

High Weald Academy

Angley Road, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2PJ

Inspection dates

2–3 April 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Last year, pupils made weak progress across a wide range of subjects, and particularly in English and science.
- Current pupils make better progress than previously in key stage 3. However, pupils in key stage 4, and particularly the most able, do not make good progress, especially in English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching is too inconsistent across subjects and year groups. Teachers do not routinely plan activities that are challenging enough. As a result, teaching does not meet the needs of all pupils.
- Pupils sometimes misbehave in lessons and distract each other from learning.
- Leaders do not always evaluate the effectiveness of their improvement strategies well enough.
- Careers education, advice and guidance is not embedded well across the school. Pupils in the past have not been ambitious enough for their futures.
- Attendance is below the national average for secondary schools. Too many pupils, and particularly disadvantaged pupils, are persistently absent.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is not yet used effectively. Consequently, these pupils do not make good progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive principal and the head of school, since starting in September 2018, have wasted no time in implementing a range of strategies to improve the school.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Previous deficiencies in the breadth of subjects studied have been rectified by leaders.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make increasingly steady progress because of effective support from teaching assistants.
- Pupils behave well around school. Bullying is rare.
- The trust ably supports leaders and staff. They have been instrumental in securing extra funding and a, soon to be opened, new school building.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils are well cared for.
- Staff morale is high, and they believe that the school is well led and managed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eradicate inconsistencies in teaching, learning and assessment so that staff planning meets the needs of all pupils and provides high levels of challenge, particularly for the most able.
- Improve rates of progress across the school, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and the most able.
- Further improve leadership and management by sharpening evaluations of how well improvement strategies are working.
- Improve careers education, advice and guidance so that pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education and become increasingly ambitious.
- Improve attendance and reduce persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Further improve pupils' behaviour in lessons so that all pupils concentrate hard on their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since starting in their posts in September 2018, the executive principal and head of school have acted with commitment and resolve to make improvements across the school. They have put in place a series of strategies that are beginning to have a positive effect on overall standards. However, these improvements have not yet led to consistently strong teaching, learning and assessment or improved outcomes.
- The school has experienced a period of staff turbulence and difficulties in the recruitment of teachers and leaders. Since the last inspection, this has been the main barrier to rapid improvement.
- The school has been a member of the Brook Learning Trust (BLT) since 2013. The trust has ably supported the school, particularly in the recruitment and retention of staff. The trust has strengthened leadership, recruiting leaders from other schools in the trust. For example, the executive principal oversees High Weald Academy and The Hayesbrook School.
- The trust has successfully managed the school's finances and resources. The school is due to move into much-needed new school buildings later this year. The trust has also successfully secured further finance to strengthen staffing. For example, finance secured from the Department for Education has been used to employ a senior leader who works across the trust's schools to improve teaching.
- Leaders have prioritised the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. They have introduced well-thought-through strategies designed to ensure that high standards are consistently present in all lessons. For example, leaders have introduced 'knowledge organisers' in lessons so that pupils have a record of the subject-specific vocabulary that they have to remember. However, these strategies to improve the quality of teaching are not yet fully embedded.
- Leaders and trustees understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have constructed plans for improvement that address the school's main weaknesses. The effects of these plans are monitored by leaders. However, this monitoring sometimes lacks precision. As a result, leaders and trustees are not always fully aware of how well their changes are improving teaching, behaviour and outcomes.
- The curriculum is now broad and balanced. Leaders identified that there were some deficiencies in the curriculum at the start of this academic year. They introduced changes to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects. For example, in key stage 3, pupils are now able to study Spanish as a formal part of their curriculum.
- Staff morale is high. They recognise the improvements that have been made by leaders and feel well supported by them. All staff that responded to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire agreed that the school is well led and managed. Leaders consider staff's workload when introducing new policies. Together with the trust, leaders have worked hard to ensure that staff feel motivated and supported. Consequently, staff absence has dramatically decreased over the past year.
- Many parents commented on the improved leadership of the school. Most parents who

responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to others. Similarly, most parents agreed that the school was well led and managed. Several parents commented on the improving reputation of the school in the local community.

