

Cotham School

Cotham Lawn Road, Cotham, Bristol BS6 6DT

Inspection dates

17–18 April 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher is successfully leading the school through a period of significant change. As a result of her vision and her skilful and determined leadership, the school is now steadily improving.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's context and its performance. They are making the changes necessary so that the school continues to prosper. The capacity for further improvement is good.
- Governors and school leaders have a strong commitment to serving the needs of their diverse community. They are determined to make sure that the needs of all their pupils are met so that all can maximise their potential. The support for pupils who speak English as an additional language is particularly strong.
- Pupils behave well around the school site. They enjoy coming to school and the atmosphere in the playground and in social areas is positive and friendly. Pupils are respectful and courteous to staff. They welcome those from different backgrounds or who hold different beliefs.
- Pupils are keen to take part in lessons. They answer teachers' questions enthusiastically and they want to do their best. They are keen to respond to teachers' advice and correct and improve their work where they can.
- Pupils make good progress because teaching is typically good. Teachers are well-qualified subject specialists who make sure that they highlight key points and set appropriate work to reinforce them. They use questioning skilfully to make pupils think hard.
- Not all middle leaders ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are consistently good in their subjects. Consequently, some weaker teaching remains. Pupils do not make good progress when teachers do not set high enough expectations of them and do not give pupils enough opportunities to consider problems in sufficient depth.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress because they are well taught and their progress is monitored closely.
- Many of the school's improvement strategies are relatively new. Currently, they are not evaluated with sufficient rigour. As a result, leaders are not able to fine-tune their work effectively.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - all middle leaders are as effective as the best in evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils achieve equally well in all subjects
 - leaders at all levels monitor and evaluate their improvement strategies rigorously.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils, regardless of their starting points or the challenges they face.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since her appointment in 2015, the headteacher has acted with great purpose to address the changing needs of the school. The school is responding well to the changing social context of the community which the school serves. The headteacher's vision and her focus on meeting the needs of all pupils have been at the heart of the school's transformation.
- The headteacher has the support of a strong and skilful senior team. They understand the strengths of the school and what must be done to improve it further. They share their analysis and plans openly with staff and with parents on the school website. They have put improving teaching, learning and assessment at the centre of their plans and they address weaknesses with determination and persistence. As a result of their approach, improvements, which were initially slow to take hold, are now beginning to have an impact across the school.
- Leaders have carefully aligned the training opportunities they provide for teachers with the needs of the pupils. Teachers have the opportunity to work together to research new ideas and ways of teaching. They are also increasingly getting opportunities to work with colleagues in other schools. This is enabling them to meet the challenges of recent changes to the GCSE curriculum.
- The headteacher is managing the performance of teachers effectively. She has set clear expectations of staff and has tackled weak teaching and leadership robustly. Good systems for monitoring the quality of teaching are in place. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is appropriate for all pupils. They have insisted that the curriculum is designed to ensure that there is academic challenge for all pupils and that there are no 'soft options'. A very high proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, take a foreign language option in key stage 4, for example. Pupils are given additional support to achieve success in these courses rather than being put on less demanding courses.
- The curriculum also includes a broad range of opportunities for pupils to develop their personal and social skills. Teachers make sure that opportunities for moral, spiritual and cultural education are taken wherever they occur across the curriculum. Pupils also enjoy their personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. They are keen to take part in discussions about values and moral dilemmas. Consequently, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders and teachers have designed and implemented a good assessment system. Teachers understand what pupils know, understand and can do and hence can plan the next steps in learning. The assessment system also allows leaders and teachers to identify those pupils who are falling behind and need additional support. This is a relatively new development and it is not yet fully embedded into school life. Consequently, not all pupils who need help are receiving it as quickly as they should.
- The headteacher has raised expectations of middle leaders. Middle leaders are increasingly held accountable for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in

their subject areas. In most subjects, this has been effective and has led to pupils making better progress. However, in some subject areas, middle leaders have not responded to the challenge effectively. In these areas, the quality of teaching is too inconsistent because the middle leader has not ensured that teaching meets the needs of all pupils. In these areas, teachers' expectations of pupils are sometimes too low and pupils are not given opportunities to consider problems in sufficient depth.

- The leadership of pupil premium is good. Pupils who need support are identified and appropriate help is put in place for them. Their progress is monitored and teachers and teaching assistants intervene if required. A significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils also speak English as an additional language. Leaders have ensured that these pupils are well supported by a knowledgeable and committed team. As a result of their work, these pupils are overcoming the barriers they face and are able to thrive in school.
- The funding which the school receives to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is spent effectively. Leaders ensure that this group of pupils are well supported and able to make good progress. Their needs are understood by teachers and appropriate support is in place. Their progress is monitored appropriately. A small number of pupils who have medical needs attend alternative provision. School leaders and teachers work closely with the provider to ensure that these pupils are well supported and are able to make progress.
- Leaders have established a good programme of careers education throughout the school. They are aware that some pupils do not have high aspirations and they have put in place a comprehensive programme to raise pupils' expectations of themselves. As a result of this package, an increasing number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are setting their sights high and moving on to top universities.
- Leaders and teachers are working together on a broad range of strategies to improve the quality of provision they offer pupils. Currently, they do not always evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies they deploy with sufficient rigour. This is preventing them from refining their approaches and maximising their impact.

