

The Hawthorne's Free School

Fernhill Road, Bootle, Merseyside L20 6AQ

Inspection dates

13–14 September 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies greatly across year groups and across different subjects.
- The work set for pupils is often not challenging enough, including for the most able. Some learning time is wasted in completing tasks that do not require pupils to think.
- Pupils make slow progress in humanities and there is little sign of this changing because some teachers have poor subject knowledge.
- Over time, pupils' progress in mathematics and some other subjects has been slow. The pace of learning in lessons is still not fast enough to be certain that pupils catch up quickly.
- Some pupils have difficulty accepting leaders' high expectations of behaviour and conduct.
- Pupils' literacy skills are weak. Many have poor handwriting and this slows the progress that they make across their subjects.
- Attendance overall is low and shows little sign of improvement. Extra help provided for some pupils and their families is not making enough of a difference.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are absent, and excluded, far more often than their classmates. As they are not attending regularly, this is slowing their progress.
- Very recent changes in leaders' roles and responsibilities mean that some leaders do not know enough about the strengths and weaknesses of their areas.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher, fully supported by staff and governors, is committed to raising aspirations for pupils from the community. As a result, the school is starting to move forwards.
- The broad and balanced curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to develop as British citizens while improving their academic achievements.
- Staff know individual pupils and their families well, so additional help provided is well targeted at their needs.
- Pupils' achievement in Spanish continues to go from strength to strength. Pupils make exceptional progress because of highly effective teaching.
- Support provided by the trust for teachers to develop their teaching skills and knowledge of the curriculum is effective. A culture of sharing effective practice has been created by leaders.
- Safeguarding is effective and pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and therefore accelerate pupils' progress, by teachers:
 - using the information that they have on pupils to plan work that builds on what they already know
 - planning tasks that encourage pupils to think harder about their work, or to apply their learning
 - making sure that no learning time is wasted through unnecessary repetition or mechanistic tasks.
- Ensure that teachers who are non-specialists act on the support that they receive to improve their subject and curriculum knowledge, especially for teachers of history and geography.
- Improve the attendance of all pupils, but especially those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Provide further support for pupils in managing their own behaviour, thereby reducing exclusions, especially for those who join the school under fair access or as managed moves from other schools.
- Ensure that leaders and managers use the information available to them more carefully and insightfully so that they have a more accurate view of:
 - what is working well and what is less effective
 - trends or patterns such as in attendance and behaviour information.

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

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The new headteacher is fully committed to the trust's vision to improve the opportunities available for pupils at this school. Staff share this vision and willingly follow his lead as they work to broaden the range of experiences for pupils, including many who are extremely vulnerable.
- The headteacher has reviewed many of the systems and procedures in the school since his appointment about a year ago. He has introduced many changes to improve the standard of education for pupils. Some of these changes have only recently occurred so it is not possible to see the difference that they are making.
- Standards over time have varied greatly across subjects. Pupils in key stage 4 are still battling to overcome a legacy of weaker teaching in the past. However, pupils in key stage 3 are starting to benefit from changes made to the curriculum and improvements introduced to teaching.
- Leaders recognise the urgency to improve attendance overall, which continues to be low, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Some actions are reaping benefits. Most pupils attend school regularly and some, who have had very low attendance in the past, show marked improvements in their attendance. However, help given to families of a core group of pupils who are persistently absent is failing to make any difference.
- Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities have very recently changed. As a result, some leaders do not know enough about trends, what is working well or what activities are failing to make a difference, leading to inaccurate self-evaluation.
- Teachers appreciate the training that they receive to improve their skills. They also appreciate the many opportunities made available to them to share effective practice with others, including with other schools in the trust. Leaders check on the impact of this support through regular observations of teaching and learning. However, the variability in the effectiveness of teaching seen during the last inspection continues, especially in lessons taught by staff who are not subject specialists.
- Pupil premium funding is used to provide disadvantaged pupils with extra help in literacy and numeracy. Funding is also used to make changes to the curriculum, including the use of off-site alternative provision and specialist help for pupils who have emotional and mental health concerns. However, the additional funding is not fully effective. As a result, wide differences in achievement for disadvantaged pupils compared with their more advantaged classmates continue in some year groups and in some subjects.
- Considerable overlap exists between pupils eligible for support through pupil premium funding and those who have low attainment in English and mathematics on entry who are entitled to support through Year 7 catch-up funding. Extra support to help pupils with their reading is successful. In 2016/17, all pupils receiving literacy support while in Year 7 improved their reading age by at least 12 months. Extra help for numeracy resulted in less marked improvements.

