

Cove School

St John's Road, Cove, Farnborough, Hampshire GU14 9RN

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the last two years have not all been eradicated.
- A few teachers do not challenge pupils, check their understanding during lessons or follow the school's marking policy.
- The most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and some boys do not achieve as well as they should, based on their starting points.
- Achievement varies between subjects, reflected in recent GCSE results which showed some below-average progress, especially in science.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has focused on long-term high-quality standards in all the school's work. He makes the difficult decisions needed even if they generate temporary problems.
- The interim executive board and the local authority are 100% behind the headteacher and, rightly, rate his leadership highly.
- The senior leadership team and practically all middle leaders are now experienced, determined, enthusiastic and making a difference to pupils' success at school.
- Pupils' welfare and personal and learning needs are overseen by expert assistant headteachers who have sharpened up procedures and the quality of care.
- A programme on mental health is being introduced to underpin pupils' knowledge and understanding of welfare issues.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Their awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues is good.
- Pupils behave well in the majority of lessons. Staff are increasingly quick to stop any unnecessary chatter.
- With new leadership and some new teachers, several subjects that had poor GCSE results in 2016 improved a great deal in 2017. Over two-thirds of pupils attained a standard pass in both English and mathematics.
- Teaching is improving as staff are supported to develop their skills. Professional development is relevant and practical, and collaboration with other schools is encouraged.
- The curriculum includes three modern foreign languages and four technology subjects along with a popular range of creative ones. Work is in progress to widen the range of extra-curricular activities.
- It is only the pockets of variation in the quality of teaching and outcomes that require improvement. Leaders are determined and poised to make teaching effective in all lessons.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that all pupils make equally good progress, by:
 - extending the already effective range of support for disadvantaged pupils' personal and learning needs
 - strengthening the culture of high standards and rapid progress, especially for the most able pupils
 - exploring ways to respond to the factors contributing to some boys' underachievement.
- Improve learning, by all teachers:
 - keeping up a good pace in lessons, especially in the last 10 minutes
 - checking disadvantaged pupils' learning regularly during lessons
 - insisting that pupils present their work neatly, with legible handwriting
 - giving the most able pupils work that raises their aspirations and challenges them to achieve their best
 - following the school's homework and marking policy.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- A parent wrote, 'There does seem to be a clearer vision this year'; this was confirmed by the inspection. Year 10 pupils observed that what they were keen to see in the future was stability and 'keeping all the teachers we've got'. The headteacher would totally agree with their wish. His resolute determination has almost achieved the high-quality staff needed at all levels for the school to flourish in the future.
- Before his appointment in September 2016, the headteacher had worked in the school supporting the part-time, executive headteacher. This meant he had reflected on the changes needed to develop stable, long-term success rather than quick-fix, unsustainable actions.
- The headteacher knew that confronting weak leadership and teaching would generate staffing issues, which it did. He was right though, that many competent and loyal staff would rally. Both the head of mathematics and the acting head of English, leading departments with considerable staff turmoil, organised well-attended before- and after-school sessions for Year 11; their GCSE results held up and progress in mathematics was above average.
- By the beginning of his second year, the headteacher had appointed specialist, expert assistant headteachers. For most subjects he had secured strong leadership and some new, enthusiastic teachers. Whether in post for one year or a few weeks they have all used their skills extremely well to support the headteacher's 'hugely rapid journey'.
- Examples of things that are now well underway and improving achievement, but were not happening in the past, include:
 - intensive support swings into place for any weak readers, especially those pupils eligible for catch-up funds contributing to extra English and/or mathematics
 - pupils in Years 7 to 9 now study poetry and Shakespeare plays
 - all Year 11 pupils took GCSE English literature in 2016
 - teachers have detailed information about every child they teach, whatever their individual learning needs, so they can give helpful advice on how best to support them
 - expectations for behaviour in class and around the school are clear
 - additional funds for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are spent carefully and wisely
 - all pupils attending off-site provision follow courses towards basic qualifications.
- Teaching and learning require improvement because more time is needed for all the developments, some mentioned above, to feed through into better learning in all lessons. Hence pupils' outcomes are not yet where they should be. The headteacher is fully aware that the proportion of pupils entering the school with high attainment at the end of primary school is increasing. Already, some of these most able disadvantaged pupils are visiting universities for extra input in science, for example.
- Staff are now confident that their requests for training to extend their skills will be met.

