of expressive vocabulary. The work in pupils' books across the school indicates that teaching is developing pupils' writing effectively in a range of subjects across the curriculum.
- The support provided by teaching assistants is generally of a very high quality. They provide excellent support for many pupils. In particular, their work supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for pupils who speak English as an additional language, is skilful and sensitive. They use their deep knowledge of the pupils and their starting points to evaluate pupils' needs. With warm and positive relationships, support staff gently explore the pupils' knowledge and understanding and build on their previous learning while promoting their independence.
- The teaching of handwriting is also of high quality. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' presentation and consistently follow the school's policy for teaching handwriting. They increasingly expect pupils to complete written work clearly and neatly, and pupils respond willingly.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are incredibly proud of their school and their achievements. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors could not suggest any way in which they would change the school.
- Pupils have many opportunities to work collaboratively. During their discussions they listen to the views of others with interest and respect, giving their opinions in a mature manner.
- An ethos of respect and tolerance permeates the whole school community. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors are clear that it does not matter how you speak, what you look like or where you come from: everyone is welcome at Hillcrest Academy. This attitude is evident in the playground, where pupils of all ages and backgrounds play harmoniously alongside each other.
- Senior leaders place a high emphasis on supporting the emotional well-being of all pupils. Difficult and sensitive issues are discussed in a mature way by pupils so that they are able to offer support to one another. For example, the NSPCC 'Pants' programme is sensitively covered to ensure that pupils are safe from sexual abuse. Pupils spoke very highly of the help that they had received to keep safe.
- Physical health is promoted effectively. Pupils develop a good understanding of healthy eating through initiatives such as Family Learning and the well-named Food Ambassadors who keep an eye on the quality of pupils' packed lunches.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Visits to school by organisations such as the police help pupils to develop a good awareness of road safety.
- Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying and how to report it if they were a victim or a witness. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors are confident that bullying is very rare in their school and are sure that adults can be trusted to deal with it immediately.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Teachers and senior leaders skilfully manage pupils' behaviour because they have set very high expectations, so pupils know what is expected of them and they respond accordingly.
- The quality of pupils' behaviour in lessons is consistently good and often exemplary. In almost all lessons pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and want to do well. The vast majority of pupils have very positive attitudes to school and are extremely respectful towards members of staff and visitors.
- Pupils listen carefully when the teacher talks and eagerly get on with their work when directed. Pupils say that misbehaviour hardly ever disturbs lessons, and this view is confirmed by inspectors' observations of behaviour and learning during the inspection.
- Pupils are kind to each other and behave very well during playtimes. At the start of the school day inspectors observed a very orderly response as pupils lined up sensibly, greeted their teachers and then smartly entered school. Due to their excellent behaviour, no learning time is lost.

- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Various strategies to promote attendance are in place, and alongside robust processes for checking on absences and stronger sanctions for instances of persistent absence, they have resulted in attendance rates improving considerably. Weekly detailed attendance analysis identifies cohorts, groups and individuals whose attendance is raising concern and subsequent action is taken.
- Every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, and all of those who spoke with inspectors during the inspection, expressed very positive views about pupils' behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Current pupils achieve exceptionally well. There are no significant differences between rates of progress of different groups. Pupils are very well prepared to take on the challenges of secondary school once they leave Hillcrest Academy.
- Pupils left school in 2016 reaching standards which are not significantly different from the national average. When considering their very low starting points, this represents rapid progress overall.
- For the past two years, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics was higher than the national average in all three subjects. In 2016, pupils' progress was significantly above that of other schools nationally in writing and mathematics. This has been the result of improved teaching and leadership of teaching over time.
- Pupils' phonics knowledge is very strong due to excellent teaching. In Year 2, for example, pupils were observed confidently sounding out words during a fun and lively lesson. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening test has improved significantly for the last two years. Once pupils very new to the country are removed from national scores, four out of five pupils will have successfully achieved the expected phonics level in Year 1. This represents outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Evidence seen during lessons and in books shows that all groups of pupils in key stage 1 make rapid progress in all subjects. In a mathematics lesson in Year 1, for example, the most able pupils made strong progress because they were challenged by the class teacher to deepen their understanding through her very effective questioning.
- Achievement in writing across the school is strong. Leaders' introduction of high-quality texts to inspire pupils' writing this year has had a positive impact. Work in pupils' books is of a high standard. Pupils punctuate accurately and use a range of adventurous vocabulary to enhance their writing. Sophisticated skills are being developed by older pupils to subtly convey meaning to their audience.
- Pupils make excellent progress in mathematics. For the past two years progress has been significantly above the national average for pupils in key stage 2. Books show that pupils develop mathematical fluency effectively and have opportunities to deepen understanding of mathematical concepts through problem-solving activities.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve very well. Evidence in lessons shows that progress for this group of pupils is at least in line with that of other pupils in all subjects. Senior leaders keep a close watch on the achievement of this group of pupils through analysis of assessment information and checks on pupils' books. As a result, in 2015 and 2016,

the progress of disadvantaged pupils was above that of other pupils nationally.

