

Coombe Dean School

Charnhill Way, Elburton, Plymouth, Devon PL9 8ES

Inspection dates

28–29 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make good progress across a range of subjects. In particular, middle-ability pupils do not make sufficient progress and so their understanding is not secure in several subject areas.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is weak. Too few of these pupils attain the qualifications they are capable of.
- Sixth-form students do not achieve well enough on applied general courses. Their progress is regularly below the national average.
- Teaching is not consistently good across the school. Much teaching is not well planned and so does not demand enough from pupils of all abilities.
- Some teachers do not identify pupils' misconceptions precisely, and so gaps in pupils' knowledge are not picked up swiftly and dealt with.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently good. Too many pupils do not take pride in their work.
- Some pupils lose concentration too easily in lessons. They quietly switch off and this holds back their progress.
- The rate of pupils' attendance is rising but is still below the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance remains stubbornly low.
- Senior leaders' strategy for improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils has not had enough impact.
- Middle leaders' evaluation of teachers' effectiveness is too generous. Middle leaders have not improved the quality of teaching quickly enough in their areas of responsibility.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has a clear vision to further develop the curriculum and ensure that more pupils attain well in academic qualifications.
- Senior leaders share the headteacher's vision. They understand the changes that are necessary to raise pupils' achievement.
- Pupils' communication skills are being developed well in Years 7 and 8.
- Senior leaders have improved the systems used to record and evaluate safeguarding concerns. As a result, they identify concerns quickly.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of all groups of pupils and plan work that is suitably demanding for them
 - checking pupils' understanding swiftly in lessons to make sure that misconceptions are overcome and pupils are ready for further challenging work
 - making sure that disadvantaged pupils make better progress
 - improving the progress of sixth-form students on applied general programmes.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving pupils' motivation to learn by ensuring that lessons are well planned and interesting
 - building on the work to improve pupils' attitudes to their learning that has already begun in key stage 3
 - increasing the rate of pupils' attendance, especially that of disadvantaged pupils, so that it is at least in line with the national average.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing the accuracy of middle leaders' self-evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses in their departments
 - providing middle leaders with further training to help them ensure that teaching is more consistent across a broad range of subjects
 - increasing the effectiveness of the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The headteacher has brought the school through a period of considerable change. Since his appointment in September 2015, an entirely new leadership team has been appointed and senior appointments have been made to the support staff. Throughout this period, he has been determined to ensure that any changes are sustainable and made for the long-term benefit of the school and its pupils.
- Senior leaders support the headteacher well. They are in the process of changing the curriculum so that it provides a strong academic grounding for pupils' future education or training. However, they have not managed to maintain consistently good teaching across the school in this period. Their efforts to help disadvantaged pupils make good progress have not been effective enough.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and committed. For example, many of them have readily accepted the chance to take part in leadership training programmes in the near future. However, they have an overgenerous view of the quality of teaching in the school. They have not raised the standard of teaching, learning and assessment in their subject areas sufficiently to ensure good progress for all groups of pupils.
- Senior leaders have coherent and credible plans for improving the school. They share these plans effectively and so staff have a good understanding of the school's priorities for improvement. Several initiatives have been introduced recently but they have not had time to bring about a significant change.
- The leadership of teaching has been effective in some areas. For example, there is a consistent approach across the school to the way lessons begin. This helps pupils initially settle well to their learning. The headteacher encourages all staff to discuss the latest research findings and apply them to their practice. Teachers share ideas well across other schools within the trust. This has established an open culture in the school and so teachers are well motivated.
- Senior leaders have introduced a new system this year to help manage the performance of teachers. This is leading to better use of monitoring information and clearer targets for improvement. Newly qualified teachers are supported well by senior staff as they begin their teaching careers.
- Senior leaders are gradually updating the curriculum to allow more pupils access to the English Baccalaureate suite of academic subjects in key stage 4. Successively more pupils each year are completing these qualifications. However, while this process of development is ongoing, the inconsistent implementation of the curriculum means that some pupils do not achieve the academic outcomes they are capable of.
