

Hertswood Academy

Cowley Hill, Borehamwood, Hertfordshire WD6 5LG

Inspection dates

27–28 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The persistent absence of pupils, especially those eligible for the pupil premium and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, has been too high for too long and is getting worse.
- Procedures to monitor attendance are insufficient to ensure that staff always know the pupils who are present and those who are absent.
- Leaders and governors recognise that attendance is not good enough, but have not given the issue sufficient priority.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions of pupils is high.
- The narrowed curriculum does not meet the needs and interests of all pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and other leaders have shown a relentless determination to raise attainment. Over the last five years, pupils' attainment and progress have risen dramatically. This demonstrates leaders' capacity to improve the school further.
- In the main school, the majority of pupils make above average progress and attain GCSE results that are above the national average.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students flourish in an environment where they are well taught and supported, and motivated to gain places in top universities or highly sought-after apprenticeships.
- For the majority of pupils, most teaching in the main school is effective. The leadership of teaching has led to improved quality since the previous inspection.
- Support for pupils' next steps in education or towards employment, including careers information, guidance and support, is effective.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance by:
 - aligning the school's resources with its most urgent priority to increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who attend school regularly
 - working collaboratively with external organisations to tackle non-attendance so that pupils see the value in attending school
 - providing a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils in the community served by the school
 - ensuring that staff receive accurate information about the pupils who are present and those who are absent at the start of the school day.
- Improve behaviour so that the number of pupils excluded from school is reduced.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and governors recognise that the main challenge for the school is that of the persistent absence of a sizable minority of pupils. Leaders have not translated that recognition into effective action to ensure that more pupils attend school regularly.
- Leaders have driven a significant rise in attainment that has benefited the majority of pupils in the school. They have achieved this while giving insufficient priority to the needs of pupils with low attendance.
- Parents are generally positive about the school, but several expressed reservations about the school's priorities, such as: 'The school is more interested in the grades and not the welfare of the children.' Another parent commented: 'The academy only cares about its good Ofsted grade and does not care about the children who are not A* students.'
- Leaders' narrow focus on improving outcomes and behaviour has led to an over-generous evaluation of the quality of education in the school.
- The curriculum offers a broad range of academic subjects supplemented by BTECs in sport, business, health and social care, and information and communications technology (ICT). There is also an extensive offer of design and technology subjects. Pupils are generally happy with the range of courses from which they can choose. Leaders have chosen to insist that all pupils take a range of subjects that will enable them to gain the English Baccalaureate qualification (EBacc). This is supplemented in Years 9 to 11 by a wide choice of subjects, including the popular art option, music, dance and psychology.
- Leaders have a clear philosophy of curriculum design which is to offer a range of well-regarded academic subjects to maximise pupils' opportunities for work or higher education. This is commendable, but insufficient consideration has been given to how best to make these subjects accessible to all pupils and make coming to school worthwhile for everyone.
- The curriculum is focused on maximising GCSE outcomes. This focus begins in Year 7. Leaders have used their discretion to reduce the content of the key stage 3 national curriculum, ending key stage 3 in Year 8.
- From Years 9 to 11, opportunities exist for all pupils to receive personal, health, social and economic (PHSE) education and religious education (RE), but leaders are aware of the need to review and improve the effectiveness of this provision and to make sure the school meets its statutory requirements for RE.
- A whole-school approach to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the promotion of fundamental British values is in the early stages of development. Various subjects make a contribution. For example, most pupils choose to take art or photography at GCSE, which helps their cultural development.
- A range of visiting speakers and trips, such as to the local synagogue, are used to raise awareness of life in modern Britain. There is some support available to pupils eligible for the pupil premium to participate in trips, but no monitoring of pupils' take-up.