The senior leader overseeing teaching and learning knows exactly where there is excellent practice that can be shared and welcomes external advice and support as needed. Teachers have already received training about how best to support the most able or disadvantaged pupils and to be alert to differences in boys' and girls' work.

- Senior leaders are broadening the curriculum, for example by introducing electronics and 3D art from Year 7 upwards. Pupils already have a good choice of option subjects for GCSEs, including three modern foreign languages, four technology and several creative subjects. Starting in Year 7, pupils receive helpful careers advice and the proportion proceeding to education, employment or training is above average.
- The headteacher knows that the extra-curricular provision could include more variety and he responds to pupils' views. Introducing table-tennis tables is one suggestion he has welcomed. A new debating club, called Think Tank, is proving popular. Enrichment days, such as ones focusing on science or technology, broaden pupils' experiences.
- Pupils study philosophy and ethics in all years and practically all of them take GCSE in this subject. In these lessons, some pupils have clearly discussed extremism or radicalisation. Such topics feed into the thoughtful planning for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development. Within the programme they learn about British values such as the rule of law and individual liberty, although only a few pupils could explain them in detail. The school council is an example of democracy in action and many pupils described what it does and what it has achieved.
- A very small number of parents wrote comments which might have been describing two different schools. These ranged from a parent whose two children, 'are very happy and positive about the teachers', to others who were critical. A few other parents expressed concerns about bullying, the turnover of teachers or the quality of teaching.
- Discussions with pupils made it clear that there have been issues related to behaviour and staffing since the previous inspection. Inspectors are confident that current senior leaders have taken all the right steps towards ensuring that these concerns are fading into the past. The headteacher encourages pupils and parents to communicate their worries to a member of staff and is keen for parents to feel fully involved in their children's education.

Governance of the school

- Members of the interim executive board have been determined to see the school succeed; they consider its future carefully. They bring a wealth of wise and practical experience in governance, education, human resources and finance to their deliberations. Their convincing levels of confidence in the headteacher explain why they will soon hand over to a governing body. This would not happen if board members were not assured that actions they had overseen being put in place, such as appraisal procedures for all staff, will continue to be well organised. The board probes finances in depth, checking, for example, whether funding allocated for disadvantaged pupils made the difference expected and whether it was also good value for money per head.
- Governors are pleased that the headteacher has reduced the number of pupils in full-time off-site provision and have supported his increased checks on providers. Expensive placements have been used in the past. One institution used by the school,

now run successfully under new management, did not prepare key stage 4 pupils for any examinations.

- Governors, the headteacher, senior leaders and all staff now work as a cohesive team. Staff morale is high, and pupils' comments show that they can sense changes are making things better. The local authority continues to offer strong support and is equally confident about the future. Numbers applying for entry in Year 7 have remained high.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The quality of training, for every single member of staff, has moved into a higher gear. They are fully aware of how to identify and assess a range of risks that pupils may encounter, from child sexual abuse to female genital mutilation. They receive regular updates, recently on the 'Prevent' duty. They would use the whistle-blowing policy if necessary.
- In all the questionnaires, the highest percentage 'agreeing' was for statements about pupils feeling and being safe. Leaders, learning support assistants and many other staff, such as those working in the hearing-impaired unit, go out of their way to support pupils, whatever their particular situations or learning needs. They involve families whenever possible, make referrals when necessary and seek relevant, external expert support for particular issues.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Senior leaders know that it is the lack of consistency in pupils' learning that requires improvement. With almost stable staffing, including several new, skilled subject leaders and teachers, there is considerable scope for good learning to be the norm as this academic year progresses. Pupils (and a few parents) observe that more teaching is good and that more teachers stop any low-level disruption calmly and instantly.
- All pupils' reading ages are assessed regularly. The huge push on improving pupils' reading and writing, an issue raised in the previous inspection report, has not been in place long enough to have benefited all ages. It has already made a big difference to some disadvantaged pupils' reading and confidence. Inconsistency exists between teachers who do or do not automatically highlight subject-specific words, define their meaning clearly and insist that pupils use them when speaking or writing.
- Leaders appreciate that a whole-school focus on numeracy skills has been lacking. In non-mathematics subjects, graphs without scales or titles still remain in pupils' books, or figures are set out in a confusing way. Staff are being trained on how to raise the profile of numeracy.
- Inconsistency is also still evident in the style and effectiveness of teachers' questions, how well they convey their enthusiasm for their subjects and whether they use every minute of lessons purposefully. In a small number of lessons visited during the inspection, a rather relaxed atmosphere seeped in during the last five or 10 minutes.
- The school's marking policy has been rewritten this term. To make sure that pupils learn from the comments and questions teachers write in their books, teachers are expected to give them time to respond, discuss and improve their work. This generates

