

The Hillcrest School and Community College

Simms Lane, Netherton, Dudley, West Midlands DY2 0PB

Inspection dates

23–24 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Standards of achievement have fallen in recent years and leaders have failed to take urgent action to stem the decline. GCSE outcomes were poor in most subjects in 2016.
- Disadvantaged pupils make particularly slow progress and underachieve as a result. Leaders have not made improving their attainment a sufficiently high priority.
- Leaders do not use information about pupils' attainment, attendance and behaviour well. They do not spot trends and areas that need improvement, especially for groups of pupils.
- The teaching of mathematics is ineffective and most pupils underachieve in the subject as a result. Leaders' recent attempts to improve teaching have not been successful.
- There is too much variability in the quality of teaching across several subjects, especially in teachers' expectations of pupils.
- Attendance has declined for three years and is below the national average. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils is consistently low and continues to decline.
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are ineffective. Leaders have failed to ensure that pupils understand the risks posed by people with extreme views. Consequently, pupils do not know how to protect themselves from such risks.
- Some pupils do not behave well in lessons and around the school. Too many lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour.
- Governors do not effectively hold leaders to account for the school's performance. They are over-reliant on leaders and they do not understand some of their statutory responsibilities.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors have reacted energetically to the poor GCSE results of 2016. However, it is too early to see impact from several actions taken this year.
- The school's off-site inclusion centre, 'PALS+', successfully supports some of the school's most vulnerable pupils. They engage well with education and their progress improves.
- The teaching of French is strong. Teaching in some other subjects, including history and creative arts is improving.
- The school's careers education programme is thorough and well planned. Pupils are well informed and supported as they leave the school for college, training or work.

Full report

In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, make consistently good progress in all subjects by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use assessment and other information about pupils to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' needs and that challenge pupils to think hard
 - have high expectations of the quality and quantity of work that pupils produce in lessons.
- Raise standards in mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan lessons that take into account what pupils already understand, know and can do
 - activities in lessons develop pupils' deep understanding of topics
 - pupils are expected to use mathematics in other subjects.
- Improve attendance, especially that of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, by evaluating the existing strategies used to improve attendance and identifying which are successful and which need to be amended or discarded.
- Improve behaviour by ensuring that:
 - all staff consistently apply the school's behaviour policy
 - pupils conduct themselves sensibly at break, lunchtime and as they move around school.
- Ensure that pupils understand the potential risks from people with extreme views and know how to protect themselves from such risks.
- Improve leadership by:
 - ensuring that information about progress, behaviour and attendance is routinely analysed by pupil group to identify trends and areas that need to be improved
 - carefully evaluating the impact of strategies funded by the pupil premium to identify which are successful and which need to be amended or discarded
 - ensuring that governors understand their statutory responsibilities and have sufficient expertise to hold leaders to account for the school's performance
 - seeking out external expertise and challenge to support improvement in teaching, assessment, behaviour and attendance

- ensuring that the curriculum in key stage 3 provides high levels of challenge, especially for the most able pupils
- accurately identifying pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

External reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how these aspects of leadership and management might be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 4 have declined considerably in recent years. Outcomes in mathematics and for disadvantaged pupils have been very poor for two years and show no sign of improvement. Leaders and governors did not respond with urgency to the weak outcomes in 2015 and so failed to stem the school's decline. A more energetic response to the even weaker outcomes of 2016 is evident, but only limited impact is currently apparent.
- Leaders did not foresee the drop in results across several subjects that occurred in 2016 because teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment were very inaccurate. Steps taken this year to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments have yet to yield convincing evidence of improvement.
- Senior and middle leaders' monitoring has not been sufficiently rigorous and consistent. Consequently, leaders have an overgenerous view of the school's performance, especially of the quality of teaching and the standards of behaviour in lessons. As a result, they have not tackled weaknesses in teaching, assessment and behaviour quickly enough. A more rigorous and consistent approach is evident this year, but it is too early to see impact.
- Leaders and governors have not sought sufficient external support and advice to validate and challenge their work. For example, leaders have not sought external verification of teachers' assessments until this year. This insularity has contributed to leaders' inaccurate view of the school's performance and their slow response to areas of decline.
- Although the school is rich in data about pupils' attainment, behaviour and attendance, leaders do not make effective use of this information. They do not use it well to spot trends or issues. For example, during the inspection, leaders were unaware that attendance had declined for three consecutive years. Leaders do not routinely analyse all data by groups of pupils. For example, information that leaders presented to governors about pupils' 'attainment and expected progress' in 2016 contained analysis for neither disadvantaged pupils nor pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, governors are not aware of the urgent need to improve outcomes for these groups of pupils.
- At all levels, from governor to class teacher, insufficient emphasis is placed on improving the performance of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders do not carefully evaluate the impact of pupil premium-funded activities, so they do not know which have been successful and which need to be amended or discarded. Senior leaders do not routinely analyse the progress, behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Middle leaders are unaware of how well disadvantaged pupils are progressing in their subject. Teachers identify disadvantaged pupils on seating plans, but then do not take this information into account when planning lessons.