Governance of the school

- Trustees and governors know the school well. They are experienced and many have a background in education. They are committed to the continued success of the school as it meets the new challenges it faces.
- Two to three years ago, the school's performance fell from significantly above national expectations to significantly below, before recovering. During this period, which included the change in the school's context, governors were initially slow to react. However, they now hold the headteacher and senior leaders to account well. They ask appropriately challenging questions of the school's leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong and well embedded culture of safeguarding right across the school.

All members of staff are well trained and take their responsibilities seriously. They are vigilant and know what to do should they feel a pupil is at risk.

- Appropriate checks are made when appointing staff and records are comprehensive.
- Pupils say they feel safe. They know who to go to should they want to report a concern or for reassurance and guidance. They receive regular reminders in assemblies and PSHE lessons about keeping themselves safe online.
- Staff work well with other agencies, such as the local authority social work team, to keep vulnerable pupils safe and to support pupils who are facing additional challenges in their lives. As a result of their work, some pupils who would otherwise find it difficult are able to thrive in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils make good progress overall because the teaching they receive is meeting their needs. Most teachers are subject specialists who know their subjects well. They plan their lessons to focus on key learning points and they ensure that pupils develop their understanding of them. In mathematics, for example, teachers use penetrating questions to probe understanding and encourage pupils to think deeply about the topic in question.
- Teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils. In a range of subjects, for example in mathematics, science and the performing arts, teachers expect pupils to reach high standards. Pupils rise to meet the challenge and so make good progress.
- Teachers generally assess the progress that pupils are making well. They take time to assess pupils' work carefully and draw out any misconceptions or points for pupils to reconsider. Pupils enjoy refining and improving their work and respond well to their teachers' suggestions. This approach to assessment is relatively new. In most subject areas it is well embedded and working well. In a few, it is not. Pupils do not make as much progress in those subjects because they do not know how to improve their work.
- Leaders and teachers put a strong emphasis on supporting pupils to improve their literacy skills. Leaders require almost all subjects to focus on literacy and provide stimulating opportunities for writing. Pupils who require additional support are identified at an early stage and a team of staff work alongside them to improve their skills. A specialist team supports those pupils who speak English as an additional language. This team is skilled and highly effective in boosting the skills of this group of pupils. As a result of their intervention, this group of pupils make good progress across a range of curriculum areas.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive the support they require to make good progress. Leaders make sure that teachers are fully aware of each pupil's needs. Leaders expect that teachers will meet the needs of every pupil and provide support in order for this to occur.
- Overall, teachers provide the additional challenge that the most able pupils need to reach the standards that they are capable of. In most cases, expectations of these pupils are high. However, this is not universally the case. Sometimes, the most able are not given the more complex problems or asked the most subtle questions that would tease out that additional depth of thinking. Consequently, they are unable to reach the

very highest standards.