- Support for pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is effective. Funding for these pupils is used effectively and high importance is given to pupils' social and emotional well-being. Pupils acknowledged how previous anxiety issues reduced upon joining the school through the support that they received. Although pupils' progress is carefully monitored, and extra help is tailored to pupils' needs, checks on the group's attendance are not carried out with the same rigour.
- Leaders and teachers benefit from the support provided through the trust and the opportunities to work with colleagues in other schools that this creates. A common trust approach to schemes of learning and assessment is in place and leaders are confident in the accuracy of teachers' assessments because they are checked and moderated across trust schools.
- The broad and balanced curriculum has a good effect on pupils as it provides many opportunities that prepare pupils for life and to develop into well-rounded British citizens. Visits to universities successfully raise pupils' aspirations. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is promoted through trips to theatres and museums. It is also developed through extra-curricular clubs such as debating, sporting activities and a combined cadet force.
- Pupils' understanding of British values is well supported through the curriculum. For example, democracy is promoted through the 'student parliament'. Pupils take on responsibility as ministers, for example for charity, education, health and community.
- Transition arrangements from Year 6 are managed successfully. Pupils told inspectors that they have several opportunities to visit the school before they start, including attending coffee mornings with parents. Leaders use analyses of Year 6 tests to identify key gaps in learning in English and mathematics. Schemes of learning in Year 7 are modified as a result. Pupils told inspectors that transition could be even better if they could meet their form tutor before they started and if they knew if their friends were in their classes.

Governance of the school

- During the inspection, it was not possible to meet with many governors from the local governing body. However, those who spoke with inspectors, including staff governors, demonstrated their passion and commitment to improving the quality of education provided for pupils in the local community.
- Governors are well aware of the budget constraints in the school as a result of the falling number of pupils on roll since the previous inspection. This led to staff redundancies last year, including the deputy headteacher and other teachers.
- The vice-chair, who has responsibility as the safeguarding governor, is suitably knowledgeable and skilled as a result of training attended, including on the use of assessment information.
- Governors were not aware of the inadequacies of the school website because they do not check this themselves, nor do they receive a report on the effectiveness of the school's internet monitoring and filtering system. A new school website is currently in design to tackle the omissions.

- Governors visit the school regularly, including to observe teaching and learning. This helps them to gain first-hand evidence of the improvements being made to teaching and learning.
- Reports on the pupil premium spending and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are regularly presented to governors to keep them informed about the difference these funds are making. Governors do not challenge leaders regularly enough to make sure extra support given to pupils is fully effective across all subjects and year groups.
- Governors appreciate the 'traffic light' coding on the school's improvement plan because they can quickly evaluate the pace of change. However, the impact of some actions on improving pupils' outcomes is not always clear.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Checks on staff recruited to posts in school are carried out rigorously and accurate records are kept. Staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe because of the effective training that they have received.
- Leaders engage well with parents to make sure pupils are safe. Support through outside agencies is organised quickly to provide early help for families needing this support.
- Weaknesses identified in checks on the attendance of pupils who attend alternative provision were quickly tackled during the inspection and new, effective procedures are in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because there is too much variability in the effectiveness of teaching across year groups and subjects. This slows learning for some pupils.
- Teachers' planning does not make effective use of their knowledge of individual pupils' starting points or prior learning. Consequently, the work set by teachers is sometimes not sufficiently challenging for some pupils.
- Pupils who complete tasks early, or who grasp concepts quickly, have nothing else to do while they wait for others to catch up, wasting valuable learning time. Time is wasted in copying out the lesson objective from the board. Slow writers do not get to the more important task of learning subject vocabulary and other key words to extend their learning.
- Teachers set tasks that are sometimes overly repetitive or mechanistic and do not require pupils to think harder about their work or demand them to apply their learning. As a result, pupils make slower progress than they should.
- Teachers' subject knowledge varies, leading to errors or misconceptions not being tackled well enough. This occurs, for example, in humanities lessons that are taught by non-specialist teachers.