- Leaders incorrectly place underachieving pupils on the special educational needs register, regardless of whether they actually have any special educational need. This practice results in an inaccurate special needs register and makes it impossible for leaders to evaluate the progress of pupils who genuinely have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have not paid due regard to the statutory guidance contained in the 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years' of January 2015. Additional special needs funding is therefore not spent effectively.
- The local authority has an inaccurate, overgenerous view of the school's effectiveness. It has been too slow to challenge leaders and governors about the school's declining performance, taking no action in response to the school's weak GCSE outcomes in 2015. Indeed, the local authority approached the principal to provide support for The Coseley School in the summer of 2016. Since September 2016, the local authority has provided a greater degree of challenge and support. It is currently facilitating some formal joint working with three other local secondary schools.
- Parents present mixed views of the school's effectiveness. Of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 60% believe that their child is making good progress and 40% do not. Approximately half of parents would recommend the school to another parent and a similar proportion would not. Staff who completed the online questionnaire responded much more positively. For example, four fifths said that the school is well led and managed.
- The curriculum provides pupils with an appropriate range of subjects in all years. Leaders evaluate the curriculum and make changes when necessary. For example, leaders have extended key stage 4 to three years, from Year 9 to Year 11. This additional time to focus on examination preparation is seeing pupils' progress accelerate in several subjects. Leaders' decision to provide some pupils in Years 7 and 8 with additional literacy lessons has also resulted in better progress for these pupils. However, in some subjects, the key stage 3 curriculum fails to build on what pupils have learned in primary school. This leads to unnecessary repetition of work in Year 7, especially for the most able pupils.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities supplement the formal, taught curriculum. Although members of staff keep attendance registers for these activities, they do not analyse this information to identify any trends or issues for groups of pupils. Consequently, leaders are unable to evaluate the impact that enrichment activities are having, for example for disadvantaged pupils.
- Weekly personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, supplemented by assemblies, successfully contribute to several aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. A planned programme helps pupils to understand how to stay safe online, how to budget and how Britain's democratic system works. However, the programme has not ensured that pupils understand the threats that they might face from radicalisation or extremism.
- Leaders and governors have successfully recruited teachers and the school is fully staffed. Previous gaps in staffing, for example in mathematics, have now been filled.

- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers to teach mathematics, but may do so in other subjects.