- Pupils study the key stage 3 curriculum in Years 7 and 8. Senior leaders are developing their approach to key stage 3. They have introduced an initiative to help pupils explain their ideas orally. This is helping pupils to learn more effectively by organising their thinking more efficiently. The curriculum fosters respect for different religions and cultures. Pupils understand our democratic processes and the importance of the rule of law. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- The well-considered personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme provides pupils with a good balance of experiences that address the particular needs of pupils at this school, for example a newly introduced initiative that is designed to help pupils take responsibility for their own attitude to learning.
- The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities that enhance the curriculum well. For example, at the time of the inspection, pupils were preparing a drama production called 'Just Add Dragons'.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well by a programme of assemblies and other activities. However, tutors do not follow the school's guidelines for tutor time consistently, and so the messages provided in assemblies are not reinforced effectively.
- Senior leaders ensure that funding to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is used appropriately. Funding provided to support Year 7 pupils who need to catch up with literacy and numeracy skills is used well.
- The great majority of staff who responded to the online survey believe the school is well managed. In particular, many staff commented that they feel well supported working in this school.
- A higher proportion of pupils than seen nationally leave the school roll during Years 10 and 11 each year. School leaders are aware of the reasons pupils leave, all of them legitimate. For example, a large number of these pupils are foreign nationals who return to their country of origin, having spent a short period of time in this country. Some pupils transfer to other schools because their families move away from the area. Senior leaders promote an inclusive ethos at the school. As well as those leaving, many pupils join part way through the year. These pupils are accepted by the school when they transfer to it from other schools in the Plymouth area.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school has changed significantly since the previous inspection. Senior leaders report on the performance of the school to the trust board via a local governing body. The local governing body includes individuals with considerable educational experience. They are knowledgeable and skilful. The trust board and the local governing body together provide suitable challenge to senior leaders. However, their efforts have not secured good progress for pupils since the trust was formed.
- The trust ensures that the school meets its responsibilities for safeguarding pupils. It holds senior leaders to account for the performance of all staff. The trust ensures that the headteacher's performance is scrutinised appropriately.
- The trust maintains appropriate financial oversight of the school's budget. This includes the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, Year 7 pupils who need to catch up and pupils with SEND. Governors are acutely aware of the need to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors are committed to improving the quality of education at the school. They are passionate about supporting pupils in this area to succeed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's inclusion team has expertise in protecting pupils' well-being. Pupils feel confident and comfortable in seeking help if they need it.
- Staff are given regular training in safeguarding and so they are aware of the signs of potential abuse. All staff understand the system for referring concerns to the designated safeguarding leader. The school introduced a new system this year for logging information about pupils' welfare. This allows rapid analysis and communication of information when suspicions are raised.
- Senior leaders take appropriate steps when they have concerns over a pupil's welfare. They contact external agencies when required and follow up their concerns to check that agreed actions have been taken.
- Senior leaders have established a vigilant culture at the school. They are acutely aware of the vulnerability of pupils who are persistently absent from school. They have made improving attendance a high priority for the future.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because pupils' experience varies too much between subjects and between classes within subjects. This leads to wide variations in the progress pupils make from the same starting points. For example, there are significant differences in pupils' progress in German and French.
- Many teachers provide activities for pupils that enthuse them and help them to learn well. However, too much teaching is not of this standard. Too often, it is not planned well enough to provide suitable stimulus for pupils of differing ability and aptitude within each class. For this reason, some pupils' learning is held back.
- Not enough teaching accurately identifies pupils' misunderstandings. When pupils do not understand important ideas – and this is not recognised quickly – pupils' misconceptions persist. Pupils then have difficulty understanding the next idea in the sequence of learning. Over time, this leads to poor motivation and weak progress.
- Teachers' expectations of the most able pupils are suitably high in English and mathematics. These pupils are now stretched by demanding work in these subjects.
- Even though teachers are not all specialists in their subjects, they demonstrate a firm understanding of the subjects they are teaching. Pupils recognise this and so they have confidence in their teachers.
- Teachers across the school use well-established routines for encouraging pupils to read widely. Pupils read regularly in lessons and at home. As a result, many pupils develop an interest in reading.
- The majority of teachers help pupils improve their writing skills well. For example, they correct pupils' spelling mistakes. However, some teachers do not consistently correct spelling and grammatical errors in pupils' work and so these pupils' literacy skills do not develop as quickly as they should.

