

West Hill School

Thompson Cross, Stalybridge, Cheshire, SK15 1LX

Inspection dates

3–4 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Although achievement has improved on some measures, it requires improvement because the progress made by some pupils over time is not rapid enough, particularly in English.
- There is too much variability in the quality of writing and presentation in pupils' books, and they do not always respond adequately to the teachers' advice in order to improve their work.
- Senior leaders and governors have considerably strengthened the school's capacity to improve over the last year, but subject leaders' checking of pupils' learning and support vary in effectiveness.
- While pupils' behaviour in and around the school is generally courteous and mature, some do not develop enough resilience to persevere with the most challenging work. Therefore, they do not always reach the highest standards of which they are capable in tests and examinations.
- The quality of support for pupils' literacy is too variable between subjects and year groups.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn about some aspects of modern British life and its values.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has improved since the last inspection because of the clear direction set by senior leaders. They have worked hard and with considerable success to eradicate inadequacies identified and raise achievement, for example, in mathematics.
- Leaders have established more rigorous systems for tracking pupils' progress and managing teachers' performance. The school's commitment to providing high quality professional development for staff has led to improvements in teaching.
- Staff know pupils well and relationships are very positive. The school's partnerships work very effectively to provide strong support for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.
- Pupils appreciate the rich variety of extra-curricular activities provided by the school. They have a wide choice of sports and many opportunities to take responsibilities.
- The governing body offers a robust level of challenge to senior leaders. The role and impact of governance is expanding as new skills and experience are reflected in the governing body membership.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of classes across the curriculum, including joint observations with senior leaders. Other brief visits were made to classes, to check on particular aspects of the school's work, and to an assembly.
- Meetings were held with leaders, teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The views of pupils were gathered by talking with them about their work in lessons and informal conversations around the school. A telephone call was made to Tameside College to check the off-site provision provided for a small number of pupils from West Hill School.
- No results are published for the online questionnaire (Parent View) in the current year. Instead, inspectors took into account a summary of the school's own survey of parents' views.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of policies and other documentation, including safeguarding policies, school evaluation and development plans, external reports on the school's progress, records relating to behaviour and attendance and the school's own data on current pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspection team

