



# Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 103482  
**LEA** Birmingham  
**Inspection number** 276933  
**Inspection dates** 11 January 2006 to 12 January 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Michael Smith HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Stonehouse Lane
<b>School category</b>	Community		Birmingham
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18		West Midlands B32 3AE
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls	<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 4643172
<b>Number on roll</b>	821	<b>Fax number</b>	0121 4281075
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr David McCann
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	20 November 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Lynda Roan

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 18	<b>Inspection dates</b> 11 January 2006 - 12 January 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 276933
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre is a girls' specialist mathematics and computing college, with a few boys in the sixth form. Over half of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion of students speaking English as an additional language is higher than in most schools. The school serves a socially and economically disadvantaged area to the south-west of Birmingham. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Students' attainment on entry to the school is below the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Hillcrest is a good school because good leadership and management enable its students to meet the school's aim to develop a wide range of skills and to achieve their potential, both academically and socially.

Standards are broadly average, with students generally making good progress. However, problems in recruiting and retaining suitable science teachers until now have contributed to low standards in this subject.

The school has accurately evaluated itself. Well-developed structures to check standards and the quality of teaching and learning are in place. These are used well to identify areas for development. Subject leaders have a good overview of their departments' strengths and weaknesses and work well to improve standards.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good and reflects the cultural diversity celebrated within the school. Students are well prepared for their economic future, for example, by the imaginative curriculum within design and technology, which also prepares students well for vocational courses. Students have brought about changes through the effective school council, for example, to the food served at lunchtime, which is now healthier, and students often choose this option.

The quality of teaching is good, lessons are well prepared and questioning is used well to challenge students and develop understanding. Teachers are very skilled in supporting and guiding students towards achieving students' challenging targets.

The school has improved since the last inspection and has a good capacity to make further improvements. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form is satisfactory. Overall standards are average by the end of Year 13. Results at A-level are average overall, but were better in 2005 than in previous years. For the few students who took science in 2005, results were below average. Results in BTEC National are above average, enabling students to look to continuing their studies in higher education. Sixth formers are mature, take responsibility and develop sound leadership skills. The range of courses is satisfactory, if somewhat limited, providing a reasonable choice of academic and vocational courses, including an information and communication technology (ICT) networking course. The collaboration with other schools, to be implemented in 2006, aims to widen choice and enrich students' learning experience. Overall, teaching is satisfactory and some is good. Some lessons lack pace and targets are insufficiently challenging. Leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory but sometimes it is not sufficiently proactive.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in science by continuing the work to share good practice to ensure a consistent and effective approach to teaching and learning across the department.

• Provide a broad and coherent curriculum for post-16 students through collaborative arrangements within the Oaks Collegiate.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Overall, achievement and standards are good. Although standards are broadly average and improving, students generally make good progress based on their attainment on entry to the school.

Students start Year 7 with standards that are below the national average. Standards attained by students in the end-of-Year 9 national tests in 2005 were slightly below the national average in mathematics and science, and above in English. The GCSE results in 2005 were broadly average, though below average in science. Progress was good and this is a result of the work done to make teaching more lively and more closely matched to students' learning needs. The impact of this work is evident in most subjects, though the school rightly says there is room for further improvement, for example, in science.

Students with learning difficulties and those arriving at the school during the year receive sensitive support, advice and guidance and make good progress. The great majority of students, whatever their backgrounds or prior attainment, achieve well, reach their targets and enjoy their learning. Standards are best in art and design, religious education and English. In these areas, teaching is particularly challenging and interesting.

In the sixth form, AS- and A-level results were broadly average overall in 2005 but the small number of entries in some subjects makes comparisons difficult. Results were best in art and sociology. Students' achievement was satisfactory overall, taking into account their prior attainment.

The school sets challenging targets, including those for its specialist status. It met the majority of its targets in 2005 and was close to those which it missed.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 2**

The personal development and well-being of students are good. The majority of students really enjoy school and most parents feel that students make good progress. The students work hard in lessons and are keen to reach their targets to improve their future choices. They develop effective key skills to prepare them for work, including good social and emotional skills. These are supported by a useful focus on enterprise and an effective work experience programme. The majority of students behave well and are kind and helpful to each other and visitors, although a few parents are concerned about behaviour in lessons. Students with behavioural difficulties respond well to expert help from the school. This enables others to continue learning.

Attendance is broadly satisfactory and the school has been successful in improving attendance and punctuality and reducing exclusions.

Students know what to do, who to turn to and how to keep safe, and there is little bullying. Most students have also begun to eat more healthy food and take plenty of exercise, including extra sports.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. They show a subtle understanding of cultural and moral issues in discussion as well as an appreciation of the spiritual nature of the world around them.

Students are very involved with the work of the school and the wider community, not only through the very active school council but also, for example, through regular charitable activities, sports teams and musical groups.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Teaching is good and students learn effectively. Generally, teachers prepare lessons well with a good range of activities to interest and engage students in their own learning. In the best lessons teachers ask searching questions that encourage students to answer thoughtfully, leading to good progress in their understanding and knowledge. In the very best lessons, for example, in religious education and geography, very challenging work and teachers' very good knowledge of their students' levels and progress lead to very good achievement. Overall, teachers have a good understanding of the students' learning needs and plan work effectively to meet these.

