

Whitecross Hereford High School and Specialist Sports College

Three Elms Road, Hereford, HR4 0RN

Inspection dates

21–22 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Governors, the headteacher and senior leaders share the same vision and ambition to inspire their community through the achievements of their students.
- Achievement has improved and is good. From low starting points, students are now attaining at least in line with national averages.
- The proportion of students gaining five A*-C grades, including English and mathematics, has improved and is average.
- The behaviour of students is good in lessons and around the school. Students feel safe and have a good understanding of safety and risk. Their attendance is improving. Bullying is rare and dealt with quickly.
- Effective leadership and management of teaching have secured improvements to bring about good learning. Teaching is good and some is outstanding.
- Students enjoy being at the school and have good attitudes to learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not as good in mathematics as it is in most other subjects because work is not challenging enough.
- Best practice is not shared widely enough across the school.
- Some students whose prior attainment is low do not make as much progress in mathematics as the others, or as much as they do in other subjects.
- The school does not track the progress of students with special educational needs early enough to make effective adjustments to their support if required.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 29 lessons, of which eight were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team visited a number of other lessons for short periods.
- Meetings were held with students from each year group and inspectors also spoke to many students in lessons and around the school. Inspectors met with governors, senior and other leaders and spoke to a number of teachers and support staff.
- A discussion was held between the lead inspector and a former inspector with the local authority who had supported the school prior to its conversion as an academy.
- Inspectors analysed 54 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) during the inspection and 72 responses from teaching and support staff.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including those relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning, the progress being made by students including examples of students' work and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Huw Bishop, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ian Jones	Additional Inspector
Jane Bonner	Additional Inspector
Hilary Green	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Whitecross Hereford High School and Specialist Sports College converted to become an academy in January 2013. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good.
- This is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below average.
- The proportion of students support at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, additional governing funding for students known to be entitled to free school meals, looked after children and those with a parent in the armed services, is below average.
- Opportunities for some shared provision, with The Bishop of Hereford Bluecoat School, is available for students in Years 10 and Year 11.
- Students are predominantly of White British heritage.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, especially in mathematics, by:
 - improving the way teachers plan and structure lessons, to make sure that students of all abilities have work which is challenging and meets their needs
 - accelerating the progress of students with special educational needs through checking more frequently how they are doing and setting targets for them more often to identify and tackle any weaknesses quickly.
 - sharing the best practice already evident in the school in many subjects more widely.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- GCSE outcomes are improving, particularly in English. The number of students gaining five A*- C grades, including English and mathematics, is close to the national average. This represents good achievement given students' below-average attainment levels when they enter the school.
- Additional support funded through the pupil premium provides opportunities for specific learning activities that meet individual needs. Extra staffing is having a noticeable impact on outcomes for these students so that they achieve well. The number of students achieving a C grade or above in English and mathematics is average, while achievement for students known to be eligible for free school meals is better. There are thus no gaps in attainment between students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and the others.
- Most students make nationally expected progress in mathematics and some have made good progress by the end of their courses. However, those whose attainment when they enter the school is low make less progress than expected in mathematics than in their other subjects, including English and science. This is because the quality of teaching in mathematics is not as strong as in other subjects.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are set long-term targets to work towards and generally make good progress over time. Their progress is not better because teachers do not check frequently enough how well they are doing, or set shorter-term targets for them as smaller steps along their learning path. As a result, it is not always picked up quickly enough when changes are needed in the support they receive.
- Results in science, design and technology, English and geography are significantly above average while results in most other subjects are average.
- Students' literacy and numeracy skills are improving well and the school has recently changed the way in which literacy and numeracy skills are being developed across all subjects.
- Most parents who responded on Parent View agree that their children make good progress.
- The school makes good use of test results and other information about students' performance and sets realistic targets for them. This information is monitored carefully, but is not used enough to plan lessons at the right level for students in all subject areas.
- Currently, no student leaves the school at the end of Year 11 without a placement in education, training or employment. This means that they are successfully prepared for the next stage of their learning and are confident using the key skills of literacy, numeracy and communication.
- Although students are entered early for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics, the organisation of subjects does not limit the achievement of more-able students, who go on to take further qualifications.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers and other adults create a positive learning environment that enables students to make good progress in their learning. Students and parents say the quality of teaching is good.

