

# The Highcrest Academy

Hatters Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP13 7NQ

**Inspection dates** 19–20 November 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, has not improved rapidly enough over the last few years. The most able students do not always make the progress that they are capable of in all subjects.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students do not make rapid enough progress on AS courses. Retention rates are low and changes to the courses on offer have not yet had an impact on results.
- There is variation in students' achievement across different subjects. Achievement in modern foreign languages, geography and graphics requires improvement.
- Teaching in the sixth form is not consistently good. As a result, students do not make good progress.
- The quality of teachers' marking varies too much. Students' responses are not always checked to make sure that they understand the work.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to work independently in all lessons.
- The work of senior and subject leaders has not yet resulted in good achievement for all students, particularly those in the sixth form.
- The governing body does not have a clear enough view of the school's performance.

### The school has the following strengths:

- Students make good progress in English and science and achieve particularly well in mathematics.
- Disabled students, those with special educational needs, those supported by extra funds (the pupil premium) and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress in their learning.
- The overall quality of teaching is good and improving. Students are taught well by dedicated teachers who are committed to supporting their learning.
- All students are courteous, polite and respectful and their conduct is exemplary. Relationships are strong and behaviour is consistently good. Students feel very safe and parents and carers strongly support this view.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 40 lessons, seven of which were observed jointly and agreed with senior leaders. In addition, they made a number of shorter visits to lessons and tutorial sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the members of the governing body, the headteacher, other leaders and managers, and groups of staff.
- Members of the inspection team held meetings with four groups of students representing all age groups. Informal discussions also took place with students.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work and reviewed a range of documents, including: the academy’s own evaluation of how well it is doing; its improvement plan; and statistical information about students’ achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- Inspectors considered the 32 responses to the online Parent View survey and the 61 responses to the staff questionnaire. The views expressed by parents and carers in response to the school’s own surveys completed by all students and almost half of all students’ families were also taken into account. Additional comments received from parents and carers during the inspection were also considered when making final judgements.

## Inspection team

Rob Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Catherine Robinson-Slater	Additional Inspector
Gill Walley	Additional Inspector
Justine Hocking	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Highcrest Academy converted to become an academy school in July 2011. When its predecessor school, Highcrest Community School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school is a smaller-than-average sized non-selective secondary school in a local authority which operates within a wholly selective system.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is well above average. This is additional government funding to support particular groups of students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The majority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Asian British heritage. Forty per cent of students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well above average. A small number are at an early stage of English language acquisition.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well above average.
- The off-site services provided by the Aylesbury Centre are used to support students' learning.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school is a specialist technology college. It holds awards the Basic Skills Award, the Sportsmark Award, the Investors in Families Award, International Schools Award, the Continuing Professional Development Award, the Healthy Schools Award, the NACE Challenge Award and the Inclusion Quality Mark. It is a National Support School and is a National Schools Network Leading Edge School.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the improvements in teaching, particularly in the sixth form, so that all groups of students make at least good progress by:
  - setting work at the right level of difficulty for each student with enough challenge, particularly for the most able students
  - improving the quality of marking and feedback to that of the best in the academy so all students know how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve their work, as well as being given time to respond to teachers' guidance
  - making sure that there are more opportunities for students to learn independently.
- Improve the sixth form, including retention rates, quality of provision and students' outcomes by making sure that the courses on offer fully meet students' needs and that teaching is consistently good.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
  - all subject leaders consistently and robustly analyse and accurately evaluate the impact of teaching on students' achievement and progress from their starting points.
- Make sure that the governing body maintains an accurate and detailed understanding of the school's performance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students join the academy in Year 7 with skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are generally well below average. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, was below the national average in 2012 and has not improved in 2013.
- In the sixth form, attainment remains below the national averages. Although standards for vocational courses appear to be good, achievement in subjects at AS level fell in 2013 and a significant number of students did not continue with their studies to A level. The academy is beginning to modify the curriculum so that it is better matched to students' needs. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is also improving, but it is too soon for these changes to have an impact on students' achievement.
- Achievement across different subjects is not consistent. Standards in art, business, drama, science and engineering are high, but are much lower in modern languages, geography and graphics. Students studying work-related courses, including those attending alternative provision, achieve well.
- The most able students do not always make the rapid progress that they are capable of. This is because they are occasionally set work that is too easy and does not challenge them.
- Achievement is good in English and particularly strong in mathematics. The proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress is above national figures and the academy's data show that this positive trend is set to continue.
- Pupil premium funding is being used in a range of ways. Additional teaching during the holidays and extra classes, as well as sporting and cultural activities, provides specific targeted support for students' learning. The academy's data show that all students who are eligible have benefited through the extra funding. In 2013, these students made better progress in English and mathematics than the other students in the school. The gap in attainment has narrowed and is approximately half a grade in these subjects.
- Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language achieve well. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are also achieving as well as their peers and some are making particularly good progress. This is because they receive good individual attention from teachers and classroom assistants. Parents and carers recognise and value the impact of this support.
- Additional staffing and support are helping students eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium to catch up in English and mathematics and settle into life at the school. Standards in literacy are rising because students are encouraged to read more often, by themselves and to each other. However, they have few opportunities to read to adults.
- The academy does enter some students early for GCSE examinations but this does not disadvantage these students.