very good learning when used well by staff. If teachers have not looked at pupils' work, write illegibly or do not give them time to reflect, it does not.

- Learning support assistants, supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged, are skilful at knowing when to offer help and when to stand back. They, along with other members of staff such as cover supervisors and behaviour support staff, contribute much to pupils' learning and progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Knowing how much good health and self-confidence underpin pupils' enjoyment of school life and how well they learn, the assistant headteacher for inclusion and behaviour has made changes for the better. Year directors now combine their overview of pupils' progress with their attendance and behaviour and thus get to know pupils really well.
- Pupils rate the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons highly, saying, 'We learn a lot.' They appreciated the content of the 'boot camp' in the first week of term. Topics included behaviour expectations and many important aspects of e-safety, along with healthy lifestyles. A mental-health awareness programme is set to be rolled out to all ages this term.
- Year 9 pupils are concerned that they, as is the case for key stage 4 pupils, will not have PSHE education lessons every week, as they value the content and discussions. Most pupils do read quietly for 20 minutes in form time but a few find it difficult to concentrate. Staff who watch and discuss the news with their forms clearly broaden their pupils' horizons.
- Confirming how improvement began last year, a parent wrote that, 'when the new special educational needs coordinator arrived, my child received the right support'. In discussion with inspectors, learning support assistants were keen to describe how they now feel that their work is valued and supported with training matched to the pupils they work with.
- Working alongside the special education team, all inclusion, behaviour and pastoral staff are determined that no children will miss out if they need help. For example, an attentive eye is kept on children looked after or those attached to the hearing-impaired unit.
- Staff receive updates and visit pupils attending off-site provision regularly; they are informed promptly about any absence. Pupils' behaviour, learning and personal confidence improves now that the provision is carefully matched to their needs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. During the inspection, the school was calm and pupils moved sensibly between lessons and paid attention in the majority of lessons. Very little behaviour was seen that was not normal for 11- to 16-year-olds. A group of Year 10 pupils agreed that, 'behaviour is generally good but is even better this year'.
- It was therefore surprising that a few pupils in Years 11 and 7 felt that behaviour was not good and bullying not dealt with firmly. The headteacher, local authority representatives and governors expressed disbelief and concern when these pupils' comments were shared with them. Senior leaders probed further as did inspectors, who held meetings with other groups of pupils and some whom they had met before.
- It emerged that issues outside of school permeate pupils' feelings, and stories of events get spread around. As well, the headteacher describes pockets of poor behaviour when he arrived at the school in 2015 and memories can be strong. Parents' views and written comments presented a very mixed picture of views on behaviour and bullying.
- Pupils who distract others in class now work in the new isolation room, do the work that is being covered in missed lessons and receive support to improve their behaviour. This has reduced fixed-term exclusions, which were too high in the past.
- Reducing the number of persistent – or poor – attendees is a considerable problem yet to be solved. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and some who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. A new attendance officer is determined to keep overall attendance matching the national average and reduce the gaps between different groups.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- GCSE results since the last inspection reveal the groups of pupils in all years that have yet to achieve their full potential. These include disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils, and boys. Early in the academic year, some classes have got off to a good start; others have not and require improvement.
- During the last few terms, leaders have ensured that all teachers have information about, and ways to support, the individual abilities and needs of the pupils they teach, especially those mentioned above. It is clear that the potential for consistently good achievement in all years and in all subjects is in place.
- It is also encouraging that most subjects where progress was weak in the past, for example history, art, food technology, textiles and especially mathematics, have been completely turned around by new leadership and new teachers. This was confirmed by 2017 GCSE results, visiting lessons and talking to pupils.
- Progress overall in 2016 and 2017 was below average. However, the proportion of pupils achieving GCSE 'standard' in both English and mathematics increased to 65%. Progress in mathematics was above that seen nationally, having increased steadily in recent years; it dropped a little in English.
- Well below half the disadvantaged pupils achieved GCSE 'standard' in both English and mathematics in the last two years and did not achieve well in several other subjects. It

