

Blythe Bridge High School

Cheadle Road, Blythe Bridge, Stoke-on-Trent ST11 9PW

Inspection dates	24–25 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new headteacher has raised expectations and quickened the pace of change. Her impact is evident in all aspects of the school's provision and in pupils' outcomes.
- The quality of governance is good. The expertise of members of the governing body contributes very well to improving the school.
- Monitoring processes ensure that underperformance, whether in teaching or pupils' achievement, is identified promptly and effective extra support is put in place rapidly.
- The quality of support and professional development for staff is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning, which is now good. This in turn is helping pupils to make good progress.
- The new behaviour management policy is improving pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour well.
- The strong support provided for individual pupils, and groups of pupils, ensures that their academic and pastoral needs are met well.
- The quality and impact of marking and feedback at key stage 4 ensures that pupils are able to learn from their mistakes and improve the quality of their work.
- Pupils' attainment at GCSE is above average and all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability, are now making good progress from their starting points.
- The sixth form provides students with highly personalised provision and very strong support, which enables them to progress to their chosen destinations successfully.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The remaining gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school, and nationally, has not yet closed.
- Some teaching is not sufficiently challenging to stretch pupils, including the most able, as much as possible. As a result, some of the most able pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 are not attaining the higher grades they are capable of.
- Marking and feedback at key stage 3 are not yet having as positive an impact on improving pupils' work as at key stage 4.
- Not all parents feel as confident of the school's support for their children as the majority do.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Close the remaining gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally in different subjects.
- Ensure that teaching provides sufficient stretch and challenge to encourage pupils to do as well as they possibly can. Do this particularly for the most able in the main school and in the sixth form so that they make the progress they are capable of, are able to achieve the highest grades, and have aspirations that match their abilities.
- Improve marking and feedback at key stage 3 so that its impact on learning is as strong as at key stage 4.
- Promote further engagement with parents to ensure that all parents feel confident of the school's support for their children.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- All areas for improvement from the last inspection report have been effectively addressed.
- The headteacher leads by example and is making a difference to the school. She regularly teaches a number of classes and has a strong presence around the school. This gives her credibility with staff, who have the utmost respect for her and feel confident that she will not ask anything of them that she cannot do herself. She also has a very good reputation with pupils and a growing reputation with parents. She has improved the pace of change since taking up her role. Middle leaders feel that she and her senior leadership team provide them with opportunities to put forward new ideas. They feel confident to do so because leaders are listening.
- Leaders and governors set high expectations for pupils and staff and are establishing an ambitious culture in the school where all are expected to achieve well. Their self-evaluation of the school's performance is detailed and accurate. Improvement planning is thorough and well judged and links very well to realistic but challenging targets for the school as a whole and for its staff and pupils.
- A highly effective monitoring, support and review cycle is in place to ensure that underperforming pupils, and individual groups of pupils, are supported to improve the progress they make.
- The quality assurance cycle for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning is highly effective. The system enables areas for improvement to be identified promptly, professional development and support to be implemented swiftly, and impact to be evaluated.
- Leaders monitor the consistent implementation of the marking policy and the quality of its impact thoroughly because they see it as crucial in promoting pupils' learning. Individual support is planned and developed as a result of the school's marking and feedback system.
- Robust steps have been taken to improve the reliability and accuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' work and expected examination grades. This has been reinforced with external marking and moderation in English and mathematics.
- Effective line management and a thorough appraisal policy for staff promote accountability and high-quality teaching and learning. Very effective professional development opportunities are available for staff. Partnerships with other schools help staff develop key areas linked to the targets set for them to improve their work. Recently this included visits by staff, including teaching assistants, to a number of high-performing local schools to observe and learn from good practice elsewhere.
- The use of pupil premium funding is well targeted. For example, strong support has been directed to improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils in order to minimise the impact of absence on their learning. The attendance of this group has improved as a result. This, together with more tailored teaching, is resulting in their improving progress and the gap between their achievement and that of other pupils in the school, and nationally, narrowing.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. A wide range of extra-curricular activities supports the knowledge, skills and understanding of pupils. Pupils speak positively of the range of activities available. The curriculum is well planned to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to promote British values across all subjects. The quality and impact of this is monitored as part of ongoing quality assurance activities within subjects. The school holds the International School Award, which has a strong focus on this aspect of the curriculum. A European day of languages involves all departments and pupils, and the school contributes to the Stoke-on-Trent multi-faith celebrations. A comprehensive enterprise provision supports the development of pupils' work-related skills and all pupils in Year 10 undertake work experience. The school has gained the Careers Education, Information and Guidance award for the quality of its careers guidance provision.
- Part of the school's vision involves 'learning through leadership'. This provides opportunities to build leadership capacity and is reflected in the restructuring of the leadership team. Examples include middle leaders temporarily seconded to the senior leadership team, who complete 'closing the gap' projects about underperforming groups. The findings of these school-based research projects have been shared with staff and governors and are informing school practice.
- The school promotes equal opportunities, diversity and collaboration well. For example, it works hard to provide opportunities for, and increase the participation of, disadvantaged pupils. The Year 8 'make some noise' project, which involves boys eligible for pupil premium funding collaborating with visiting professional musicians, is an example.

