

Light Hall School

Hathaway Road, Shirley, Solihull, B90 2PZ

Inspection dates 4–5 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well, particularly in mathematics. They enjoy their learning and are keen to do well. Rates of progress are improving in English and science.
- Most teaching is good, and it is sometimes outstanding. In lessons, teachers generally adapt tasks in line with students' individual needs and ability levels, and provide a good balance of challenge and support.
- Teachers are promoting students' key literacy and numeracy skills increasingly well across different subjects.
- Students' behaviour is good and often exemplary. They say that they feel safe, bullying is rare and adults support them well. They are polite and thoughtful of others.
- The inspirational headteacher is well supported by a strong senior team and highly effective governors. They have been rigorous in their drive to improve the quality of teaching and the impact is now being seen in rising achievement, particularly in English and science. They show an outstanding capacity to improve the school further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet consistently good enough to promote outstanding achievement.
- Not all teachers use information on students' progress effectively to plan their lessons. As a result, some activities do not fully challenge those of the highest ability.
- A small minority of teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent, so students do not always know how well they are doing or how to reach their targets.
- Attendance rates are only average and persistent absence is above average, particularly among the group of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 58 lessons, seven of which were seen together with one of the school’s senior leaders. They also made a number of further short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students, governors and staff, including subject leaders. A telephone conversation took place with the school’s improvement partner.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at policies, the school’s own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and its development planning, records of lesson monitoring and governing body meetings, information about students’ progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students’ work.
- The views of the 80 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, together with a phone message from one parent. Inspectors also took account of the school’s recent survey of staff opinions.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Robert Bourdon-Pierre	Additional Inspector
Patrick Taylor	Additional Inspector
Simon Hughes	Additional Inspector
Beverley Mabey	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Light Hall School converted to become an academy on 1 August 2011. When its predecessor school, Light Hall School Specialist Maths and Computing College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is broadly average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is average, with the largest groups being of Indian and Pakistani origin. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and students who have a parent in the armed forces, is just below the national average.
- Five students follow a variety of part-time alternative courses at Solihull Sixth Form College. Four students attend full-time alternative courses at the James Brindley School, the Fairbridge Trust or South Birmingham College.
- Some students are entered for mathematics GCSE prior to Year 11, the large majority being entered during their final year.
- New subject leaders have been appointed for English, mathematics and science since the school became an academy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching consistently good or outstanding, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - make good use of assessment information to plan appropriately challenging tasks and support to meet students' individual needs, and particularly to fully stretch those of the highest ability
 - routinely plan tasks that actively involve students in their learning, promoting their independent learning skills
 - give written feedback that identifies students' next steps in learning and encourages them to respond by attempting a new challenge or practising skills.
- Raise levels of attendance by reducing persistent absence, particularly of students known to be eligible for free school meals, by communicating the importance of good attendance to students and their parents.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students typically enter the school with above-average levels of basic skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics. All groups make good progress from their various starting points, and the proportion making or exceeding expected rates of progress now compares favourably with national levels in both English and mathematics.
- There is no significant difference in progress between ethnic groups, and the students who speak English as an additional language achieved even better than their classmates in 2012 as a result of the well-planned support they received.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are very well supported and make good progress. Year 7 'catch-up' funding enables students identified as requiring extra support for literacy and numeracy to be taught in a new form group so that they can be closely supported by additional adults, enabling them to achieve well. This is particularly evident in the support provided to accelerate reading. The various strategies used are matched closely to students' individual needs and include catch-up courses and one-to-one tuition for the weakest readers.
- In 2012 the proportion of students achieving five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics was just above the national average, and overall attainment in mathematics was well above average. The school has successfully tackled the relative underperformance in English, and current assessments and inspection evidence show that attainment in this subject is rising strongly.
- Results in science were below average in 2012 as a result of staffing instability that the Year 11 students had experienced during Key Stage 3. Improved leadership of the subject and better teaching are now having an impact on raising students' achievement.
- Leaders are striving to raise standards of literacy across the school. Effective individual support throughout Key Stage 3 and beyond, along with close checking of students' progress, is leading to strong and sometimes dramatic improvements. Students are frequently encouraged to read out loud, and in most subjects teachers make good use of subject-specific technical vocabulary.
- Pupil premium funding is used appropriately to provide staff training, additional support for literacy and numeracy, and to ensure that disadvantaged students are fully included in trips and other activities. The attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above that achieved by this group nationally in English and particularly in mathematics. In 2012 the average GCSE grade of these students was only slightly behind that of their classmates. The school's current data show that the gap is closing further.
- Early entry for mathematics GCSE is used effectively to ensure that students' achievement in this subject is maximised. Once students reach their target grades they are able to follow extension courses in the subject such as further mathematics or statistics.
- Students studying on other sites achieve well as a result of the practical and appropriate courses provided. Their attendance, progress and well-being are frequently checked by the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- The lessons seen during the inspection and the records of leaders' regular checks on teaching show that most teaching is good, some is outstanding, and a small amount requires improvement.
- In the best lessons, tasks are matched closely to students' abilities. For example, in an outstanding English lesson the teacher provided individual challenge for the most able students, making clear her high expectations that they could achieve beyond their target, while at the same time providing additional support for those who required it.
- Students told inspectors how much they enjoy lessons that are fun and provide opportunities for group work and to be active. For example, students in a Year 8 drama lesson showed great excitement as they were challenged to develop the skill of synchronising their movements, first in a pair but then in a group. This enabled the development of close collaboration and teamwork skills, and also promoted their cultural development as they modelled their work on Indian ritual dance.
- Where teaching occasionally requires improvement, it is typically because teachers have not planned in sufficient detail to enable learning to build progressively, or to enable students to be actively involved in their learning and develop independence. In a small minority of lessons, teachers miss opportunities to use assessment information fully to ensure that all ability groups are appropriately challenged. Here all students are required to undertake the same task, even though those of the highest ability sometimes find it too easy.
- The promotion of literacy is becoming a strong focus across all subjects. Most teachers promote the technical language for their subject well and pay attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, some miss opportunities to check on such details when they mark students' books, or to write key words on the board.
- Inspectors observed some outstanding examples of written assessment, for example in art where students are provided with clear advice on how to reach their targets. In English, increasing consistency in good practice across different age groups is helping students to be clear about their next steps in learning. However, in other subjects students are not always so clear about how well they are doing. Teachers are missing opportunities to encourage students to try another challenge, practise skills or correct mistakes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well in lessons, and told inspectors that this is typically the case. Their behaviour around the school is calm and well ordered. During the inspection they showed particular thoughtfulness towards those taking external exams, keeping quiet when near the examination room even when unsupervised.
- Students' relationships with adults and with each other are warm and supportive, and they say how much they value the support that their teachers provide. Students are polite and welcoming to visitors.
- Students who find it difficult to behave consistently well are well managed through consistent support including in the internal isolation room. The school shows 'zero tolerance' for unacceptable behaviour, and takes firm action to ensure that learning is not disrupted and everyone is treated with respect.