Susan Wareing, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathleen Harris	Additional Inspector
Rebecca Lawton	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- West Hill School is a slightly below average sized secondary school with a comprehensive intake.
- The school has a lower-than-average proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have a disability or special educational needs is also below the national average.
- Eighteen boys from Years 10 and 11 attend Tameside College for one day per week, following courses in motor vehicle engineering, carpentry, joinery and life skills. A small number of pupils spend a few days during the year training at professional football clubs in the North West.
- The school has achieved a wide variety of awards including the Inspiring Information, Advice and Guidance Award, The National Standard for Enterprise Education and the Cultural Diversity Quality Standard at Bronze level.
- The school became a converter academy in 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the improvements in the quality of teaching to ensure that it is consistently at least good in all subjects across the school by:
 - providing further opportunities for teachers to learn from the good practice that exists within the school and in good and outstanding local schools, in order to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching
 - ensuring all teachers have the highest expectations of the quality and presentation of pupils' written work and their responses to teachers' feedback on it.
- Ensure that a higher proportion of pupils meets, and especially, exceeds nationally expected rates of progress across a wide range of subjects, particularly in English, so that remaining achievement gaps close rapidly by:
 - securely implementing the new whole-school literacy policy across all subjects, so that pupils have more effective opportunities to improve their literacy skills
 - ensuring that all pupils develop greater resilience in tackling the most challenging levels of work, especially in extended writing.
- Intensify training for subject leaders in checking pupils' learning and support and the performance of staff, so that any inconsistencies in the application of whole-school policies and procedures are quickly eradicated.
- Ensure that the curriculum equips pupils to reflect on and understand life in modern Britain more thoroughly and promotes an understanding of British values more effectively.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders and governors have formed a united team that has worked extremely hard in the year since the last inspection to improve key aspects of the school's work. Development planning identifies appropriate priorities to drive the school forward and self-evaluation is detailed and thorough. Senior leaders and governors know the school well, although their judgements of the school's work are sometimes too optimistic.
- More effective systems and policies are now in place to hold staff more rigorously to account for pupils' progress and teachers' own performance. Pay progression is firmly linked to the school's priorities and pupils' achievement. The impact of these systems can be seen in pupils' high attainment rates on some measures in the GCSE results in 2014, notably in pupils' best eight GCSE subjects and the strongly improved overall attainment and progress in mathematics.
- Systems for tracking pupils' progress give more refined information that is generally effectively used by teachers in planning work for pupils. However, there is some variation in the extent to which teachers ensure that work is appropriate for the learning needs of all pupils. Therefore, while some gaps between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school are narrowing, others are still too wide.
- The management of teaching and learning has improved because senior leaders have provided extensive opportunities for high quality professional development for teaching staff. Teachers appreciate the time they can devote to sharing good practice within the school and, increasingly, learn from good and outstanding schools in the North West of England.
- New appointments made at subject leader level have strengthened the capacity of middle leadership to improve the school. They are very enthusiastic practitioners who understand their roles and responsibilities, but there is too much inconsistency in their checking of teachers' work. This slows down the identification and tackling of pockets of underachievement rapidly enough.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and kept under regular review by senior leaders to ensure that it fully meets pupils' changing learning needs and interests. The school is quick to remove ineffective courses and replace them with new ones more relevant to pupils' ambitions and aspirations.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and effectively managed across the curriculum. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and of their responsibilities towards others in the school and the community in the broadest sense.
- Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of sports and international links, as well as personal challenges such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and the annual Three Peaks Challenge. However, pupils' knowledge and understanding of some aspects of British values are under-developed.
- The school has been externally recognised for the high quality information, advice and guidance it provides for the next phase of pupils' education or working life. The strength of the programme is seen in the very low proportions of pupils who do not move on to education, employment or training at the end of Year 11.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs benefit greatly from the high quality, individual care and support that the school provides in partnership with a wide range of outside agencies. Nevertheless, this does not always result in good progress for all these pupils, because the school has not ensured that expectations for their progress are high enough.
- The school is very proud of its harmonious relationships between pupils from different backgrounds and promotes equality of opportunity through its curriculum. In spite of this, leaders have not ensured that all groups of pupils make sufficient progress.
- Communication with parents is effective and most parents who responded to parental surveys conducted by the school are very positive about the quality of the information they receive about aspects of the school's work.
- The school maintains a positive relationship with the local authority and currently benefits in particular from effective support for the improvement of provision in English.
- Safeguarding meets all statutory guidance, including for pupils who attend off-site provision.
- **The governance of the school:**

- The role and impact of the school's governance is expanding as new skills and experience are reflected in the membership of the governing body. Since the last inspection a new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed and governors have restructured their committees to make them more efficient. They have also audited the skills and expertise of members. Governors have appropriate key roles and responsibilities that support and monitor the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils and meeting the needs of those with special educational needs. The governing body has a growing awareness of the use and some of the impact of pupil premium funding and members present an effective level of challenge to the work of the school, for example, in the sharper performance management targets set for leaders.
- Governors are aware of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement, including the quality of teaching. They are confident in the use of technical information on the school's performance and use it to question senior and subject leaders about pupils' achievement. However, this has not helped them to ensure that all differences in the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils, such as the disadvantaged and those with special educational needs have been eradicated.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Not all pupils develop enough resilience during their time in school to tackle the most challenging work and this inhibits their progress at the highest levels in tests and examinations. Although they do all they can to keep the school buildings tidy, some litter is left in the grounds at lunchtimes.
- Pupils conduct themselves very well in and around the school. They are very polite, well mannered and get on very well with each other and with their teachers. They are articulate and confident speakers, at ease with adult visitors. Staff in off-site provision confirm pupils' positive conduct.
- Pupils' overall attendance is high across the school, with only one significant gap, between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in Year 11.
- Permanent exclusions appear relatively high over time, but inspection evidence confirms that exclusion is only used for the most serious misbehaviour.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement. This is because the curriculum provides insufficient coverage of the risks associated with some aspects of life in modern Britain.
- Pupils whom inspectors met during the inspection say that they feel safe in school and this is confirmed by parents' responses in surveys conducted by the school.
- Pupils are aware of different kinds of bullying, including prejudiced-based, racist and cyber bullying. They can identify many adults in the school whom they can call upon if they have concerns.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when they are using computers or mobile phones.
- Almost all parents who completed the survey conducted by the school agreed that their child was safe, secure and well cared for at school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Despite improvements since the last inspection and leaders' strong commitment to professional development, teaching is still not securing the highest levels of progress for all pupils in all subjects. While much teaching is good over time, too little of it has the highest expectations of what all pupils can achieve.
- Teaching over time does not develop sufficient resilience in pupils to persevere with challenging tasks, for example in extended writing. For at least some pupils, the provision of too much support, in the form of worksheets and writing prompts inhibits this resilience. This was evident in work seen and observations of teaching and learning during the inspection.
- The school has made literacy a high priority for improvement but the expectations of lower ability pupils, in Key Stage 3 in particular, lack challenge, especially in writing.
- Where pupils work hard and make good progress, teachers' questioning is skilled and deepens pupils' thinking. Teachers engage pupils' interest effectively and ensure that all pupils, but especially the most able, are challenged or supported appropriately to express their views, write at length or solve complex