### The quality of teaching

### is good

- Teaching in the main school is at least good and there is some outstanding practice. This is a result of the leadership's efforts to improve the quality of teaching and has led to good achievement in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is less effective in the sixth form. The impact of recent improvements is not yet evident in the results, particularly in AS subjects completed at the end of Year 12. While inspectors did observe good practices in the teaching of vocational courses and some A-level lessons in the sixth form, such approaches have yet to become the norm for all Years 12 and 13 students.
- Key to the quality and success of many lessons are the extremely good relationships between

teachers and their students. Students are clearly motivated and cooperative because they want to succeed and know that they are well supported by their teachers, who are prepared to give of their time freely to ensure that they learn well.

- Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and plan lessons well so that learning moves at good pace.
- There is some good quality marking and feedback provided by teachers in the school, but this best practice is not yet consistent. Even when marking is thorough, not all teachers build in the chance for students to review work and too many do not check to see if students are acting upon the advice given.
- Most teachers make good use of assessment information to match tasks to the learning needs of all students. Chances to use practical activities to consolidate learning are included where teaching is best and students point out that they learn more when they have to apply and use the skills they have learned. However, some teachers do not plan work at the right level of difficulty for all students, particularly the most able.
- Teachers work closely with teaching assistants to provide extra help to those students who most need it. Support for disabled students, those with special educational needs and for those known to be eligible for the pupil premium is of a very good quality. Students' progress is regularly checked and relevant support provided. As a result these students make at least good progress.
- Teachers do not always provide enough opportunities for students to learn independently. This can slow their progress.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students have positive attitudes and say they enjoy learning in a safe environment where all are working to support them to aspire and achieve. Students, including those in the sixth form, are increasingly more confident when applying their skills, knowledge and understanding to new learning and real-life scenarios.
- Students conduct themselves extremely well around the school. They are very polite, courteous, respect each other and cooperate with all staff. Inspectors were frequently helped to find their way around the building. Doors were opened without prompting.
- The school manages behaviour well and staff are generally consistent in their use of the school behaviour policy. There were no disruptions to learning seen in lessons.
- Students are very proud of their school community and speak positively about each other. The staff promote and model good behaviour. Students talk openly about how teachers respect them, and how they in turn respect each other and the adults within the school community. They enjoy being at the school and appreciate the effort that goes into making their time at the academy a positive experience.
- Students say that bullying is extremely rare. They are confident that staff will deal with any such incidents quickly and effectively. They know about different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. The academy is an extremely tolerant and racially harmonious community which does not accept any form of discrimination. This reflects the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within the academy.
- Attendance is improving and is now in line with the national average as a result of leaders' drive to reduce absence. Incidents of exclusions are falling as a result of the work of the school and the positive, planned support overseen by the heads of learning.
- Students take on many responsibilities, including roles within the prefect, student and year councils. They enjoy the many opportunities to get involved in events both in and out of school. Their involvement and engagement in charitable and community activities are strong. There is a thriving sports programme and the school has been able to provide a rich and diverse range of extra-curricular activities in response to a strong 'student voice'.

- Parents, carers and staff strongly agree that behaviour is good and that the academy is a safe place where students enjoy coming to learn.

## The leadership and management

## require improvement

- Leaders have not yet ensured that teaching and achievement are consistently good across the main school and the sixth form.
- The headteacher is passionate and energetic in her continued drive to raise standards. The questionnaire responses of both staff and parents and carers show that these groups overwhelmingly support the headteacher, a view echoed by many students.
- Leaders and managers have a secure understanding of where improvements are most required. However, leaders, including those in charge of subjects, have an overgenerous view of the impact of teaching on students' achievement. They do not always rigorously analyse the impact of teaching on students' progress from their individual starting points.
- Although there have been good improvements to teaching in the main school, leaders have not yet secured consistently good quality teaching across different subjects and in the sixth form.
- The academy has robust systems in place to support and manage the performance of teachers. Teachers are accountable for their students' achievement and speak positively about the additional support and training they receive to improve their skills. Teachers work collaboratively to coach each other and to share best practice. The academy challenges underperformance appropriately.
- A good range of subjects and qualifications meets the needs and aspirations of most students at Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the sixth form curriculum has not been suitable for some students and as a result achievement in the sixth form is not good. In addition, retention has been affected, with some students leaving. This issue is now being tackled by leaders but it is too early to see the impact.
- Leaders have created a very harmonious community. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students enjoy a range of enrichment activities. The personal development programmes broaden students' experience and raise their levels of confidence. Students are keen to involve themselves in the wider community and give generously in terms of their time as well as raising significant amounts of money for various charities through their own efforts.
- The local authority enjoys good relationships and works well with the academy. It generally provides good support.

### ■ The governance of the school:

Governors are strongly committed to the academy and to promoting high-quality care for students in an inclusive atmosphere. They have effective committee systems for undertaking their statutory responsibilities, and make sure that all safeguarding responsibilities are met and that all appropriate policies are in place. They are aware of procedures for teachers' appraisal, the types of targets that are set for teachers and the range of training opportunities available. They also check that pay progression is linked to teachers' performance. Governors are aware of how the pupil premium funding is spent and are fully informed about its impact. However, while governors receive considerable and detailed information about the work of the academy, it has not been focused enough on students' achievement and the progress they make from their starting points. Governors do not have a clear enough view of the school's performance and this has limited their ability to ask challenging questions.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136858
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	426691

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy converter
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	809
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	104
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Chris Turner
<b>Principal</b>	Shena Moynihan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 529866
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