

Inspection of a good school: Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre

Stonehouse Lane, Birmingham, West Midlands B32 3AE

Inspection dates:

27 and 28 September 2022

Outcome

Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre are hard-working, polite and welcoming. They enjoy coming to school and achieve well. Students in the sixth form appreciate the individual academic guidance that their teachers provide.

Leaders have high expectations for staff and pupils alike. They have planned an ambitious curriculum for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils benefit from a distinctive emphasis on what women can achieve. Teachers are passionate about how best to plan and sequence their lessons. There is a real commitment to continual improvement.

Pupils want to do well. They take pride in their work and behave consistently well in lessons. Pupils behave responsibly at break and lunchtimes and the corridors are orderly. Bullying is very rare, and staff resolve any disagreements. Pupils know whom to turn to, and they feel safe.

Pupils learn about different cultures and traditions. They are tolerant of others and treat them with respect. Pupils enjoy a range of extra-curricular activities, before and after school. The school's careers programme is a particular strength.

Leaders understand the school well and check on the impact of the changes they make.

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

Across the school, leaders have planned out an ambitious curriculum. In some subjects, such as physical education, the expectations exceed those of the national curriculum. Leaders have given careful thought to pupils' interests and the school's local context. For example, at key stage 3, pupils in history study the patterns of migration into Birmingham. This helps pupils to understand the make-up of their city. Leaders have made sure that pupils' work is planned to build on what they already know. A strong

emphasis on the importance of reading is starting to pay dividends. Staff support weaker readers well.

In general, there is a good breadth to pupils' studies. At key stage 3, pupils follow all the subjects that make up the national curriculum. At key stage 4, leaders believe that pupils' aspirations are best served when English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, humanities and science are at the heart of the curriculum. Pupils choose from a range of other subjects. Currently however, there are some curriculum restrictions in religious education and design technology. Leaders ensure that the courses available in the sixth form complement other local provision.

Teachers think hard about the curriculum and put it into practice well. They plan lessons so that pupils add to their knowledge in manageable steps. Teachers know their subject well and use the technical vocabulary to good effect to explain new learning. They are keen to use the findings of educational research to refine what they do. For example, teachers are currently working on checking pupils' knowledge in the classroom. They use assessment well to pick out what pupils have learned, and make sure that teaching fills any gaps in pupils' knowledge. This is helping them to address misconceptions immediately and provide good feedback. Across the school, pupils learn well.

Staff are ambitious for pupils with SEND. Leaders identify pupils' additional needs quickly. Staff plan so that where possible, these pupils keep up with their classmates in their work. Teachers sometimes do not meet the additional needs of pupils with SEND as well as they might do. Where this happens, pupils sometimes struggle to make sense of new learning.

Pupils behave very well in lessons. There is a clear understanding of what leaders expect, and pupils want to succeed. They concentrate well and take pride in their work. Disruption to learning is very rare. Despite some narrow spaces, pupils move sensibly around the school. At social times, they sit together in small groups, chatting calmly and pleasantly.

Pupils develop a good understanding of personal safety, relationships and cultural topics as part of a well-planned programme. Leaders check that pupils have understood the knowledge that is most important for their welfare. Different groups of pupils get on well together. Teachers in the sixth form encourage students to discuss important social and political topics in a responsible way. Pupils across the school benefit from a wide-ranging careers programme which includes live and virtual visits to local employers. All students in the sixth form undertake work experience, which they describe as well tailored to their aspirations and interests.

Senior leaders show a clarity of purpose in line with the school's values. They use external evaluation well and know how to improve the school further. Staff believe that leaders take their workload into consideration. Less-experienced staff receive effective support when they join the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils learn about the risks that they may face, including those originating online. Leaders make sure that staff are well trained in safeguarding, so that they know how to identify pupils who may be at risk. They keep the staff updated about issues that might pose a threat. Leaders take appropriate action to support pupils and involve other agencies that work with children.

The school keeps the necessary safeguarding records. Leaders make the right checks on the staff who join the school. Pupils know that there is always someone to talk to. They feel safe at school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some narrowing of the key stage 4 curriculum in religious education and in design technology. Pupils do not have the breadth of opportunities that are at least equivalent to the national curriculum. Leaders should use their ongoing curriculum review to enhance pupils' learning in these two subjects.
- There is inconsistency in the effectiveness with which teachers provide for the needs of pupils with SEND. As a result, these pupils sometimes do not learn as well as they might. Leaders should ensure that all teachers receive the right information about these pupils, and then check that all teachers are using it effectively.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2013.

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.

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	137346
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10240790
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	641
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	62
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Dee McIlmurray
Headteacher	Julie-Ann Davies
Website	hillcrest.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 July 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 11 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school is part of The Oaks Sixth Form College, a consortium of three schools offering post-16 courses in south-west Birmingham. However, very few of the school's students currently attend provision on the site of another school.

Information about this inspection

- 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 that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. Meetings were held with curriculum leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors also met with a range of other staff, including early career teachers and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils at social times, and with groups of pupils more formally.
- When inspecting safeguarding, inspectors looked at the school's procedures for recruiting and checking on staff. They also considered the effectiveness of staff training and the procedures to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including leaders' plans to improve the school, records of governors' meetings, and the school's attendance and behaviour records.
- The inspection team took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, including narrative comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and for pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history and physical education. In these subjects, inspectors considered the curriculum, visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. Inspectors also met with pupils and teachers to discuss learning in these subjects.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Graeme Rudland

Ofsted Inspector

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