

Colmers School and Sixth Form College

Bristol Road South, Rednal, Birmingham, West Midlands B45 9NY

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2018

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders in the school are highly reflective, honest and driven. They make bold decisions to make sure that all pupils make progress, regardless of their background.
- Following disappointing English and mathematics results in 2017, across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, current pupils make good progress. Progress in science has improved markedly.
- Leaders have designed a new 'Bridge' curriculum for Years 7 and 8. This curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Governors support and challenge leaders effectively. They make sure that leaders have the resources required to meet pupils' needs.
- While improving, disadvantaged pupils' progress is below that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- A small number of pupils find it difficult to meet the school's high expectations of behaviour.
- The sixth form offers a high-quality experience to post-16 students. Many go to university after Year 13 and embark on a range of exciting courses.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is generally good. Relationships between teachers and pupils are strong.
- Fixed-term exclusions are above the national average but are effective in improving pupils' behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average. Persistent absence is decreasing but is higher than the national average.
- Leaders have introduced a new assessment system which is effectively improving teaching. Consequently, teachers match work to pupils' needs more consistently.
- Sometimes, leaders' tracking of the impact of their interventions is not as sharp as it needs to be.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils, by:
 - continuing to monitor the impact of the new assessment system
 - continuing to monitor the impact of the 'Bridge' curriculum on the literacy and numeracy skills of Years 7 and 8
 - further improving pupils' attendance.
- Sharpen leaders' monitoring of pupils' persistent absence and behaviour so that they:
 - have a clearer view of the impact of their attendance-support strategies on groups of pupils
 - have a clearer view of the impact of their behaviour interventions on groups of pupils.
- Further reduce the incidents of poor behaviour by the small group of pupils who find it hardest to meet the school's expectations.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, governors and teachers are united in having the highest aspirations for pupils. They are highly reflective, accurate and honest about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors scrutinised all of the school's action plans and monitoring information. This showed that leaders pinpoint the exact actions that they need to take to improve the school and that they think deeply about the effectiveness of most of their actions.
- Teachers' training is a strength of the school. Many teachers commented on the bespoke opportunities that leaders had provided for them which prepare them for future leadership opportunities.
- Recognising that many pupils need to accelerate their progress in literacy and numeracy, leaders have developed a new curriculum for Years 7 and 8. They have renovated a building so that pupils in key stage 3 have a stimulating environment which is a bridge between primary school and high school. The new 'Bridge' curriculum for Years 7 and 8 is delivered by highly effective specialists. As a result, pupils are making good progress. They are becoming better prepared for their GCSE courses because their basic skills are more secure. This new curriculum and facilities have been in place for a relatively short period of time and are very different from previous arrangements. Leaders are monitoring this new curriculum diligently to make sure that it continues to improve pupils' experiences, and acknowledge the need to continue to do so.
- Leaders have introduced a new, streamlined assessment system. This system is effective because it produces simple-to-understand assessment information. As a result, teachers know who is behind and needs to catch up. Leaders can track groups' progress and intervene when necessary.
- Leaders' use of extra funding for disadvantaged pupils is effective. While these pupils' progress is below that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points, it is improving.
- A new leader has taken responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. New leadership in this area has led to pupils' needs being better met, appropriate applications for education, health and care plans and a sharper focus on teaching that allows these pupils to make progress.
- Sometimes, leaders' monitoring of pupils' behaviour and attendance is not sharp enough. While their interventions are effective in improving behaviour and attendance, they do not have swift access to information about some groups. Leaders are aware of this and have plans in place to improve this aspect of leadership.

Governance of the school

- Governors effectively challenge and support school leaders because they are well informed, having visited other schools to identify good practice.