- The progress that the most able pupils and lower-attaining pupils make is equally strong. This is because teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils of all abilities can achieve. Teachers use what they know about pupils to plan lessons that build on their knowledge and skills and provide challenge from the outset.
- Well-planned teaching and pastoral support enables pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to make excellent progress from their starting points. The school works well with outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the precise help that they need. Careful assessment and good planning for their learning drive their strong progress.
- Leaders check the planning of the curriculum to ensure that pupils' learning is linked to the term's key learning objectives. The curriculum leader produces a very helpful, annotated review of the creative curriculum, allowing staff to reflect and amend their practice. As a result of an outstanding curriculum, pupils achieve very well across a wide range of subjects and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is highly successful.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- On entry to Nursery, children's skills are below those typically expected, with many being well below. Children routinely arrive with particular weaknesses in communication, language and literacy, and with restricted personal, social and emotional development. A majority arrive speaking limited English.
- Outcomes at the end of the early years improved in 2015 and again in 2016, although they were lower than the national average. All children made at least typical progress, with many making rapid progress to reach the expected level in many areas of learning. This represents rapid progress from children's individual starting points.
- The leadership of the early years is strong and determined. The leader is driven to ensure that children make consistently good and better progress.
- Disadvantaged children achieve very well. Adults are acutely aware of the need to develop the specific areas of need often displayed by disadvantaged children. Their social and learning needs are particularly low on entry and staff make these a prompt and deliberate focus as soon as children start their education at Hillcrest Academy.
- Adults' expectations of children's learning are high and the activities in the early years are certainly challenging enough to ensure that children make rapid progress, particularly the most able children.
- Children share resources and show resilience to overcome problems with their tasks and help each other to succeed. Adults' comments and questions fully explore and extend children's understanding.
- The early years leader has established herself well with children, parents and staff, and is clearly respected. She is keen to make further improvements in the quality of outdoor provision so that activities build even more consistently on children's learning.
- High-quality teaching ensures that children are increasingly well prepared with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to learn well in Year 1. A sharp focus on the needs of disadvantaged children consistently aims to increase the proportion achieving a good level of development year on year.

- Teachers and teaching assistants are very caring and attentive. They know the children very well, making sure that they are safe and secure. Children get on well with each other and behave well. During the inspection, children happily and confidently joined in with activities, chatting comfortably with adults.
- Leaders have established effective procedures for children starting school, and parents speak highly of the early years provision.

School details

Unique reference number	140413
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	10019700

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	439
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Peter Gruen
Principal	Mark Randall
Telephone number	0113 262 4080
Website	www.hillcrest.leeds.sch.uk/
Email address	m.randall@hillcrest.leeds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school complies with DfE guidance on what academies should publish on their websites.
- This is a larger than average primary school. It converted to an academy in January 2014 and joined the Gorse Academies Trust. Since the conversion, leadership has changed and there has been a complete transformation of the teaching team.
- The vast majority of pupils (96%) are from minority ethnic groups, and for 85% of pupils their first language is not English.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are supported by the pupil premium.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

- The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school partway through the year is much higher than average. Many of these pupils arrive from overseas speaking little or no English and some with little or no previous schooling.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in samples of lessons throughout the school. Several of these were visited jointly with the members of the senior leadership team and directors of teaching and learning.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan and records of pupils' behaviour, safety and attendance. They also scrutinised the work of current pupils and pupils from the previous year.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's information on pupils' progress and records of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with pupils and teachers and visited an assembly. They listened to a range of readers from key stage 1 and key stage 2. A meeting was held with three members of the governing body. A meeting was also held with two representatives of the multi-academy trust.
- The views of parents were obtained through informal discussions, which were held at the school on both days of the inspection.
- The responses from the parents' online survey and a parent survey held by the school were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Steve Bywater, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Florence	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Birch	Ofsted Inspector

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