- Increased communication, such as celebratory texts to parents about pupils' good behaviour and achievements, has been a focus of the new headteacher. There is a continuing need to promote this further. The school's own parent surveys are very positive and suggest that most parents would recommend the school to others. This is reflected in the record number of applicants for Year 7 places this year and the increased number of applicants from Year 11 pupils for a place in the sixth form. Despite these positive aspects, the headteacher and school leaders, including governors, are aware that there are still a few parents with whom they need to engage with more effectively to ensure that their needs and concerns are being met.
- There are strong transition links with local primary schools, in particular in relation to Spanish, mathematics, physical education and for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Assessment in English and mathematics when pupils join the school in Year 7 allows the school to promptly identify and target weaknesses. Extra support for reading and mathematics is strongly embedded at key stage 3 and used successfully so that pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are improved to enable them to successfully access the key stage 4 curriculum.
- The local authority has provided valuable support to the new headteacher since she took up her post.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Members of the governing body have a very good mix of experience and relevant expertise, which they use well to challenge and support school leaders.
 - Governors have a very good understanding of pupils' outcomes and are very clear about the importance of progress, especially in this school where attainment on entry is generally above average.
 - Some aspects of their work are still developing, such as links with curriculum leaders.
 - They contribute fully to school self-evaluation and work with the headteacher to provide strong strategic direction for staff.
 - Governors' minutes indicate a good level of challenge and a thorough focus on safeguarding and the needs of individual groups of pupils, including children looked after, pupils who have special educational needs or disability and disadvantaged pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Policies and procedures are rigorous and a strong team approach ensures the safety and welfare of pupils. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of safeguarding procedures, what actions to take when they have concerns, and who to contact, as a result of effective and regular training.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching and learning has improved across all subjects and key stages and is now consistently good. Good relationships are the norm between pupils and teachers. This is reflected in the very positive climate for learning evident in almost all lessons observed during the inspection and reported in the school's monitoring information.
- Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and provide well-planned learning activities that mostly engage pupils very effectively so that they learn well as a result. Mostly, pupils are self-motivated and have effective learning skills.
- The effective and regular use of information about pupils' starting points, and assessment of their progress and the achievement gaps between different groups of pupils, informs and supports teachers' planning. This has contributed to the good quality of teaching and learning now evident in the school and is resulting in the narrowing of achievement gaps between different groups of pupils.
- Assessment is systematic and much emphasis is placed on high-quality marking and feedback. For example, in English at key stage 4, teachers' feedback involved challenging extension questions, which encouraged pupils to improve their work and extend their learning very effectively. In one example, the detailed marking of boys' work enabled the teacher to identify precise areas for improvement and to closely tailor further work to their specific needs. As a result, the gap between the progress made by boys and girls in the class was narrowing rapidly. At key stage 4 this approach has had a highly positive impact on the quality of pupils' work, on their ability to learn from their mistakes, and on the progress they make. It is not as strong at key stage 3.
- Where learning is strongest, teachers provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils from all different starting points, including the most able. This is linked to probing questioning that helps pupils develop

higher-order thinking skills and extend their learning.