- Leaders are now tackling deficiencies in disadvantaged pupils' progress with more urgency. Leaders now use pupil premium funding in a more considered way. They have thoughtfully developed the pupil premium strategy. This is beginning to have a positive effect on the provision for disadvantaged pupils.
- Recent improvements in the leadership of SEND provision means that support for pupils with SEND is well planned. Extra funding for pupils with SEND is used effectively.

Governance of the school

- Earlier this year, the Academy Council was replaced by the Interim Advisory Board (IAB). This means that the level of challenge and quality of support for leaders has increased substantially.
- The IAB holds leaders to account well. Its members scrutinise leaders' plans and ask searching questions. Rightly, they emphasise to leaders the importance of demonstrating the effectiveness of their plans for improvement.
- IAB members and trustees have a wide range of experience in education and outside of education, which they use increasingly well to support the school. They are ambitious for pupils and very committed to improving their school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Procedures and processes meet statutory requirements and ensure that the suitability of staff is appropriately checked.
- Staff are well trained, and they know pupils well. Staff understand how to spot signs of abuse or neglect. They provide effective support for pupils, and particularly vulnerable pupils.
- Staff work well with external agencies. They have formed close links with local agencies and use these links to ensure that when referrals are made to social services, timely responses are forthcoming.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is variable across year groups and within subjects. In too many lessons, planning does not meet the needs of pupils.
- A lack of consistently strong teaching in the past means that pupils were not given the opportunities to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding. As a result, current pupils in key stage 4, have substantial gaps in their knowledge
- Teachers' expectations are not consistently high enough. In mathematics, English and science, teaching does not challenge pupils to extend their learning. Pupils are set high

targets by leaders. Nevertheless, too often levels of challenge in lessons are too low and do not enable pupils, and particularly the most able, to make strong progress.

- In some subjects, such as geography and performing arts, teaching is stronger because teachers have high expectations and they plan activities that interest and engage pupils.
- Attitudes to learning are variable. In some subjects, pupils are keen to learn and eager to participate. In too many lessons, pupils produce poor-quality work and lose interest in activities because teachers' planning is not effective in helping them learn and relationships between teachers and pupils are fragile.
- Some teachers use the new assessment and feedback policy well. They provide feedback to pupils that highlights where they have succeeded and how they can make improvements in future. However, this practice is not widespread. Too many pupils, particularly in mathematics and science, do not receive valuable feedback that helps them to improve their work.
- Recent changes to homework procedures have meant that homework is set more often for pupils. Most parents who responded to Parent View agreed that pupils receive appropriate homework.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They are taught how to stay safe in interesting and memorable ways. For example, older pupils experience talks from visitors with first-hand experience of serious issues, such as knife crime.
- Pupils are not prepared well for the next stage of their education because careers education is not embedded across year groups. Plans are in place to improve careers provision. However, current provision is not strong. Consequently, pupils, particularly in Year 11, have a narrow view of the career paths open to them and they are not as ambitious as they should be.
- Pupils are smartly dressed. They wear their uniforms with pride and many wear reward badges that demonstrate their successes in school.
- Health and well-being issues are understood by pupils. Several pupils told inspectors that they understand how to eat healthily. Personal, social, health and economic education encourages pupils to develop their knowledge around issues such as mental health. Consequently, pupils are increasingly aware of these issues.
- Pupils are confident and feel well cared for. Several pupils told inspectors that they value school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development permeates through the curriculum. Frequent opportunities in tutor time and assemblies ensure that pupils think about and discuss these aspects of their education. For example, pupils listened to an assembly about what 'belonging' means and how the idea is linked to different