- Teachers are typically highly skilled in the way that they question pupils, particularly in Spanish. They use a variety of different question styles to build confidence in the recall of subject knowledge and vocabulary. Most teachers routinely ask pupils to 'explain' or to consider 'what might happen if', which deepens their understanding.
- Pupils' understanding of mathematics is improving because teachers make sure that pupils are taught the correct methods to develop their understanding. Pupils are routinely expected to explain their work to others. This is supporting the development of their reasoning skills.
- Teachers consistently apply whole-school literacy and numeracy policies in all lessons. Where the literacy or numeracy task challenges pupils to think and links with the work planned that lesson, it supports learning well. For example, in an art lesson pupils had to write a few sentences to explain how the artist had made a picture look real. This led nicely into the work on 'photo realism'.
- Support in lessons provided for pupils who speak English as an additional language helps pupils to access the full curriculum. This is because a teaching assistant translates resources to the home language for pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils know how to demonstrate respect for one another because they are taught this through their 'values-based' curriculum. Pupils also develop resilience and an understanding of the skills needed to become leaders.
- Pupils follow the school's 'ASPIRE code' (aspiration and achievement, self-awareness, professionalism, integrity, respect, endeavour) which is modelled well by staff. For example, respect for everyone is demonstrated each lesson through pupils greeting the teacher with a welcoming handshake.
- Pupils say there is very little bullying but, when it does occur, it is stopped quickly by teachers and pastoral leaders.
- Pupils have a good understanding of differences, including those related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. They told inspectors that 'everyone is welcome in our school'. Pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures is experienced first-hand through their friendships with new arrivals to the country, including asylum seekers.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe from a wide range of threats, including when using the internet and social media. They have a good understanding of injustice and equality. For example, pupils told inspectors it was unfair that Year 7 pupils were always the last year group to go into dinner. They also shared their concern that disadvantaged pupils had to queue for their 'free meals ticket'. Leaders immediately changed procedures during the inspection in response to these concerns.
- Careers education is effective and includes a range of strategies, including careers fairs and visits to university. The proportion of pupils who continue in education,

employment or training when they leave the school, although below the national average, is rising.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Attendance continues to be stubbornly low and shows little sign of improvement overall. In 2016/17, attendance for all pupils continued to be below average although Year 7 had much stronger attendance than pupils in other year groups.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are more frequently absent than their classmates. Leaders do not routinely monitor patterns in attendance for these groups frequently enough. They therefore do not know whether strategies to tackle the high absence of these groups are working. However, leaders know individual pupils well and have detailed case studies of the help given to individual pupils and their families.
- Exclusions continue to be high, with more disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, excluded than their classmates. Many exclusions are given to pupils who did not join the school in Year 7. These pupils have difficulty accepting leaders' high expectations for conduct and managing their own behaviour.
- Some pupils become bored and fidgety when the pace of teaching slows and learning time is wasted, resulting in off-task behaviour. This is not always managed well enough by teachers.
- The behaviour of pupils who take part in off-site alternative provision is not checked often enough. Procedures were changed during the inspection and plans are in place for this to happen more regularly.
- Pupils are smartly dressed and wear their uniform with pride. Pupils move quickly to lessons and arrive on time. Most pupils demonstrate a good attitude to learning, settling quickly to the tasks set by teachers.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Outcomes require improvement because there is wide variation in different subjects and the progress pupils make varies considerably. Over time, pupils have made slow progress in mathematics, history and geography compared with their much stronger progress in English and Spanish.
- Progress of pupils in mathematics is showing early signs of improvement in key stages 3 and 4. However, pupils continue to make slow progress in history and geography in some year groups and the progress made by pupils in science varies.
- Only about half of Year 11 each year attain the standard in English and mathematics that allows them to continue with their education at college or in school sixth forms without the need to repeat these examinations.
- Disadvantaged pupils' achievement in English and mathematics has been below that of their more advantaged classmates each year since the previous inspection. Assessment

information on current pupils suggests that disadvantaged pupils continue to underachieve in geography in most year groups and in English, mathematics and science in some year groups in key stage 3. However, differences are narrowing.