- Where learning is weaker, there is insufficient challenge for pupils from different starting points, and particularly the most able. Teachers' questioning does not promote deep thinking or challenge pupils sufficiently. Similarly, it does not engage the whole class in learning from questions and answers that are not directly aimed at them. Teachers are not as effective at establishing and addressing individual needs. Very occasionally, these weaknesses result in low-level disruption.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Tutor groups that include pupils from Year 7 to 11 and the house system support and contribute positively to pupils' personal development. Older pupils and sixth-form students provide good role models for younger pupils.
- Arrangements to support pupils who have special educational needs or disability are strong. This ensures that they are able to engage and work alongside other pupils, reflecting the strength of the school's equalities and accessibility policies. Appropriate adjustments are made to curriculum and provision as necessary.
- Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of different forms of bullying. Bullying incidents are well recorded and dealt with promptly and effectively. Pupils have a good understanding of the impact of their behaviour on others and their personal responsibilities.
- They feel safe and secure in school and know those they can talk to about problems, including peer mentors and teachers, and are confident they will be listened to. Incidents of derogatory or aggressive language are not tolerated and are effectively dealt with.
- E-safety is handled proactively to ensure that pupils are aware of the dangers and responsibilities associated with social media. The programme of personal, social and health education incorporates awareness of issues such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- The few pupils on alternative provision benefit from courses that meet their needs and promote their personal development, behaviour and welfare well. Comprehensive risk assessments have been undertaken for these placements.
- Case studies of pupils facing difficult circumstances indicate effective coordination of personal development, welfare and behaviour issues alongside academic progress. They reflect the strong team approach evident in the school where pastoral and academic staff work together to ensure a consistent approach.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Behaviour around the school indicates that pupils demonstrate respect, courtesy and good manners.
- School records indicate that the new behaviour policy, which rewards good behaviour rather than applying sanctions for unacceptable behaviour, has reduced incidents of low-level disruption in lessons and around the school considerably. Parent surveys suggest they have a positive view of behaviour and pupils rate the policy highly. The policy promotes a strong link between achievement and behaviour, which is evident in pupils' good attitudes to learning.
- Attendance is currently in line with national averages and improving, including that of disadvantaged pupils. Systems are focused on early and proactive identification and there is a strong focus on support for vulnerable pupils and their families. School evidence indicates the positive impact of these strategies. The number of exclusions is lower than the national average.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Achievement in all year groups and most subjects has improved since the last inspection and since summer 2015. Overall standards of attainment, progress in English and mathematics, and added value in science, humanities and modern foreign languages are all now above average or well above average.
- Attainment has been consistently above average in recent years and this trend is set to continue, with

standards expected to increase further in summer 2016. Assessment records indicate that the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of others in the school, and nationally, is narrowing rapidly, although further work is needed to completely close these attainment gaps.