Governance

- Governors have failed to carry out some of their statutory duties because they are unaware of them. For example, at the time of inspection, the school had no special educational needs information report and its pupil premium statement did not comply with government requirements. The school's website fails to meet statutory requirements with respect to special educational needs, the pupil premium and governance. Governors do not ensure that additional funding, including the pupil premium, Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium, and special needs funding is used effectively.
- Governors do not have a good understanding of externally published information about the school's performance. They rely too heavily on leaders to provide them with information and its interpretation. Consequently, governors are not able to challenge leaders about specific weaknesses because they do not know these weaknesses exist. For example, governors have not challenged leaders sufficiently about the poor and declining achievement of disadvantaged pupils, because leaders have not drawn it to governors' attention. Similarly, governors, in common with leaders, consider the very weak GCSE results of 2016 as a 'glitch'. They are unaware that several weaknesses, for example in mathematics, were equally present in the previous year's results.
- Governors care deeply about the school and in some areas of responsibility they are far more effective. For example, the designated governor for safeguarding attends local authority training and then works with leaders to ensure that the school's child protection policy and procedures are up to date.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Despite Dudley being a priority area under the government's 'Prevent' duty, pupils are not aware of the potential threat from people who hold radical or extreme views. Although members of staff have been trained in the government's 'Prevent' duty, this has not impacted on pupils' ability to keep themselves safe in this area. Although pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school, there are potential risks of which they are not aware.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and fit for purpose. Leaders keep detailed records securely. Staff have been thoroughly trained and are vigilant to possible dangers as a result. They pass on any concerns they might have, knowing that leaders will take their concerns seriously and will take appropriate action. Procedures to recruit staff safely are in place and used well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The teaching of mathematics is weak and pupils are underachieving as a result. Teachers' planning does not take into account what pupils already understand, know and can do, so some pupils find activities too easy while others find them too difficult. Teaching does not develop pupils' deep understanding of mathematical topics. Teachers' explanations are sometimes confusing. For example, inspectors observed pupils learning about adding and subtracting negative numbers where an unhelpful analogy of 'ice cubes' for negative numbers and 'hot coals' for positive numbers served to confuse pupils. Classes move to harder topics before they have mastered more basic concepts. For example, inspectors observed a class that had not mastered the concept of straight-line equations moving on to much more difficult graphs.
- Pupils' numeracy is not developed well in subjects beyond mathematics. Combined with the weakness of mathematics teaching, this means that pupils are not able to apply mathematics to solving problems as well as they should.
- There is too much variability in the quality of teaching in subjects other than mathematics. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils. They set tasks that are too easy and they are too ready to accept insufficient work or work of poor quality.
- Although the school is rich in assessment and other information, teachers do not routinely use it to ensure that activities are well matched to pupils' needs. For example, teachers know which pupils in their class are disadvantaged, but they do not use this information when planning lessons. The same is true of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers know who these pupils are, but do not routinely use this information to ensure that activities are appropriate for them.
- Teachers do not apply the school's 'fix-it' feedback policy consistently. When teachers do provide feedback in line with the school policy, pupils readily act on their teacher's advice and their progress accelerates as a result.
- There is some effective teaching in most subjects and much effective teaching in some. For example, teaching in French and the creative arts is characterised by strong relationships, expert subject knowledge and enthusiastic pupils who enjoy their lessons.
- Teaching assistants provide effective support in lessons for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This one-to-one support helps pupils understand and tackle tasks and therefore to make good progress. However, when teaching-assistant support is not present, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities too often struggle because the teacher has not considered their needs when planning the lesson.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Pupils do not understand the dangers they might face from people who hold extreme views. During the inspection, inspectors spoke with three focus groups of pupils from Years 7, 9 and 11 and spoke informally with many other pupils. No pupil was able to demonstrate any knowledge about the dangers of radicalisation or extremism.
- Although most pupils are mature, sensible and proud of their school, a minority demonstrate far less mature attitudes. They lack self-confidence and are not able or willing to regulate their own behaviour.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. They said that bullying is rare and most said that adults deal with bullying well. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online. For example, they know not to give out personal details and they know they should never arrange to meet someone they do not know. However, pupils are unaware of some potential threats, such as those posed by people with extreme views.
- Almost all staff who completed the inspection questionnaire and most parents who responded to Parent View believe that pupils are safe in school. However, more than a quarter of parents who responded to Parent View said that their child does not feel safe in school. The small number who added comments to the questionnaire cited poor behaviour as the reason for this. Inspection evidence supports these parents' concerns about behaviour.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance is a strength of the school. Leaders have designed a thorough programme that runs from Year 7 to Year 11. It includes PSHE lessons, advice on choosing options, visits to colleges and universities, work experience for all and small-group and one-to-one interviews with an independent careers adviser. Pupils in Year 11 told inspectors that they feel well prepared for their next steps when they leave school. In 2016, almost all pupils who left the school moved on to college or training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Pupils' attendance has declined for three years. It is below the national average for secondary schools and has fallen further below national figures over that time. It has improved a little this year. The attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils is consistently low and has fallen further this year. Leaders do not carefully analyse attendance data and so are unaware of weaknesses. They have not evaluated the impact of the actions they are currently undertaking to improve attendance.