- Students say that there is little bullying. They have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take and say that adults quickly provide support should they need it. Consequently they say that they feel safe and well cared for. Older students receive special training to enable them to act as mentors for younger ones, and regularly provide support during Year 7 form time.
- Students enjoy taking responsible roles through the school council, charity fundraising and the prefect system. Those who spoke to inspectors about these roles showed maturity and pride in their positions of responsibility.
- Parents and staff agree that behaviour is good and that students feel safe. One parent commented on how much they value the support of the special needs coordinator.
- The pastoral team ensure that all students are known and cared for as individuals, and that those facing challenging circumstances receive the support they need to enable them to achieve well. They are working to promote the importance of good attendance, and pupil premium funding has enabled the appointment of an attendance officer to reduce persistent absence, particularly of those known to be eligible for free school meals. However, these measures have not yet had sufficient impact on raising attendance levels this year.

The leadership and management are good

- Many aspects of leadership are outstanding, although leaders have not yet ensured that the quality of teaching and attendance are consistently good or better. They have taken strong action to maintain high standards of behaviour and above-average attainment despite recent staffing changes, and through rigorous monitoring at all levels have identified the right priorities to move the school forward. The consistently outstanding leadership of mathematics, the improvements in English and science, and a clear track record of improving the practice of individual teachers indicate an outstanding capacity to improve further.
- The headteacher has been inspirational in ensuring that his vision is shared by all involved in the school community. He is supported by an extremely strong team, whose individual skills and experience are used well to lead all aspects of the school's work. They in turn are very well supported by the outstanding governing body.
- The school has thorough and well-established procedures to manage staff performance. Regular checking of teaching ensures that any underperformance is quickly identified, and it is then addressed through a comprehensive programme of support, including the sharing of good practice across the school. The headteacher has very high expectations of all his staff and has been uncompromising in his belief that students' achievement should be the priority, taking thorough steps to ensure that teaching continues to improve.
- Newly qualified teachers are well supported, including by the school improvement partner, and have already shown themselves to be effective. The local authority provides 'light touch' support at the school's request. This includes regular visits to build the capacity of subject leaders and carry out lesson observations.
- Leaders meticulously track students' progress and tackle any underachievement of groups or individuals through well-targeted support, so all have an equal opportunity to succeed. This support includes additional revision sessions at weekends and during the holidays, and individual mentoring by specialist teachers.

- The leaders of English, mathematics and science, well supported by the senior team, are tackling previous underachievement by establishing consistent practice and holding teachers to account. Their leadership is now beginning to show an impact in English and science, while mathematics remains a strength of the school.
- Students study a wide range of subjects that are closely matched to their needs and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students told inspectors how much they enjoy the range of trips and special days that promote their well-being. For example, they told inspectors how their excellent work in art had been influenced by trips to local galleries. The options in Key Stage 4 include both academic choices and work-related courses on other sites, for example in construction.
- The school makes strenuous efforts to engage parents through a wide range of media, parents' evenings and focus groups. The family liaison officer provides support for students and their families who face challenging circumstances. These efforts have not yet had a full impact on raising attendance levels.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school extremely well through detailed information about all aspects of its work. They play an active role by liaising with subject leaders to observe teaching. They provide very good challenge and support for the school, and compare its performance with similar schools nationally. They fully support the school's leaders in maintaining high standards of behaviour and raising the quality of teaching. Governors take an active part in ensuring that staff pay increases are linked to their performance, and in tackling the causes of underachievement. They undertake training to improve their skills, and effective financial management is a key strength of their work. Governors are fully aware of how pupil premium funding is spent, and check its impact on raising the achievement of the students it supports. They ensure that safeguarding procedures and practices meet current government requirements.

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	137231
Local authority	NA
Inspection number	413455

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Shirley Moss
Headteacher	Vic Scutt
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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