- The quality of teaching of mathematics is a strength of the school. It is effective because expectations are high and teachers challenge the thinking of all abilities of pupils in each year group. Teachers monitor progress closely and give pupils the extra help they need. Pupils respond well. They are clear about what they need to know and understand and they are keen to absorb the necessary skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' attitudes to work are generally very positive. Most pupils come to school with energy and with enthusiasm for the day ahead. They enjoy answering questions and taking part in lessons. They show pride in their work and they are keen to improve it when teachers show them how.
- Pupils treat each other well. Relationships are generally good-humoured and positive. Pupils report that while bullying does sometimes occur, it is dealt with well by staff. Pupils are tolerant of those from other backgrounds or with other beliefs. They are adamant that there is no place for racism or homophobia in their school.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are good. Pupils are respectful when talking with adults and courteous to visitors.
- Pupils with emotional and mental health needs are well supported. There is a well-trained team of staff to support pupils when they need support. Staff work closely with other agencies when necessary to provide a safety net for pupils.
- A small number of pupils with medical needs attend an alternative provider. They are well supported by the school and provider, who work together to enable pupils to have good access to learning while unable to attend school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The conduct of pupils around the school site is typically good. They are polite and friendly to adults. They treat each other well. There is some occasional boisterousness but this is generally good-humoured. In the past, levels of fixed-term exclusion have been too high but this has now improved.
- The vast majority of pupils behave well in lessons. Where the quality of teaching is good, there is little low-level disruption. On the occasions when teaching does not meet pupils' needs, some pupils sit back and become disengaged. Occasionally, disengagement grows into disruption.
- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. There are relatively few pupils who are away regularly. Disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils are monitored closely to ensure that they are safe and that they can catch up with missing work on their return.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 make good progress overall. In 2017, pupils achieved results broadly in line with pupils in other schools. This was an improvement on 2016, when pupils achieved less than their peers.
- Pupils in key stage 3 are making good progress across a wide range of subjects. They are achieving good standards in mathematics and science and in many other subjects. School leaders are aware of the need to boost pupils' literacy skills and these are improving. However, there are still weaknesses to be overcome if pupils are to write as well as they should.
- Key stage 4 pupils are making appropriate progress from their starting points. Pupils who joined the school with below-average attainment are well supported and are reaching good standards. This is an improvement on 2017, when these pupils tended to make slower progress than other pupils. The most able are achieving well in most subjects because they are responding well to their teachers' high expectations. In some cases, though, they are not achieving all that they are capable of because they are not challenged sufficiently to reach the highest standards.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not made good progress in the past. Leaders and teachers are focusing closely on this group so that their progress improves. There is some improvement, but further work is required if these pupils are to achieve as well as their peers. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are making good progress from their starting points as a result of a well-organised and delivered package of support.
- Pupils achieve broadly similar standards in English as pupils in other schools. Disadvantaged pupils do not make as much progress. This is a key issue for the school and one that leaders and teachers are working hard to address. There is some improvement but some pupils continue to underachieve.
- Standards in mathematics are high. Pupils of all abilities make good progress. Disadvantaged pupils make better progress than other pupils across the country. Pupils also make strong progress in science.
- Six out of 10 pupils achieved the government's measure of a good pass (level 5 or better) in both English and mathematics in 2017. This is significantly better than the national average of four out of 10.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Alongside their GCSE subjects, school leaders make sure that pupils receive a curriculum that develops their social skills and emphasises their role as an active citizen. They receive good-quality, independent advice and guidance about their potential careers.
- Students in the sixth form make better progress with their A levels than students in other schools. They are achieving well across a broad range of subjects. They are also making better-than-average progress with English and mathematics GCSE courses they are retaking. Disadvantaged students are making similar progress to other students across the country.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is well led. Leaders have high ambitions for the sixth form and promote high aspirations for all their students. Their self-evaluation is accurate, open and honest. They have a secure knowledge of strengths and priorities for improvement.
- Teaching is typically good. It is underpinned by the strong subject knowledge of teachers and the positive relationships they enjoy with students. Students feel secure and are willing to test out and share their deeper thinking and reveal their misconceptions. As a result, students make good progress across almost all subjects.
- Teachers and leaders monitor the progress of students carefully and put in place well-structured interventions if a student starts to fall behind. Students value the support they get from their teachers and the sixth-form leaders and support staff.
- Leaders have reviewed the curriculum offered in the sixth form, which had previously been heavily focused on academic qualifications. An increased range of vocational courses and the introduction of a level 2 programme have broadened access to the sixth form. The proportions of pupils joining the sixth form from minority ethnic groups, who speak English as an additional language or who are disadvantaged have increased.
- Students who study for level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics because they failed to achieve a pass in Year 11 make good progress. The proportion who achieve a pass is significantly higher than the national average.
- Students feel that they are very well supported. They are proud to be Cotham sixth-form students. Students who joined the sixth form from Year 11 feel they received good guidance and advice when making their choice of course. The large number of students who joined the sixth form from other schools feel that leaders' work to integrate them has been very effective.
- The school is part of the North Bristol Post-16 Centre, a collaboration with another local school. This arrangement provides a broad range of subject choices for students. Leaders have put in place effective procedures to monitor quality and progress across the two sixth forms and to coordinate attendance and safeguarding procedures as students move between them.
- Students have strong personal, social, employability and independent learning skills. Students develop leadership skills through serving as 'respect ambassadors'. They support younger students to develop respect and tolerance. For example, some high-achieving students of Somali origin mentor younger students from their ethnic group to raise their aspirations and achievement. Other students lead focus groups such as a gender equality group.
- A large proportion of students go on to university when they leave school. Forty-five per cent secured places at Russell Group universities in 2017. Leaders foster strong relationships with a number of local universities and as a result many students are able to take part in access programmes and benefit from mentoring schemes offered by the universities. Current students report that they are very well supported in making decisions about, and applying for, their future destinations.
- A larger-than-average number of students left the sixth form before the end of Year 13

last year. Leaders have evaluated the information about their destinations and reasons for leaving carefully and have made changes to how they monitor this for current students. In-year leaver numbers for the current year are much lower.

School details

Unique reference number	137440
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10037206

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	1,503
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	420
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jim Bowyer
Headteacher	Jo Butler
Telephone number	0117 9198000
Website	www.cotham.bristol.sch.uk
Email address	info@cotham.bristol.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is a much larger-than-average school.
- The school is a partner in the North Bristol Sixth Form Centre, working with another local secondary school.
- The school has a higher-than-average number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including minutes of trust/governor meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour data, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Meetings were held with members of the trust board, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, newly qualified teachers and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 332 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Andrew Lovett, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Christine Raeside	Ofsted Inspector
Jeremy Law	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrea Quigley	Ofsted 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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