- Evidence of outstanding teaching was seen in a number of subjects, but it is not a feature of all. In mathematics in particular, the quality of teaching and learning is not as strong as in many other areas. This is because the work is not always appropriate or sufficiently taxing and results in some students not making sufficient progress over time.
- In the best teaching, work is planned to meet the learning needs of individuals and groups. In a Year 10 chemistry lesson, questioning was used very effectively to challenge students' thinking and encourage independent research to a high standard. A Year 9 history lesson, where students were required to analyse a historical source, contained activities designed individually for students. Students were highly motivated and engaged with no learning time wasted. In both lessons, students made outstanding progress.
- Where improvement is needed to teaching, expectations are not high enough and there is a tendency for the teacher to do too much of the work. This prevents the opportunity for all students to learn and make progress by being sufficiently challenged and work by themselves and collaboratively alongside their peers.
- The school has trained staff to use information from test and examination results to assess students' progress. However, there are inconsistencies in the way some teachers use this information to plan lessons that build on what students already know. Some good practice that exists, for example in English, is not shared sufficiently widely with all subject areas, especially mathematics.
- Students' work in lessons and over time is assessed regularly with good feedback being offered to the students so they can improve further. This is the case in most subject areas, particularly in English, modern foreign languages and science and this helps them to achieve well. It is inconsistent in mathematics, however, as there is not much written dialogue between students and teachers about the next steps in learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students are respectful and courteous towards each other. They work well in groups, in lessons and in social areas, and are respectful of the views of others.
- Attitudes to learning are good in most lessons and also in less formal contexts such as extra-curricular activities. Students enjoy attending the school, feel safe and comment on the quality of relationships and mutual respect between them and the staff.
- Students commented on how secure they feel within the school and appreciate the safe environment it provides for them. They could describe clearly how the school has prepared them to be safe when using the internet, and appreciated how the personal, social and health education programme has contributed to their understanding of various issues affecting young people.
- The school has good systems for monitoring all types of bullying, including racism or homophobia and students say that such incidents are rare. Students' understanding of different types of bullying is good. In a discussion with an inspector they showed maturity in the way they described a particular homophobic incident in school and the way it had been dealt with effectively by staff and students.

- Although a minority of parents and carers expressed some reservation about behaviour and bullying, the majority commented that behaviour is at least good. Inspectors received letters from two parents commenting strongly on how well the school had supported their children.
- Behaviour is not yet outstanding because in a small minority of lessons, where teaching is less effective, some students show a lack of interest in their learning.
- Students are given a number of opportunities to take responsibility through the four subsidiary academy councils and the main school student council which meets with the headteacher. They also undertake various projects within the local community which enriches their personal development as young citizens.

The leadership and management are good

- The school is well led by the headteacher who is supported by a very able senior team and staff, both teaching and support, who are keen to see the school continue along its journey of success. There is a strong sense of ambition for the school, shared also by students.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Senior leaders know the school well and are aware of its strengths and areas for further improvement.
- The management of teaching is good and the school has good support mechanisms in place to help staff when their teaching does not meet expectations. The provision for staff development is also effective and this is reflected in the good and sometimes outstanding teaching and learning seen during the inspection.
- There is a close link between teachers' performance in the classroom and pay progression, with targets linked to the progress and achievement of students. Staff morale is high. Almost all responses to the staff questionnaire were positive.
- The range of subjects and courses is broad and meets the needs of students well, thus encouraging them to achieve to the best of their abilities. The blend of work-related and academic courses is impressive with a small number of Key Stage 4 students studying off site, or coming from other schools.
- Students enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities, with sport being particularly strong. Music and drama and many other opportunities are available before, during and after the school day. These are valued because they reflect personal student interest. They have a positive impact on students' personal development and well-being and the nurture of self-esteem and confidence.
- Subjects are reviewed using a range of evidence to monitor effectiveness. These systems are rigorous and focus on the progress made by students.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength and evident in lessons and the extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities. Students have many opportunities to get involved in issues of local, regional, national and global interest.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements, including checks on the attendance, welfare and safety of students who are off-site.

- Parents agree that the school is well led and managed. One parent referred to her 'happy, healthy student who has flourished academically and socially' under the school's care.

- **The governance of the school:**

- Although the governing body was re-structured when the school converted to academy status, governors were keen to maintain and build upon the predecessor school's improving reputation in the local community. They have a range of expertise to support and challenge the school and a thorough understanding of the quality of teaching and how the school is performing when compared to other schools nationally. They are instrumental in leading the school's strategic direction and there is a clear vision for its future. They undertake training to strengthen their collective responsibilities and they visit the school regularly to gather first-hand evidence of students' achievement. Governors manage resources efficiently; including the use and impact of the pupil premium funding on students' progress. They also make sure that teachers' salaries reflect the quality of their performance in the classroom. The Chair and Vice Chair meet fortnightly with the headteacher to discuss the progress of students. The governing body and the school's senior leaders present a cohesive team to drive the school forward to the next stage of its development.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139189
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	412829

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	875
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Chave
Headteacher	Denise Strutt
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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