- In many departments, teachers use effective systems for setting targets and assessing pupils' work. For example, in music, pupils have a good understanding of how well they are learning because the department uses a clear system to show pupils how they can improve their work. In art, teachers provide pupils with clear guidance about the skills they need to master. This guidance is helping to improve pupils' skills in this subject.
- Teachers set homework for pupils regularly. This allows pupils to extend their learning at home. Parents, carers and teachers use an online system to track homework and support pupils to complete it successfully.
- A majority of parents who responded to the Parent View survey believe that pupils are well taught.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Too many pupils do not yet have good attitudes to their learning. Where teachers' expectations are not high enough, pupils do not take sufficient pride in their work. This leads some pupils to regularly produce work which is not their best.
- Pupils show good awareness of the need to be responsible citizens. Teachers use a sports leadership programme well to develop pupils' leadership skills and enable them to be resilient. Some pupils are given additional responsibilities, for example to guide visitors around the school or to sit on the student leadership team.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school. They are taught about a range of risks. For example, during the inspection, Year 9 pupils were being taught about the principle of consent in relationships. Year 9 pupils were taking part in a child assault prevention workshop. Consequently, pupils are very aware of the dangers of risk-taking behaviour.
- Since September 2018, senior leaders have reorganised the arrangements for supporting pupils with emotional and health needs. Pupils value highly the help – including counselling – that members of staff provide. Pupils feel well supported at school.
- Senior leaders ensure that pupils receive high-quality careers education and guidance. More resources have recently been invested in this area of the school's work, with the result that work-related activities are coordinated well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- A minority of pupils find it difficult to focus on their work in lessons. When they are given work that is either too hard or too easy, they lose interest quickly. This leads some pupils to sit back and give up. They are left with gaps in their understanding.
- The school's efforts to promote good attendance have resulted in an increase in the rate of pupils' attendance over the past year. However, attendance is still just below the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' rate of attendance is low. Too many of

these pupils are persistently absent from school. This vulnerable group of pupils are over-represented in the school's exclusion figures.

- Pupils' conduct around the school site at break and lunchtime is generally calm. The great majority of pupils are polite and well mannered. However, several pupils commented that the dining area is overcrowded at lunchtime and this sometimes leads to boisterous behaviour.
- Although a small number of parents expressed concern about bullying, the majority of parents who responded to the Parent View survey believe that staff tackle bullying effectively. Pupils are aware of the different forms that bullying can take. They said that, while incidents of bullying do happen, teachers deal with them quickly.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is not strong enough in a range of different subjects. Differences in the quality of teaching across the school lead to wide variations in the standards pupils attain. For example, in 2018, pupils did not attain well in art, business studies, digital applications, French, product design and religious studies.
- Many middle-ability pupils do not have a good grasp of the fundamental ideas in the subjects they are studying. Consequently, they do not have a secure base of knowledge and so find it difficult to make progress towards higher GCSE grades.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is poor in comparison to other pupils nationally. Too many disadvantaged pupils leave school without attaining well in a core group of academic qualifications.
- Pupils' progress in GCSE English in 2018 was around the national average. Lower-ability pupils make good progress in English and so attain well compared to other pupils with similar starting points. Pupils' progress in mathematics last year was not as strong as in previous years, but it was still in line with the national average. Nevertheless, fewer pupils – particularly disadvantaged pupils – attained a strong pass in both GCSE English and mathematics than could be expected.
- The most able pupils are being challenged more now than in recent years. As a result, they make good progress and attain well in most subjects, for example in science. The most able pupils attained well last year in GCSE physics, chemistry and biology.
- Key stage 3 pupils work to a high standard in creative arts. Many examples of pupils' artwork are on display around the school. Pupils enjoy physical education. They appreciate the wide range of sports that are available to them and the facilities that are available.
- Pupils in Year 7 who have weak literacy and numeracy skills are given effective extra help to catch up with other pupils. They receive additional phonics teaching where necessary, and so their basic reading skills are strengthened quickly.
- In most subjects, pupils with SEND are given effective extra help. As a result of the support they receive, the majority of these pupils make good progress from their starting points.

