

North Cestrian School

Dunham Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4AJ

Inspection dates

6–7 March 2019

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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The trust and the local governing body work effectively with leaders to drive improvement across the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and improving because of the appropriate, targeted training provided by leaders.
- The published outcomes for GCSE examinations are improving and pupils' attainment in 2018 was above the national average. However, the legacy of previous weaker teaching means that some older groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils, have not made as much progress as might have been expected.
- Leaders have provided detailed information to help teachers to meet the specific needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, these pupils are progressing well from their starting points.
- Leaders have provided time for pupils to learn from their mistakes and correct their work to make it better. However, some pupils find this difficult without help and support.
- At times, teachers do not help pupils to improve their basic literacy skills. Pupils often repeat punctuation, spelling and grammar errors.
- Leaders have developed an effective programme to support pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Pupils become respectful citizens who are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they display positive attitudes to learning.
- The curriculum is broad and well balanced. It is planned carefully to help pupils systematically build their knowledge.
- Leaders have dedicated a considerable amount of time to pupils' personal development. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They also consider broader issues such as equality, although their learning here can sometimes be superficial.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. All staff work towards creating a safe and caring environment for all the pupils.
- Attendance has improved steadily since the school became part of the trust. Attendance is now in line with historic national averages for all groups of pupils. The proportion of pupils who do not attend school regularly is reducing rapidly for all groups of pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Overcome the legacy of poor progress by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - provide challenge for disadvantaged pupils and the most able to help them make greater progress
 - support the improvement of basic literacy skills so that pupils, particularly the least able, develop fluency and accuracy in their writing
 - apply school policies so that pupils, particularly the least able pupils, are able to redraft and refine their own work.
- Further develop opportunities for pupils to develop a deeper understanding of issues relating to their personal development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school has a long-standing history within the community as an independent school. In 2016, the school became a free school within the Hamblin Trust. Since then, leaders have worked with the executive headteacher, the local teaching school and the local authority to ensure a successful transition to this new phase in its history.
- The conversion to a free school allowed leaders to secure funding to develop the site to accommodate an increased number of pupils. There has been an extensive refurbishment to the existing buildings, as well as considerable extension work. For the past three years, more pupils have entered the school in Year 7 than have left in Year 11 and so the school is growing rapidly. Leaders are coping well with this expansion.
- The headteacher and executive headteacher have brought together an effective leadership team to drive improvement and raise standards in the school. The leadership team has already delivered improvement in pupils' behaviour, pupils' attendance and the support given to pupils with SEND. There are appropriate plans in place to continue these improvements into the future.
- Leaders have refined the processes that they use to quality assure teaching. This has given them an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. They have introduced a responsive process to deliver training that meets teachers' needs. As a result, historic weaknesses in teaching have been addressed and teaching now is good and improving. Consequently, pupils are starting to make stronger progress. This is particularly true for pupils currently in key stage 3.
- Leaders have redesigned the curriculum to help pupils to become independent, life-long learners. The curriculum is now well sequenced in the individual subject areas and leaders feel that the next step is to make cross-curricular links to help pupils transfer their learning across the subject boundaries.
- Pupils' standards of literacy are good overall. However, some teachers do not help pupils to improve the basic literacy skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar. This leads to pupils, particularly those of lower ability, repeating basic errors and hinders pupils' ability to express their ideas.
- Pupils choose the subjects that they wish to study for GCSE in Year 9 and are encouraged, but not expected, to consider the EBacc suite of subjects. The increase in the number of pupils on roll is allowing leaders to extend the range of subjects available to pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Leaders' new behaviour policy has provided a school-wide, consistent approach to behaviour, both in the classroom and during social time. This has brought about considerable improvements in the behaviour of pupils. Consequently, the proportion of pupils that are excluded for a short period of time has steadily reduced.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are well developed through a rich curriculum of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and spiritual, moral, social and cultural activities (SMSC). Pupils enjoy the curriculum and participate in the activities that teachers use to provoke thought and consideration.

- Leaders are using the pupil premium funding effectively to bring about improvements in attendance, behaviour and progress for disadvantaged pupils. The catch-up funding is also used appropriately; however, it is too soon to see evidence of sustained improvement.