is clear that some of them were taught off-site or had poor attendance which lowered the headline GCSE results. Nevertheless, the difference between their progress and that of others nationally has diminished but has further to go, especially in key stage 4 and for vulnerable pupils in Years 7 to 9.

- Much has been put in place to use the funds for disadvantaged pupils effectively, with examples of very good outcomes already evident. Graduates with relevant expertise support teachers by working with one or two disadvantaged pupils, encouragingly guiding them through the work and checking their notes are clear. Other pupils' approach to lessons is transformed by being given all the correct uniform and breakfast in school every day.
- The most able pupils did not make the progress they should have done in 2017. For example, results in the separate sciences, which many of them took, were well below average. The proportion of strong passes was not as high as it could have been. Occasionally, in subjects taught in sets, some of the most able pupils miss out on the pace and challenge they need.
- Staff turbulence from 2015 to 2017, particularly in English and mathematics, meant that the most experienced teachers taught Year 11 groups. This contributed to a few key stage 3 pupils making less progress than expected from their starting points. Some of these pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and some boys in English, are not making the rapid progress they need to, in Years 10 and 11, to achieve well in their GCSEs.
- Year 10 pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have some catching up to do in English and mathematics. In Years 7 to 9 this is not the case as they have benefited from the much-improved provision introduced during 2016. Subject leaders, working with the special educational needs coordinator, have the correct plans in place to support Year 10 pupils. High-quality, specialised care means that the small number of pupils attached to the hearing-impaired unit make convincing progress that at least matches that of their peers.
- Pupils attending alternative provision make good progress related to their behavioural and learning needs, with the focus on reintegration when possible. Those attending Farnborough College one day a week enjoy their chosen work-related courses and make good progress.

School details

Unique reference number	116446
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10036941

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

Type of school	Community
School category	Foundation trust
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	963
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Maureen Bax
Headteacher	Andrew King
Telephone number	01252 542397
Website	www.cove.hants.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@cove.hants.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 November 2015

Information about this school

- The school is average in size. Boys just outnumber girls in most years.
- Around 80% of pupils are of White British backgrounds with about 10% from Asian backgrounds. The other minority ethnic groups are very small.
- A below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is average but fluctuates each year.
- About 20 Year 7 pupils receive catch-up funding (which is for those who did not attain level 4 in English and/or mathematics at the end of primary school).
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average overall but it is close to average for the proportion of pupils with education, health and care plans. The school has a small, purpose-built unit for hearing-impaired pupils.
- Most of the 15 pupils attending off-site provision are in Year 11 with practically all the

rest in Year 10. They attend one or two of the following: Rowhill School, Farnborough College of Technology (one day a week for construction, health and social care, and hair and beauty), Placed2Learn, Inclusion Hampshire (APEX) and the Military Preparation College, Farnborough.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in close to 45 lessons, including form time in the morning, and attended an assembly. Several of the lessons were joint observations with senior leaders, with whom inspectors also toured the school and dropped into lessons for a few minutes. Inspectors looked at pupils' books in lessons. They visited the hearing-impaired unit and the base for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Inspectors met pupils and students informally as they visited parts of the school during breaktimes. They also held meetings with groups of pupils from all years.
- Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector met the chair of the interim executive board and three other board members. She also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took into account 41 staff and 63 pupil (about 6%) responses to questionnaires. Just over 60 parents responded on Parent View and just under 40 of them wrote free-text comments.

Inspection team

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