religions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around school. During social times, and when moving between lessons, pupils are respectful of each other and there is a friendly atmosphere. At lunchtime, pupils sit sensibly and chat in the dinner hall, or they use the outside areas for playing sports.
- In many lessons, pupils follow teachers' instructions and conform to the school's rules. Pupils told inspectors that since the new executive principal started, behaviour had improved. However, there is a significant proportion of lessons where pupils' behaviour is weak. Some pupils disrupt the learning of others and do not always listen to teachers.
- The proportion of pupils that receive fixed-term exclusions is above the national average. The introduction of new behaviour strategies, at the start of this academic year, led to a slight increase in exclusions. However, overall, fixed-term exclusions are declining.
- Bullying is rare, and it is dealt with promptly if it does occur. Pupils told inspectors that, on the whole, there are few bullying incidents between pupils.
- Attendance was below the national average for secondary schools last year. A range of strategies have been put in place to improve this. Some improvements have been evident this year. For example, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils persistently absent has declined slightly. However, persistent absence, and particularly for disadvantaged pupils, remains above the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2018, Year 11 pupils' progress across a range of subjects was well below the national averages. Progress in mathematics was at the national average. However, progress in English, science, modern foreign languages and humanities was below that for pupils with similar starting points nationally.
- Attainment was also below the national averages for these pupils, particularly in mathematics, English and science. Poor rates of progress and below the national average attainment were a consequence of previously weak teaching and low expectations.
- Current pupils' progress is improving. For example, in key stage 3, pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics because of the introduction of leaders' strategies. Nevertheless, pupils in key stage 4, including the most able, do not yet make the strong progress of which they are capable, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged do not catch up with their learning at a rate that is similar to their peers nationally with similar starting points. However, the pupil premium strategy has been much improved by leaders in this academic year, and

disadvantaged pupils' progress is beginning to show signs that it is increasing.

- Overall, pupils' reading is improving across the school because support is precisely planned and delivered well. Consequently, pupils, and particularly pupils with SEND, increase their confidence in reading and develop their vocabulary.
- Pupils with SEND are making increasingly steady progress because of the extra support that they receive from well-trained teaching assistants.

School details

Unique reference number	138236
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10053292

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

Type of school	Secondary modern (non-selective)
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	250
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Ian Daker
Executive Principal	Daniel Hatley
Telephone number	01580 712 754
Website	www.highwealdacademy.kent.sch.uk
Email address	enq@highwealdacademy.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5-6 October 2016

Information about this school

- High Weald Academy has been a member of the Brook Learning Trust since 2013. The board of trustees is the accountable body for the school. There are two other secondary schools in the trust. The trust has worked with school leaders to provide strategic direction in order to improve the school.
- The executive principal leads two schools, High Weald Academy and The Hayesbrook School.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British background.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is in line with the national average for secondary schools.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average for secondary schools.

- Prior to September 2018, the school offered 16-19 study programmes. However, at the time of the inspection, there were no students studying at this level as the sixth form provision had been closed.
- Off-site provision at The Horizon Project, Tonbridge is used by the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a range of lessons across key stages 3 and 4. Senior leaders joined inspectors for several observations.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, the executive principal, the head of school, members of the IAB and the chair of the board of trustees.
- Samples of pupils' work were looked at by inspectors and inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- Inspectors formally met with groups of pupils from across the school. Inspectors also spoke to a wide range of pupils during social times and during lessons.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff from meetings with groups of staff and from the 21 staff who responded to the confidential questionnaire.
- The views of 26 parents who responded to the confidential Ofsted parental questionnaire, including 24 written responses, were taken into account by inspectors.
- Documentation was scrutinised by inspectors including the school's plans for improvement, its self-evaluation, reports on attendance and behaviour, records relating to pupils' safety, minutes of the board of trustees' meetings and information on pupils' outcomes.

Inspection team

Harry Ingham, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maxine McDonald-Taylor	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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