Governance of the school

- Trustees and governors work closely together to support and challenge the headteacher. Governors are generally knowledgeable and well informed. They are aware of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve. The trust has provided high-quality leadership support that is helping to bring about improvement.
- The trustees delegate the responsibility for performance and standards across the school to the governing body. They ensure that there are members of the local governing body that possess the necessary skills and expertise to take on this responsibility effectively.
- Governors work closely with school leaders to ensure that the processes in place to keep pupils safe are effective. Governors have all received appropriate, up-to-date training on safeguarding and the key issues that face their pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safeguarding policy has been updated annually and training has been given to all staff to ensure that they know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil. Leaders provide a pastoral meeting for staff fortnightly and updates to safeguarding are given during these meetings when necessary. Leaders have ensured that appropriate systems are in place so that only adults who are safe to work with pupils are employed in the school.
- Leaders have been particularly vigilant about pupils' safety during the ongoing building work. Leaders have produced a detailed risk assessment with the local authority's health and safety team to ensure that all possible precautions are taken to ensure the safety of both pupils and staff. They give pupils regular briefings on the changes to the site as the building work progresses and make sure that there is appropriate supervision in any area that causes congestion while the work takes place.
- There is a comprehensive programme of PSHE for pupils. Pupils explained to inspectors how they keep themselves safe online. They knew what to do if either they or a friend were being bullied. They told inspectors that bullying was not an issue in school, but on the rare occasions it does happen, it is dealt with promptly by teachers. Pupils said that they liked and trusted their teachers and there was always somebody to talk to if they needed help.
- Leaders work cooperatively with providers of alternative provision to ensure that all safeguarding checks are in place and that pupils attend regularly. Attendance is closely monitored, and absence followed up promptly. Leaders visit regularly to ensure that pupils are safe and making good progress.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching across the school is good. Leaders have introduced processes for the improvement of teaching and learning that allow teachers to hone their skills. Leaders deliver fortnightly training to staff that is based on the teaching standards and the expectations of the teaching and learning policy. Teachers are now typically providing more effective challenge to help most pupils make stronger progress. Teachers are well motivated and enjoy the sessions where they can share good practice and talk about learning. Teachers that need extra help benefit from support given by senior leaders and heads of faculty.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to create engaging lessons. Pupils are typically attentive and active participants in lessons. They listen carefully to their teachers and annotate their work with key learning points during classroom discussions. This helps pupils to redraft and make improvements to their work.
- Most teachers use questioning effectively. When this is the case, teachers' questioning is directed to individual pupils and checks their understanding. Many teachers use questioning to help pupils to think deeply about their learning and adjust their ideas. As a result, pupils are making better progress.
- Leaders' policies allow time during teaching for pupils to reflect on their work and annotate or redraft their work. Many pupils use this time effectively and their work improves as a result. However, some pupils find it difficult to work independently to improve their work and need help from their teachers to improve their skills in this area.
- Leaders have worked with staff on the quality of assessment to ensure that it is accurate. Leaders provide opportunities for teachers to moderate across departments and with other schools. Teachers are more confident in their assessments and their accuracy is improving. This improved assessment has helped teachers to plan learning that is more effective in meeting the needs of pupils, particularly at key stage 3.
- The support that teachers have been given by the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has helped them to use teaching assistants more effectively in the classroom. Pupils with SEND are more engaged in their learning and making better progress as a result.
- Improvements in learning are being driven by middle leaders, who now hold teachers to account for the progress of different groups of pupils in their classrooms. Teachers and leaders intervene to support pupils that have fallen behind in their learning and, as a result, pupils are catching up on missed learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are generally respectful to each other and to adults in the school. They say that bullying does happen sometimes, but it is rare. Teachers deal quickly and effectively with bullying as soon as it happens. Pupils that spoke to inspectors said that they trust

their teachers and can talk to them. They know that there is always someone to go to if they have a problem or any concern. Pupils say that they understand different types of bullying, such as that which takes place online.

- Leaders provide a comprehensive curriculum to support pupils' personal development. This is well resourced and covers all aspects of pupils' personal development. Pupils enjoy these sessions and develop a good understanding of many issues, including equality, relationships, drugs and employability. However, sometimes pupils do not develop a deeper understanding of the issues that impact on their personal development.
- British values are promoted well. Pupils develop a clear understanding of democratic principles, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect. The school's orderly environment and pupils' clear consideration for others indicate pupils' understanding of the concepts taught and that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Careers education has not covered all expected areas in the past; however, this year a new six-week programme has been introduced. This delivers careers guidance across all year groups. Pupils are helped to raise their aspirations. They benefit from a thorough and methodical careers education, which is supported by excellent information, advice and guidance about the opportunities that are available to them in the future.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and they are typically attentive and engaged. They complete their homework diligently and consequently are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. Books are typically well presented and demonstrate that pupils take pride in their work.
- There are a small number of pupils that attend alternative provision. Leaders ensure that the provision effectively meets the needs of the individual pupils. As a result, these pupils are well cared for and safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The introduction of the new behaviour policy has brought about considerable improvement in pupils' behaviour. There is a three-year declining trend in the proportion of pupils that are excluded for a fixed period. This reduction means that the previous high rates are now much closer to the national averages. This decline is also true for groups of pupils, the exclusions for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are both showing improvement, although still higher than the national average for all pupils.
- Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils understand teachers' expectations and respond promptly to any instructions given to them. Pupils' positive behaviour has continued throughout the time of the building work on the school premises despite considerable disruption in the quality of the school environment.
- Pupils behave well around the school site, including during breaktime and lunchtime. They enjoy one another's company and that of the many staff on duty. Pupils take responsibility for their own behaviour and self-regulate when they are not supervised.