- Leaders have worked hard to improve behaviour. To a large extent, this has been successful, but too many pupils miss out on their education because they have been excluded. Leaders expect that the new behaviour system, introduced in April, will lead to a reduced number of fixed-term exclusions. While behaviour around the school has improved, there is no evidence yet of a reduction in the frequency of exclusions.
- Senior leaders can account for the spending of the pupil premium funding, spent mainly on materials, contributions towards salaries and some funding towards trips. There has been little strategic planning to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- The leader responsible for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities knows the needs of these pupils well. There is effective training for teachers to meet the diverse needs of the pupils. There is clear record-keeping. Individual care plans are updated regularly. While inspectors recognised that some provision for these pupils is effective, there is little monitoring by senior leaders to ensure consistency.
- The Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding has been used appropriately.
- Leaders have managed many changes well. For example, the relocation this term of the school from two sites to one into temporary accommodation has been managed smoothly.
- A combination of staff training and effective performance management has led to a positive transformation in the quality of teaching. As a result of leaders' actions, inadequate teaching has been eliminated.
- The headteacher has a clear vision to raise academic standards that has been pursued relentlessly and successfully. The school's image in the community has been positively transformed. There is a productive working atmosphere in most lessons. The quality of teaching has risen dramatically.

Governance of the school

- Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school, but have been too slow to address endemic challenges.
- Governors have correctly identified the school's strengths and important areas for improvement, but have been too focused on the challenges of finance, staffing and property, and insufficiently focused on the school's most vulnerable pupils.
- The governing body has been too accepting of leaders' information regarding the seriousness of pupils' absence. While they have sought imaginative solutions by rearranging the availability of senior leaders, they have not directed resources to what they told inspectors was the school's greatest challenge: improving attendance. Similarly, governors have been insufficiently challenging regarding the high number of fixed-term exclusions.
- Governors have been instrumental in helping the school buy new accommodation and they have helped leaders respond to severe budget-driven staff cuts in recent years.
- Governors have successfully supported and challenged the school to raise attainment and progress over the last five years.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Too many pupils are absent and staff cannot be confident of their whereabouts and whether they are safe.
- Pupils who are in school say they feel safe, bullying is rare and most pupils express confidence that bullying would be dealt with well. The school's behaviour logs show few incidents of bullying or racism.
- Pupils learn to keep themselves safe online.
- Safer recruitment policies are implemented well. Child protection files are thorough and show effective work with external agencies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders have a well-developed system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Heads of faculty are effective and have their own monitoring schedule that supplements that of senior leaders. They use the findings of classroom visits to spread good practice.
- The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly over the last five years. This is partly due to teachers working together, challenging and supporting one another. Effective training and support is provided by the Mellor Educational Trust.
- Teachers have effective knowledge of their subject and how best to teach it.
- Pupils' attitudes to work is good in most lessons. In many lessons, pupils listen to their teachers with rapt attention and engage in individual, paired and group tasks with enthusiasm. Relationships between pupils and staff are effective for learning.
- In most lessons, there is good planning for the needs of pupils of different abilities. This enables the most able, and increasingly the least able, pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils value the support provided outside formal lessons. There is an extensive programme of additional support beyond the formal school day and at weekends that is well supported by teachers and pupils.
- Pupils receive helpful advice on how to improve their work. Assessment in different forms is used well to improve pupils' progress. This was seen in a wide range of subjects, but is currently less well developed in science than in subjects such as art, where it is particularly effective. Some pupils find some aspects of the assessment system confusing and the system was not entirely clear to inspectors.
- The emphasis on consistency in teaching some subjects, such as mathematics, sometimes leads to an over-reliance on prepared slides and teachers moving on while some pupils remain unclear about what has been taught.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to support pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school's work to provide information, guidance and support for careers is an impressive part of its work. The school has recently achieved Careers Mark which has been used to provide a coherent framework for work in this area. The use of work experience, together with targeted guidance, has helped to raise pupils' aspirations. Most pupils progress to education, employment or training.
- Pupils take pride in their work. They are smart in their uniforms. They are increasingly confident and proud of their school. They show respect for one another's opinions, views and differences.
- Pupils learn how to stay healthy and safe.
- Pupils are well cared for in school. Several parents were keen to point out how well pupils are cared for and new pupils are helped to settle in. For example, one parent said: 'I think the summer school that was provided really helped my child feel at ease. It was an excellent way for her to make the transition from primary to secondary school. My child also went on the Bushcraft trip which she enjoyed greatly and the staff took great care of the children without ruining their fun and independence.'
- Assemblies and form times are used to highlight topical issues. This helps pupils to be reflective and become good citizens.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- While the behaviour of pupils in school is usually impressive, the rate of persistent absence is too high and too little has been done to reduce it. While recognising the problem, leaders have failed to make the education and welfare of pupils who are persistently absent a high enough priority. Leaders focus on raising results for those who attend regularly without prioritising pupils with low attendance.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium and those who have SEN and/or disabilities comprise a large proportion of those who do not regularly attend school.
- Adding to the problem of non-attendance are the high levels of fixed-term exclusions. At the time of the inspection, there had already been 11 fixed-term exclusions this term. Again, pupils eligible for the pupil premium are over-represented among the pupils excluded.
- The overuse of exclusion was a concern mentioned to inspectors by parents. Leaders and managers were unclear about the numbers involved in permanent exclusions last year.
- Inspectors were concerned that, despite the good systems to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils in school, staff did not know the whereabouts of all their pupils. For example, on the second day of inspection, inspectors were given two different lists of absent pupils. These lists did not match teachers' class registers and the list of

