

Inspection of Whitecross Hereford

Three Elms Road, Hereford, Herefordshire HR4 0RN

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 February 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff have high expectations of pupils. Most pupils live up to the school's motto of 'excellence for all, excellence from all', and they do well. This is especially the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, the number of pupils who are suspended has historically been high and shows no sign of reducing.

Pupils say that bullying rarely happens. Staff intervene effectively if it does occur. A group of pupils, called 'I Am', promote diversity and equality. As a result of their work, the school supports 'period poverty'. There is a wide selection of extra-curricular opportunities for pupils. Pupils enjoy a range of sporting activities and regularly compete in competitions and tournaments. Pupils can take part in different clubs, including a science and debating club. Leaders have introduced more clubs this year, and pupils welcome these opportunities.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in the school. However, leaders have not made sure that the necessary checks have been made on all adults at the school. Inspectors found no evidence that pupils had been adversely affected, but this lack of vigilance does put pupils at risk of potential harm.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have developed a well-planned and well-sequenced curriculum. They have identified what pupils need to know and have divided this knowledge into 'small steps'. In some subjects, such as mathematics, teachers use these small steps well to make sure that pupils learn and remember the most important information. Teachers have good subject knowledge and choose their teaching methods carefully. In most subjects, teachers use assessment well, which helps them make sure that the work they provide matches pupils' needs. As a result, pupils can recall and build on their learning.

Leaders have clear systems to identify and meet the needs of pupils with SEND. They share useful information with teachers. The teaching assistants support them well in lessons. Pupils with SEND achieve well.

Leaders and staff have high expectations of behaviour in lessons and around the school. Most pupils know and follow the behaviour policy. Leaders have identified some pupils who would benefit from changes to their curriculum. They have started to use alternative placements to help pupils to remain engaged in their education. For example, some pupils attend Bright Stars, a boxing provision, one day each week. Despite this, the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions are high and are not decreasing. Too many pupils are suspended from school repeatedly. Leaders have not taken decisive action to remedy this.

Pupils' personal development is prioritised. The curriculum for relationships, sex and health education covers a wide range of appropriate topics. It is well planned and

reflects the risks that pupils face in the local community. As part of this curriculum, specialist organisations provide expert knowledge on issues such as consent, safer relationships and careers. Careers education is developing appropriately, with plans in place to make sure that pupils know about the world of work. Leaders have established good relationships with local employers. These relationships are proving productive. Pupils, for instance, attend career fairs, participate in mock interviews and learn about different career pathways.

Leaders take account of teacher workload, and staff are positive about the support they receive from them. Leaders monitor some aspects of the school's work well. However, this is not consistent in all areas of the school's work and so leaders do not always take the right steps to correct weaknesses in the school. For example, leaders collect behaviour data but do not use this to evaluate how well their systems are working and make changes accordingly.

Members of the governing body are keen ambassadors for the school. They provide strong support for leaders. In some areas, they also provide an effective challenge. However, they are not aware of the detail contained within safeguarding statutory guidance. They have not ensured that they have conducted appropriate safeguarding checks on all governors. This is a clear breach of their responsibilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

There are serious omissions in safer recruitment practices at the school. Trust and school leaders have not assured themselves that all staff, governors and visiting staff have had the appropriate pre-employment or Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Leaders are not aware of all their statutory responsibilities relating to DBS and pre-employment checks and so do not recognise the importance of conducting them. Inspectors found no evidence that these omissions had adversely affected pupils, but it does put pupils at the risk of potential harm.

Leaders have robust systems in place to safeguard pupils who are at risk. Leaders know their pupils well and are tenacious in securing the help that they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's arrangements for safer recruitment are not effective. This means that leaders have not assured themselves that all adults that attend the school site are suitable to work with children. As a matter of urgency, leaders should put systems and processes in place so that all safeguarding requirements are met and ensure that these systems are properly maintained from then on.
- The governing body is not aware of all its statutory responsibilities. This means that they are unable to hold leaders to account. The governing body should take

the necessary steps to ensure that they understand their duties in relation to the trust and the school and act accordingly.

- The numbers of suspensions and permanent exclusions are high, and leaders have not taken action to reduce them. This means that some pupils miss too much learning. Leaders should evaluate the effectiveness of their systems to manage and improve behaviour and amend them as needed in order to reduce the number of suspensions and exclusions in the school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	139189
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10212429
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	949
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Marc Hales
Headteacher	Timothy Knapp
Website	www.whitecross.hereford.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 February 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school is a single academy trust.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other senior and middle leaders, including curriculum and pastoral leaders and the special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors held discussions with teachers and representatives of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, physical education and languages. For each of these subjects, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, carried out visits to lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at some of their work.
- Inspectors met with members of staff individually and in groups and spoke to pupils at various points during the inspection. Inspectors took into account the response to the pupil and staff surveys, as well as Ofsted Parent View.
- An inspector visited the school isolation room and spent time talking to pupils there.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff's recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Claire Price, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Heather Simpson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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