- Very few most-able pupils are on roll, including the most able disadvantaged. Work to accelerate the progress of this group continues to be an ongoing focus of teacher training in school.
- Pupils' poor literacy skills are slowing progress across the school. Some pupils have weak writing skills and poor handwriting. Work is often illegible, with letters that are badly formed, spaces missing between words and words not written correctly on the line. Grammatical skills are also weak. A few pupils are unable to write sentences correctly using capital letters and a full stop.
- Reading skills are improving rapidly as a result of the school's highly successful approach to providing additional help for weak readers. Pupils who require extra help are quickly identified and are provided with a whole range of strategies to help them to improve their reading. These strategies include the use of reading schemes and withdrawal from other activities to read to an adult.
- Leaders' approach to increasing reading for pleasure includes silent reading sessions each morning. Teachers join with pupils in this activity and model their love of reading. However, further checks are needed to make sure that all pupils are reading books of a suitable level of difficulty.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well compared with their aspirational targets, especially those pupils who are in key stage 3. They make good progress because the support that they receive is effective.
- Achievement in Spanish at key stage 4, identified as a strength at the previous inspection, has gone from strength to strength as pupils continue to beat the national average. This demonstrates pupils' exceptional progress from low starting points, as pupils have very little experience of learning a foreign language. This is the result of effective teaching.

School details

Unique reference number	138260
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	10036771

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	217
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Hilary Wilcock
Headteacher	Peter Gaul
Telephone number	0151 922 3798
Website	www.hawthornes.org.uk
Email address	head@hawthornes.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 June – 1 July 2015

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2012 as a free school. Since the previous inspection the school became part of the Great Schools Trust in September 2015.
- Overall governance of the school and statutory duties are the responsibility of the trust. Most of the functions of governance are delegated to the local governing body.
- The school is much smaller than average and the number of pupils on roll has fallen markedly since the previous inspection. The school has an above-average proportion of disadvantaged pupils.
- Almost all pupils are of white British heritage with a small proportion of pupils from other backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is average. A small number of pupils are new arrivals to the country.
- A higher than average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although very few have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- Nine pupils attend alternative or off-site provision through Impact and one pupil through Harmonize. Three pupils receive home education to support their particular needs.
- About 20% of the pupils on roll joined the school other than at the start of Year 7, which is a much higher proportion than average. Many of these pupils join the school through local authority fair access arrangements or as managed moves from other schools.
- The school did not meet the government's floor standards in 2016. The floor standards set the minimum expectations for progress and attainment in key stage 4.
- The school meets the government's definition of a coasting school.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about its most recent key stage 4 results, the difference being made by the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium, governors' and trustees' business and pecuniary interests and governors' and trustees' attendance at meetings over the last academic year on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about its most recent key stage 4 results, the difference being made by the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium, governors' and trustees' business and pecuniary interests and governors' and trustees' attendance at meetings over the last academic year.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of year groups and different subjects in the school. Some observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Visits were made to form time and an inspector observed an assembly delivered by the headteacher.
- Checks on pupils' work were done during lessons and from a small sample of pupils' books from the last academic year, provided by leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior and other leaders and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff.
- An inspector met with the chief executive officer from Great Schools Trust and the vice-chair of the local governing body.
- Behaviour of pupils was observed during lessons and during break and lunchtime. The views of pupils were gathered by an inspector who met formally with a group of pupils from Year 10 and Year 11 who were chosen by an inspector. A meeting was also held with Year 7 and Year 8 pupils who were chosen by school leaders. Only one pupil responded to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors took account of the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and seven written comments from parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised the 16 responses to the staff survey.
- A wide range of other documentation was reviewed, including information available on the school's website and information on pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. The school's self-evaluation summary and the school improvement plan for the last academic year were examined, along with the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Denah Jones, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Deborah Bailey

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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