- Pupils' attendance has been in line with the national average for the past two years. However, the proportion of pupils that are regularly absent from school is slightly higher than the national average and this is particularly true for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have put several strategies in place to help these pupils to attend regularly. For example, leaders have increased the hours of the educational welfare officer and introduced rewards for high attendance. This is starting to have an impact and, this year, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils that are regularly absent from school has reduced considerably.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The published outcomes for pupils' GCSE examinations show that attainment in English and mathematics is strong. The proportion of pupils that attain a standard pass in both English and mathematics is well above the national average. This is also true for those that gain a good pass in English and mathematics.
- While pupils' attainment in many areas is strong, their progress is below national average. This is partly because pupils with higher prior attainment do not make the same progress as similar pupils nationally. Historical outcomes also show that the progress made by the relatively small number of disadvantaged pupils is also below average. There were promising improvements in the 2018 progress measures, which were stronger than in 2017, but there is still more to be done.
- Outcomes for pupils who joined the school during key stage 4 are not as high as for those who have been in the school longer. For some of these pupils, a full range of academic examinations would not have been suitable. Although this had a negative effect on the overall achievement headlines for the school, leaders could demonstrate that they had done their very best by these pupils.
- Current pupils in Years 10 and 11 are continuing the trend of improved progress, although this is not as consistently strong across all groups of pupils. Leaders' own data shows that the legacy of poor teaching has impacted on the progress of some groups of pupils. In particular, there is still a difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils.
- Pupils' progress in key stage 3 is showing considerable improvement. Current pupils in key stage 3 have benefited most from the developments in teaching and learning. Evidence from a detailed scrutiny of pupils' work, supported by leaders' information about the achievement of current pupils, indicates that all groups of pupils are making much better progress than in the past. Disadvantaged pupils displaying progress that is closer to that of other pupils, and pupils with high prior attainment, are being challenged to make greater gains in their learning.
- The improvement in teaching is having an impact across the curriculum and pupils are making better progress in all subject areas. This is particularly true in English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages.
- The training given to teachers to help them to provide appropriate help and support to pupils with SEND is also having a positive impact, particularly in key stage 3. This, together with improvements in attendance, has ensured that pupils with SEND are now making good progress during their learning.

- Pupils' typically strong attainment and improving progress, together with the high-quality independent careers' advice provided by leaders, ensure that pupils move to high-quality destinations that allow them to move forward on their chosen career.

School details

Unique reference number	143104
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	10087795

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	514
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr Duncan Battman
Headteacher	Mr Lee Bergin
Telephone number	01619 281856
Website	www.northcestrian.co.uk/start.html
Email address	office@northcestrian.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- North Cestrian School is a smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils that are eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of girls in the school is in lower than the national average.
- In key stage 4, a small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Trafford Medical Education Services, Ed Start Manchester and Gorse Hill Studios.

- The school is a member of the Hamblin Trust. The trustees are responsible for the core governance functions of setting the school's direction, holding the headteacher to account and ensuring financial probity. The scheme of delegation sets out clearly which powers have been delegated to the local governing body and executive officers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects, including joint observations with school leaders.
- Inspectors formally scrutinised pupils' work from Years 8, 9 and 10, across a range of subjects alongside school leaders. They also looked at pupils' work when observing teaching and learning.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. Inspectors spoke with a group of curriculum leaders, a group of teachers and a group of non-teaching staff.
- Inspectors also met formally with three groups of pupils from Years 7, 9 and 10. Inspectors also spoke with pupils informally during social times.
- An inspector spoke with five members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation, including school policies, safeguarding procedures, leaders' self-evaluation and the leaders' school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the three responses to the pupil survey, the 49 responses to the online staff questionnaire, the 125 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 74 free-text responses from parents and carers.

Inspection team

Erica Sharman, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kath Harris	Ofsted Inspector
Annette Patterson	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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