- The progress being made by pupils in all year groups and in most subjects is improving. Overall levels of progress in English and mathematics for Year 11 pupils were just above the national average in 2015. Assessment records indicate that current Year 11 pupils are making much better progress than those in previous years. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs or disability, and other groups, such as boys, is improving rapidly towards that of other pupils in the school and nationally. While some gaps have closed, this is not yet the case for the gap between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in school and nationally.
- The most able pupils currently in the school are achieving as well as their classmates and make the progress expected of them given their starting points. However, not enough reach the highest grades in external examinations for GCSE. Despite this, in 2015 the most able disadvantaged pupils made progress in English that was better than others in the school and nationally.
- The school uses a wide range of schemes to raise reading ages and improve pupils' vocabulary. Work in pupils' books indicates consistent identification of spelling and grammatical errors by teachers, corrections by pupils, and generally a high standard of presentation. This is reflected in improved rates of progress and standards of attainment, particularly in English.
- Pupils in alternative educational settings make similar rates of progress to their peers in school.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stages in their education, training or employment. This is reflected in the above-average proportion of Year 11 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, going on to sustained education and training opportunities.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leaders are aware that low numbers in many subjects in the sixth form are unsustainable in the long term. However, governors have made the decision to maintain small courses in order to meet the individual needs of students and retain teacher skills for the future, particularly as the number of applicants to the sixth form is growing.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning in the sixth form reflects the rigour seen in the main school and, as a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. There is a strong focus on identifying underperformance – which is sometimes due to low aspirations of students. The school is now well focused on raising the aspirations of students so that they achieve in line with their ability.
- Added value for vocational subjects is in line with, or above, national averages for all subjects and for all groups. In academic subjects, added value in recent years has been below national averages overall because, as at key stage 4, the most able are not achieving the highest grades sufficiently often. Declining attainment over time in academic courses has now been reversed and the positive achievement in vocational courses continues to improve further. The school comfortably meets interim minimum standards for both academic and vocational courses. Data indicates that almost all students move to appropriate next steps of higher education, employment or further training.
- The curriculum is highly personalised and takes good account of individual needs. It is broad and balanced and provides students with appropriate skills to enable them to pursue career goals and next steps well. It meets all the requirements of the 16 to 19 programme, including support and resit opportunities for those who did not gain C grades at GCSE English and/or mathematics.
- Students get good provision to develop broader skills, including work experience for all in Year 12 that links well to their chosen future plans and subjects being studied. The tutorial system provides a comprehensive coverage of important topics. These include study skills, UCAS and employment/apprenticeship applications, interview skills, careers advice and guidance, as well as e-safety and other topics about how to make students aware of the range of risks they face. A higher education and apprenticeship evening is provided for parents to ensure that they are well informed about the opportunities available.
- The sixth-form curriculum includes elements of the school's 'learning through leadership' approach, with students being encouraged to participate in a range of leadership activities such as student council, peer mentors, Duke of Edinburgh Award and paired reading schemes.

School details

Unique reference number	124396
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10009271

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	957
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Siddley
Headteacher	Mrs Rachael Johnson
Telephone number	01782 392519
Website	www.bb-hs.co.uk
Email address	office@blythebridge.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 March 2014

Information about this school

- A new headteacher has been appointed since the last inspection. The new headteacher became interim headteacher in September 2015 and substantive headteacher in March 2016.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is below the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- More than 95% of pupils in the school are of White British origin.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below the national average.
- Eight pupils attend alternative provision off-site for part of the week. The providers are the Cedars Short Stay School, Stoke-on-Trent College and Stoke City Football Club.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard.
- The school meets requirements for the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Parts of 35 lessons were observed across all key stages and subjects. Some were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. In addition to a scrutiny of books in lesson observations, one inspector undertook a scrutiny of books with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the chair and members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors met with pupils around the school during non-lesson times and had more formal meetings with groups of pupils from Year 7, Years 8 and 9, Years 10 and 11, and sixth-form students.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's self-evaluation, minutes of governors' meetings, case studies of vulnerable pupils receiving additional support from the school, and the school's quality assurance, monitoring and assessment records. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding procedures and related policies.
- At the time of the inspection, 26 responses were recorded on Parent View. Fifty-two responses to Ofsted's survey were received from staff. In addition, inspectors reviewed the school's own surveys of parents', pupils' and staff views.

Inspection team

Gwen Coates, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Bray	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Onyon	Ofsted Inspector

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