phone calls made to check on pupils' absence included different pupils.

- In lessons and around the school at breaktimes and lunchtimes, behaviour is mostly managed well. Pupils get on well together. Staff are present and visible around the large site. Any occasional misbehaviour is dealt with well.
- Leaders have managed well the move to the new site. Potential points of congestion, such as the canteen, are orderly. The start and end of the school day is orderly as pupils arrive and leave.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Overall attainment has risen sharply. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics rose from 36% in 2012 to 63% in 2016. In 2017, results cannot be directly compared to previous years due to examination changes, but the school's information shows similar improvements.
- In 2017, the school's information indicates that the progress of Year 11 pupils is likely to have been at least as positive as 2016, when progress was a little better than other schools nationally.
- Leaders' clear plan for improvement has worked well for most pupils and especially for students in the sixth form.
- The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve well.
- Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make particularly strong progress in mathematics.
- While pupils overall, by the end of Year 11, have made better progress than other pupils nationally, this is not the case for lower-ability pupils or those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Improved teaching is accelerating the learning and progress of all groups, but the impact of better provision cannot benefit pupils who are frequently absent. Since disadvantaged pupils and pupils with lower starting points are disproportionately absent, their achievement lags behind.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make progress from their starting points that is less strong than pupils in other schools nationally. In many instances, this lack of progress is linked to poor attendance.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- The sixth form is more effective than the main school because the issues of high absence in the main school do not affect the sixth form. Leaders in the sixth form understand its strengths, have identified areas of relative weakness and are clear about what they are doing to address those issues.
- The progress of students in the sixth form is excellent. Their progress from their starting points is well above average.
- Students are focused on achieving high grades and gaining places at highly competitive universities or sought-after apprenticeships. Leaders are adept at raising the aspirations of students through, for example, an assembly where success was celebrated and the success of previous students was highlighted.

- Students are well prepared for future study and employment. They are supported effectively in making applications. They benefit well from a wide range of work experience, work shadowing and visits to employers related to their career aspirations. Careers provision in the sixth form is effective.
- Students feel well supported. Their progress is monitored well. Additional help is readily available.
- Students who have not achieved grade 4 in GCSE English and mathematics study these subjects and retake the examination in Year 12, with similar rates of success as other students nationally.

School details

Unique reference number	138747
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10036237

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 comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,293
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	225
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Martin Doe
Headteacher	Peter Gillett
Telephone number	020 82387200
Website	www.hertswoodacademy.org
Email address	apullen@hertswoodacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	9 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- This is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement.
- The proportion of pupils for who speak English is an additional language is above

average.

- The proportion of pupils entitled to the pupil premium is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above average.
- The school does not use off-site alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector on the first day. They were joined by a further five Ofsted Inspectors for the second of the two days.
- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence from: 36 lesson observations, some carried out with the headteacher or lead practitioner; short visits to lessons; discussions with pupils and staff; meetings with staff, governors and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust that supports the school; reviews of pupils’ work in books; reviews of the school’s website, documents and assessment information; and general observations of the daily operations of the school, including in social areas.
- Inspectors analysed the 58 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, alongside the 31 free-text responses to the same questionnaire.

Inspection team

Adrian Lyons, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Simon Bell	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Pryor	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Dawes	Ofsted Inspector
Kathryn Herlock	Ofsted Inspector
Carole Herman	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Barr	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017