In particular, teachers are sensitive to the social issues some students have and work hard to support them so that they can learn well. Teachers' subject knowledge and knowledge of examination requirements are good and contribute to the good progress made by students.

The school checks on the quality of teaching regularly and provides extensive support and guidance, leading to improved teaching and rising standards. For example, in science, identifying areas of underachievement and planning lessons to deal with them led to improved performance in the end-of-Year 9 national tests in 2005. Work that includes opportunities to help students develop their thinking skills is starting to have a positive effect on how well students learn.

In the sixth form, teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Effective discussion to improve students' understanding is not always used sufficiently and this hinders progress.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum is good and the school provides well for students of different abilities and aptitudes. The school's specialist status in mathematics and computing has led to an extension in the range and relevance of courses provided and developments in mathematics have already improved standards across the school. Provision for the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT is good, particularly for ICT. The introduction of an enterprise culture in technology from Year 9 sets the tone and establishes an effective foundation for vocational studies.

Courses are well matched to learners' needs in Years 10 and 11, with a good range of academic and vocational options, including all students taking an appropriate examination course in ICT and most studying a modern foreign language. The school has increased the time allocated to religious education by starting it in Year 9 and students achieve good results in the GCSE short course. Overall, the curricular provision in the sixth form is satisfactory but at present it only offers a small range of appropriate courses for students of different abilities. This includes an ICT networking course. The well-established links with other schools aim to broaden the curriculum choices available, encourage more students to stay on into the sixth form and raise standards of achievement.

Provision for personal, social, health, citizenship and careers education is good, and is well supported by work undertaken in the regular tutor periods. The work-related experiences offered to students are well structured. The curriculum also includes opportunities for additional activities, such as enterprise days, activities with other schools and visits to universities to begin to prepare students for the world of work and to raise aspirations.

Students have good opportunities to take part in after-school technology and ICT classes and holiday booster classes are effective in supporting students' preparation for examinations.

The curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities enjoyed by many students, for example, performing arts and sport.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The care, guidance and support offered to students are good. The school meets its requirements for child protection and health and safety. Students are effectively made aware of how to stay safe, especially through sex education and drugs education. Students' personal development is fostered well through many subjects, but particularly personal and social development. A wide number of different specialists provide excellent support to those in greatest need. This usually results in good qualifications for these students, despite the difficulties they experience.

Students also receive good advice about how to improve and they know what their targets are. They are guided well in which courses to take and what choices to make for the future. Working closely with agencies such as Connexions and local colleges, staff help students move on to suitable further education and work placements. Each student's progress is monitored well by heads of subject departments; this allows them to guide students successfully in reaching suitably challenging goals. This is more effective in the main school than the sixth form where teaching is better. Those who are vulnerable or have learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported and often make good progress.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. The headteacher and senior team have high expectations for staff and students, within a highly caring environment in which every individual is valued and everyone's success is celebrated. Teachers are very committed and have high aspirations for themselves and their students. The vast majority respond positively to new initiatives. For example, the "Getting It Right" initiative has improved behaviour and attendance and has raised aspirations and standards.

A rigorous approach to lesson observations and evaluation provides an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning, and subject leaders have used this information to improve the quality of teaching. Subject leaders analyse students' progress in detail at regular intervals and use this to identify areas for improvement.

The school has an accurate and useful self-evaluation which it has used well to develop an appropriate improvement plan. The school works hard to gain parents' and students' views and act upon their findings.

The majority of parents feel their views are taken into account, but a few find communication with the school difficult.

The school has been successful in gaining specialist school status. This has enabled important changes to the curriculum and also greatly increased the work with the local community, particularly in increasing the number of computers which are available for community use. Some have been given to local residents and this, in turn, has helped some students with their homework.

The very effective governing body is very supportive of the school and acts as a 'critical friend' to hold the school to account, leading to improved standards.

Good improvements since the last inspection, for example, the use of ICT within the school and the very good results attained by students in the half- course Religious Education GCSE, demonstrate a good capacity for the school to improve further.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre Bartley Green Birmingham West Midlands B32 3AE

13 January 2006

Dear Students,

Thank you for your very positive responses and good behaviour when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting with you and your teachers. Your comments helped us to get a clear understanding of school life, what you enjoy and value in school.

We thought that your school is a good school and it works well to ensure you develop a wide range of skills and achieve your potential both academically and socially. You work well with your teachers to make sure that the school is a stimulating and interesting place. Your positive comments show how much you like school and appreciate the work of the staff.

We were pleased to see how you could influence what happens in school and how you take health issues very seriously, for example, how many of you chose the healthy option at lunchtimes. You enjoyed some very interesting lessons and activities with some good teaching and a varied curriculum, including a large variety of extra-curricular clubs and sports.

Your school is well led and knows its strengths and also the areas it wants to improve. As in nearly all schools, there are areas that could be better. The recent work on improving standards in science needs to be taken further so that it is consistent in all lessons. There needs to be a wider choice of subjects available to you when you join the sixth form and the plans for the collegiate could support this.

We wish you well for the future and hope you enjoy your time and are successful at this very caring and supportive school.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Smith HMI