- Governors allow leaders to innovate, support their innovations and make sure that leaders monitor any new initiatives carefully.
- Governors make sure that they regularly assure themselves of the effectiveness of safeguarding, timely referrals and secure safeguarding processes.
- Governors have a keen understanding of financial matters and competently ensure that leaders have the resources to meet pupils' needs.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders responsible for safeguarding are appropriately trained. All staff have up-to-date training and know what to look out for to keep pupils safe. New staff have an effective induction and this means that they know the school's safeguarding processes before working with pupils.
- Leaders keep a close eye on safeguarding concerns in the community and respond to these as they arise. This culture of vigilance to the constantly changing risks that young people face leads to a strong safeguarding culture.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan lessons that are often highly structured and very well planned. As a result, pupils' progress follows. In many areas of the school, inspectors saw work which was well presented and showed pupils' strong progress over time. Teachers often take opportunities to point out what pupils are doing well, which leads to an increase in confidence.
- Some teaching is inspirational. Where it is, pupils' work is prolific and strikingly well presented, and their progress rapid. Pupils at key stage 3 thoroughly enjoy the way in which the curriculum combines subjects to develop their deeper understanding of the world. For example, in a music lesson seen by inspectors, the teacher had a contagious passion for the subject. Pupils were highly engaged in their work and understood the links between musical discipline and effectiveness in life.
- Many teachers use questioning skilfully to improve pupils' knowledge. For example, in an art lesson, inspectors observed pupils articulately responding to their teacher's questions about artistic themes. In a geography lesson, the teacher used questioning to move pupils from factual recall and the use of technical vocabulary to detailed explanations of gorge erosion.
- In mathematics, inspectors saw work that was invariably well pitched to pupils' needs. Pupils say they are consistently challenged. In English, teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Pupils respond positively to teachers' feedback and strive to improve their work.
- Leaders have ensured that assessments are accurate. They have done this through internal and external moderation. As a result, teaching is improving because teachers know who is doing well and who needs extra teaching to improve their progress. New target-setting systems ensure that pupils have high aspirations and teachers know

pupils' potential. As this system is relatively new, leaders acknowledge that they need to consistently review and refine it.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Over their time in the school, pupils become increasingly confident, approaching their lessons with determination. Inspectors saw many examples of pupils' diligent and prolific work and confidence in discussion and group work.
- Pupils say that there are some bullying incidents in school, but that their teachers deal with them well. Inspectors scrutinised the systems for dealing with bullying, through training for teachers and the way in which incidents in the past have been dealt with. This showed that the school is highly sensitive to bullying, is proactive in its approach and deals with issues well. The instances of bullying are falling over time.
- Teachers make sure that pupils' welfare is improved both in and out of school. For example, they teach pupils about sexting and gang, drug and knife crime. They make sure that pupils know about sexual exploitation, consent and trafficking. As a result, pupils feel more confident and well informed about risks.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have recently launched a new behaviour policy which sets out much clearer sanctions and rewards. It has raised expectations of pupils' behaviour. Many pupils and staff agree that this is already having a positive impact on behaviour in lessons. Inspectors saw very few incidents of poor behaviour during the inspection.
- Around the school site, in halls and corridors, pupils are calm, mature and respectful of one another. Inspectors' observations and the school's own records show that this is typical. Pupils and staff say that the changes that leaders made to the social-time arrangements are having a positive impact on the space pupils have, and so on their behaviour too.
- Pupils' attendance overall is broadly in line with the national average. While persistent absence is improving, it is still higher than the national average. Leaders know this and have a range of strategies in place which are helping pupils to attend more consistently. However, leaders' tracking of persistent absence patterns could be better.
- Permanent exclusions are well above the national average. However, these exclusions are used appropriately. Fixed-term exclusions and repeat fixed-term exclusions are above the national average but are beginning to fall. They are effective in maintaining pupils' good behaviour in the school. However, leaders are committed to continuing to reduce them.
- In lessons, pupils' behaviour is generally positive. They do what their teachers ask, work with purpose and try their best. On rare occasions, pupils disrupt lessons. A small number of pupils have not responded to leaders' high expectations. Leaders are

working closely with these pupils to help them to improve their behaviour. In some cases this is effective, but some pupils are harder to support.