- The behaviour of some pupils is poor in too many lessons, usually in lower-ability teaching sets and when teaching is weaker. Inspectors observed poor behaviour in several subjects where, typically, pupils talked over the teacher, shouted out and paid little attention to the teacher's explanations and instructions. When behaviour is poor, teachers do not make effective use of the school's behaviour policy. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour is poor in some lessons. Most parents who responded to Parent View and some staff who completed the inspection questionnaire believe that the school does not ensure that pupils behave well. Inspectors agree.
- A minority of pupils behave poorly as they move around the school and at break and lunchtime. These pupils are boisterous and loud and their behaviour contributes to an atmosphere that is typically not calm at social times. Carefully kept school records indicate that injuries to pupils are not rare and that almost half result from pupils' violent behaviour.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions is a little higher than the national average and the number grew last year as leaders reinforced basic expectations. Following consultation with staff, leaders introduced a revised behaviour policy in September 2016. Staff and pupils told inspectors that behaviour is much better than last year because of this change.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons and as they move around the school. They are smartly dressed, polite and courteous to each other and to adults. Inspectors observed at least good behaviour in the majority of lessons they visited. Inspectors observed a house assembly where pupils' behaviour and attitudes were exemplary.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Unvalidated GCSE results for 2016 show pupils making slow progress across most subjects. Pupils underachieved in English, mathematics, science, geography, computer science, dance, music, drama, technology and business studies. Pupils' attainment fell considerably so that only 38% of pupils achieved GCSEs, graded A* to C, in both English and mathematics. Pupils' progress was particularly weak in mathematics.
- Several weaknesses evident in the outcomes for 2016 were also present in the previous year's results. For example, pupils' progress in mathematics was very low in 2015. Inspection evidence indicates that current pupils continue to make slow progress in mathematics. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils made very weak progress in both 2015 and 2016.
- The attainment of disadvantaged pupils, at the end of Year 11, has declined over recent years and inspectors could find no compelling evidence to support leaders' view that they have reversed this trend. Although teachers know who the disadvantaged pupils in their classes are, they do not prioritise these pupils and so classroom teaching is not accelerating their progress. Because of their comparatively low prior attainment, disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately represented in lower-ability classes where teaching is weaker and behaviour is poorer.

- Published outcomes for 2015 and 2016 show that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make slow progress in several subjects, including English and mathematics. However, leaders do not accurately identify pupils' special educational needs and so this data is not accurate. Inspectors' direct observations of pupils who have special educational needs indicate that their progress is better than published outcomes might suggest.
- The most able pupils make slow progress, but better than other pupils. Their progress is now accelerating at key stage 4. These pupils are generally in classes where the teaching is stronger, expectations are higher and behaviour is good. However, the most able pupils are still making slow progress in Years 7 and 8 because teachers do not know what they already understand and can do. Consequently, teachers have low expectations of the most able pupils.
- Pupils from a Pakistani heritage make progress that is slow but slightly better than other pupils. This is the case in most subjects including English, science, languages, history and geography.
- Leaders' focus on improving pupils' literacy is yielding results. For example, pupils who join the school with low reading ages receive additional 'basics' literacy lessons in Years 7 and 8. As a result, they make rapid gains in reading and the impact continues into Year 9, after the additional lessons have ceased. From September 2016, basics lessons have been expanded to include numeracy. However, it is too soon to see evidence of impact from this change. Pupils' numeracy is not currently well developed in subjects beyond basics and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress is improving in several subjects because of a revised curriculum and better teaching. Accelerating progress is evident in the creative arts, science and history. Pupils make strong progress in languages.
- Pupils who complete key stage 4 in the school's off-site inclusion centre, PALS+, successfully re-engage with education and complete appropriate qualifications as a result. They study a broad range of subjects including English, mathematics and science as well as completing one day of work experience each week. Given that each of these pupils was at risk of failing to complete their compulsory education, the outcomes and positive destinations of pupils in 2016 represent significant success.

School details

Unique reference number	103863
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10020398

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,031
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Taylor
Principal	April Garratt
Telephone number	01384 816 500
Website	www.hillcrest.dudley.sch.uk
Email address	info@hillcrest.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 June 2013

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the pupil premium, special educational needs and governance on its website.
- The school is an average-sized, maintained secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average.
- Most pupils are from a White British background. Approximately 20% of pupils are from a Pakistani heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is a little above average.
- The school does not make any use of alternative provision. Instead it runs a small off-site inclusion unit (PALS+) for approximately 20 pupils in Years 10 and 11.

- The principal was appointed as executive principal of The Coseley School in the summer of 2016 and tasked with overseeing its closure.
- The school meets the government's floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and some of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. They met with three focus groups of pupils. Inspectors observed pupils at morning break and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and talked to them about the books they enjoy.
- Inspectors visited the school's off-site inclusion centre.
- Inspectors considered 29 responses to Parent View and 49 responses to an online staff questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders, other leaders, two governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised several documents, including the school's self-evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings, the school's records about pupils' behaviour, attendance and attainment, and those relating to keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

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Jane Epton	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Hill	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Humphries	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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