problems.

- Pupils rise to challenging expectations when teachers use excellent subject knowledge to explain difficult concepts clearly. There is high quality teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants to clear individual pupils' misconceptions step by step. This was seen in science and geography.
- Pupils' progress is slower when expectations are not as high, questioning does not extend their learning quickly enough or there is either too much or too little support for pupils' literacy.
- Pupils have appropriate chances to practise their mathematical skills in science and technology. They have regular opportunities to read a range of books, including e-books, and many read fluently and accurately. Expectations for writing are not high enough across different subjects.
- Senior leaders have put in place a clear marking policy but the policy is used variably by teachers in different classes and subjects. Much feedback identifies next steps but pupils' responses are sometimes too cursory to make a real difference to their learning. Middle leaders sometimes check for compliance with the marking policy rather than the quality of the teacher's marking and its impact on pupils' learning.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement has improved in the year since the last inspection. A broadly average proportion of pupils left the school in summer 2014 having achieved five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. Pupils' performance across their best eight subjects was significantly above average. Subjects in which pupils achieve well include art and design, French, geography and information and communication technology (ICT).
- There is no significant difference between the attainment and progress of pupils who speak English as an additional language or the relatively small proportion of pupils from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds compared to other pupils in the school and similar groups nationally.
- The previous decline in underperforming subjects, such as mathematics, has been halted, so that both the proportions of pupils making the expected and more than expected progress are now above average in that subject. However, in English there was a dip in achievement in 2014 and these proportions were below average.
- Although narrowing overall, in 2014 differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school were around three-quarters of a GCSE grade in English and one and a quarter GCSE grades in mathematics. When compared to non-disadvantaged pupils nationally the difference was around one and a quarter GCSE grades in English and half a GCSE grade in mathematics.
- The progress of some disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is broadly similar to that of their peers nationally in mathematics. It is well below expectation in English. The school has recognised this and has taken steps to ensure that teaching and small group work for this group and the work of teaching assistants will be more tightly focused on pupils' specific learning needs in the immediate future.
- There is still too much variability in pupils' progress across different subjects and year groups, so achievement is not yet good overall. This is partly because some pupils struggle to cope with the literacy demands of some subjects, such as history and geography. The school has established specific plans to rapidly improve the progress of these pupils, but it is too early to judge their impact.
- 'Catch-up' funding has been used to provide extra sessions for pupils who start Year 7 with lower than average literacy skills. This support is bearing fruit in rapidly improving aspects of reading and spelling for these pupils, so that the great majority have attained the expected standard in reading by the end of Year 7.
- The school does not enter pupils early for GCSE in English or mathematics. There is some early entry in core science but this is under review.
- The small number of pupils who attend off-site provision at Tameside College or local professional football clubs do well because courses are matched well to their learning needs and interests. There is effective communication between the school and college and football clubs involved and there are robust measures to monitor pupils' attendance and progress and keep them safe.
- The most able pupils make and exceed the progress that is expected of them in mathematics but in 2014 the progress made by pupils was significantly below average in English. This is partly because teaching does not always help them to develop the necessary resilience to cope with the most challenging questions in external tests and examinations. The school has taken appropriate action to remedy this and ensure that pupils reach higher grades in the future.

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	137020
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	450455

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	826
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carolyn Wright
Headteacher	Robert Hewitt
Date of previous school inspection	11 December 2013
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