- Leaders arrange appropriate alternative provision placements and pupils benefit from this. Their placements help to improve their attendance, behaviour and progress. Leaders regularly visit these pupils to make sure that they are safe and that pupils' personal development and welfare are secured.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders have effectively addressed the turbulence in staffing and lack of challenge for the most able that led to a dip in progress in English and mathematics in 2017.
- Observations in lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work show that current pupils are making strong progress in English and mathematics, and that leaders have effectively addressed the issues that led to this dip.
- As a result of weak progress in English and mathematics, Year 11's overall progress scores in 2017 were weak for all pupils, and disadvantaged pupils. This followed much stronger progress in 2016.
- Leaders and teachers have made a marked improvement in pupils' progress in science. Following weak results in 2016, all groups of pupils made considerably better progress in science in 2017. Progress in humanities also improved, and progress in languages was broadly in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making stronger progress across the curriculum.
- Around one third of pupils in Year 7 join the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills. Leaders have introduced robust entry assessments so that they know which pupils are likely to struggle with their basic skills. The new 'Bridge' curriculum supports pupils' progress by focusing strongly on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.
- As a result of well-pitched interventions, those pupils with the weakest reading skills make swift progress. This helps pupils to become ready for their GCSE courses.
- Pupils go on to a range of destinations following their time in the school. The proportion of pupils who go on to employment, education and training has risen and is in line with the national average. Around one third of Year 11 pupils choose Colmers Sixth Form College.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The small number of students in the sixth form means that the published data on post-16 progress does not reflect the progress students make. In religious education, English and physical education, students' progress was weak. However, current progress in these subjects is much stronger, as shown by AS examination results, and progress in other subjects, such as psychology, is very strong.
- Students enjoy their lessons. Teachers use a wide variety of tasks which challenge them. Inspectors saw examples of independent work, development of research skills, sharing ideas and deep discussion. Teachers effectively ensure that students do not

merely recount formulaic answers but learn to reason and argue for themselves.

- Leaders have designed an appropriate curriculum. They have recently introduced vocational courses so that a wider range of pupils in Year 11 can access the post-16 curriculum, and more of these courses will begin in September 2018. They ensure that students are on appropriate courses and, as a result, retention is now higher than in the past.
- Students value the non-qualification activities leaders arrange. There are assemblies, pastoral time, talks from experts, visits to university and apprenticeship experiences. Students say that this range of opportunities inspires them. Some have been spurred to apply to university as a result. Most students do work experience. Their placements are varied and well matched to their aspirations. Many students are aiming for careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects as a result of their deep interest in these areas. Most students successfully apply to university.
- Leaders make sure that students are supported to keep themselves safe. Students say that they know who to go to if they have any problems, and that talks on sexual and mental health and recent work on sexual consent are useful.
- Students value their sixth-form experience and are glad they chose to stay in the sixth form. They enjoy the challenges of their courses, have clear views about what they want to do in future, are supported well by teachers and succeed as a result.

School details

Unique reference number	103563
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10045510

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,091
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy McHale
Headteacher	Barry Doherty
Telephone number	0121 4531778
Website	www.colmers.bham.sch.uk/
Email address	enquiries@colmers.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 November 2014

Information about this school

- Colmers is a medium-sized secondary school with a small sixth form.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is well above the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- The school has a separate sixth-form centre on site. 'The Bridge', a separate block for key stage 3 pupils, opened recently on the school site.
- The school has a small number of pupils in alternative provision at Bournville College, Southside Construction and Bridging Skills.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with governors, a representative of the local school improvement consortium, senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of staff who are new to the school. They spoke with pupils both formally and informally, took account of the 74 responses to an online pupil survey and observed lessons in all key stages.
- Pupils' current progress was evaluated by scrutinising pupils' work and sampling their assessments and external examiners' reports. Inspectors also explored the way in which the school assesses pupils across the school and took note of recent external AS examination grades.
- Parents' and carers' views were considered through the 65 responses to Parent View and the 33 free-text responses. The views of staff were considered through the 55 responses to an online survey and meetings with around 30 members of staff who wanted to speak with inspectors about their views of the school.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding, bullying, attendance, behaviour and exclusions.

Inspection team

Dan Owen, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bianka Zemke	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gwen Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Byatt	Ofsted Inspector

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