- A very small number of pupils take part in programmes at off-site alternative provision. These pupils' needs are being met well because the programmes are carefully tailored to each individual.
- Pupils understand the possible career paths open to them when they leave school because they are given good advice through an effective careers education programme. However, many pupils' options are not as extensive as they could be because they have not achieved the qualifications they are capable of.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- There are wide differences between students' achievement on academic programmes and applied general programmes. Many students taking applied general courses do not achieve their potential. Students' progress on these courses from their different starting points is not good enough. Students taking academic courses – mainly A levels – make much better progress. In particular, students studying A-level English literature and A-level physics make strong progress.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form shows the same inconsistencies as in the main school. Some teaching is well planned, challenging and effective. For example, in A-level sciences, teachers have suitably high expectations of students and practical work is taught well. However, in too many other subjects, students' experiences are not as good because teaching is not sufficiently well planned to challenge and enthuse them.
- Leaders of the sixth form are aware of the variation in the quality of teaching between different courses. However, they have not established effective plans to bring about rapid improvement and so the weaknesses remain.
- Students' study programmes reflect their interests and aptitudes well because they are given good-quality individual advice about which subjects to study. A high proportion of students stay on the courses they begin in Year 12 and complete them in Year 13. Their study programmes include activities to promote PSHE and suitable work-related learning activities. As a result, students develop employability skills well.
- Most students understand how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations because a well-organised programme of events makes them aware of a range of risks. Even so, some students do not have a thorough enough understanding of the dangers of extremist ideologies and radicalisation.
- Students' attitudes are good. The majority use their study time wisely. Students are keen to be involved in the life of the school and give their time willingly. For example, they listen to younger pupils read. These activities build students' confidence and make a valuable contribution to the main school.
- Students are given timely advice about future career possibilities. A high proportion of students gain and sustain places in employment or education. Many students secure places at university when they leave.
- Students who start 16 to 19 study programmes without attaining suitable qualifications in English and mathematics are given additional tuition in these subjects. A high proportion of these students attain a higher grade when they resit these qualifications.

School details

Unique reference number	136558
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10038760

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 comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,035
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	157
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Iain Grafton
Headteacher	Richard Woodland
Telephone number	01752 406 961
Website	www.coombedean.co.uk
Email address	office@coombedean.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 September 2012

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Westcountry Schools Trust. This is a multi-academy trust consisting of five secondary schools and eight primary schools in the Plymouth area.
- The school was one of the co-founders of the trust when it began in September 2017.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2015. All except one of the current senior leadership team have been appointed since then.

- The school is an average-sized secondary school. The proportion of pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding is average. The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average. However, a significant number of these are from Spain. They join the school for short periods of time, usually between three and six months.
- An unusually high number of pupils leave the school roll in Years 10 and 11.
- A very small number of pupils attend off-site alternative provision at ACE multi-academy trust in Plymouth.
- The headteacher is the chair of the Plymouth Learning Trust inclusion committee. This is a group of headteachers that manage the movement of pupils between schools in the Plymouth area.
- The school is part of the Plymouth Teaching School Alliance and the South West Teaching School Alliance.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a serious incident involving a child who attends this school that had occurred since the previous inspection. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and the chief executive officer of the trust. A meeting was held with the chair and vice-chair of the local governing body and the chair of the trust.
- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups, some jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work in lessons and from samples of books.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5. Inspectors spoke to many pupils informally around the school at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour logs, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Inspectors took account of 184 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, 61 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 61 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Paul Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Simons	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Collins	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah McGinnis	Her Majesty's 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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