

# Inspection of a good school: Cowley International College

Hard Lane, St Helens, Merseyside WA10 6PN

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Inspection dates:

23 and 24 November 2021

## **Outcome**

Cowley International College continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, said that Cowley International College is a special place to learn. They said that they feel safe and happy in school.

Pupils described their school as a welcoming and friendly community where 'people smile at one another'. Pupils welcome and celebrate diversity. They said that it is good 'to embrace people's differences'.

Leaders actively encourage pupils to take a lead on preventing bullying at the school. For example, the 'pupil cabinet' is currently consulting parents, carers and pupils on its review of the school's anti-bullying policy. Pupils said that bullying is uncommon. They are confident in the pupils who are trained as anti-bullying ambassadors, and in the staff, to sort out any bullying if it did occur.

Around the school and in lessons pupils behave well. Teachers are ambitious for pupils. Overall, pupils enjoy their learning, and they want to succeed. Most pupils achieve well, including students in the sixth form.

There is an extensive array of extra-curricular and enrichment activities on offer to pupils and students in the sixth form. For example, pupils benefit from a wide range of sporting and arts-based activities, and opportunities to take on leadership roles and charitable work. Leaders plan these activities so that pupils build the 'Cowleian values' as part of their character development.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders, including governors, ensure that pupils and students are at the centre of each decision that is made at Cowley International College. They are determined that everybody associated with the school is given the opportunity to succeed.

The overarching curriculum that is in place for pupils is informed by a clear rationale. The curriculum provides pupils with the breadth and depth of knowledge that they need across a range of subjects. The number of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects is steadily rising. This is because staff provide pupils with helpful and timely guidance about their different key stage 4 option choices.

Leaders have worked extensively on their curriculum plans. These plans clearly outline the topics and knowledge that pupils need to know and remember as they progress through the curriculum. Where necessary, leaders are adjusting the order in which certain topics and concepts are taught. This is so that they can swiftly address any deficits in knowledge that pupils have due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most teachers present new subject concepts in a way that helps pupils to build their knowledge and understanding of topics. However, there are a few instances where some of the activities that teachers select do not help pupils to build and learn new knowledge as effectively as they should.

In the sixth form, leaders ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of students. Students have access to a range of appropriate academic and vocational courses. Staff expertise helps students to acquire a thorough insight and knowledge of the subjects that they study. As a result, students progress well. Students are appreciative of the support and guidance that staff provide about future career pathways and study options.

Across the school, teachers use their strong subject knowledge to check how well pupils have learned new knowledge and whether they can recall previously taught topics. When needed, teachers act to address any misunderstandings that pupils have in their learning. This prompts pupils to rethink ideas and helps them to improve their understanding of subject concepts.

Leaders are unflinching in their determination to improve pupils' knowledge of vocabulary, their oral language skills, and their ability to read. Leaders recognise that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to weaker communication skills among pupils and an increase in the number of pupils with shortfalls in their reading knowledge. To this end, they have appointed a new reading leader. They have put additional systems in place to identify and support pupils who struggle to read as well as they should. This is beginning to help these pupils to catch-up quickly with their reading.

Staff with responsibility for SEND work proactively with local feeder primary schools. This means that subject teachers have the information that they need to adapt the delivery of the curriculum for pupils with SEND as soon as they start in Year 7. Leaders also have effective procedures in place to identify and support other pupils with SEND. Where necessary, they pursue additional help for these pupils from a range of external agencies.

Pupils benefit from a well-considered and sensitively planned personal development programme. Leaders ensure that this programme provides pupils with the knowledge that they need to manage their lives now and as they move into adulthood. Pupils spoke positively about this aspect of their learning.

Governors are committed to the school. They are ambitious for all pupils. Governors have a clear insight into what is required to move the school forward. Staff are appreciative of leaders' actions to address workload and well-being.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are knowledgeable and responsive to local safeguarding needs. Leaders ensure that staff training is kept up to date so that they can quickly identify any signs of harm. Staff know how to report any safeguarding concerns. Pupils are confident that there are staff in school that they can talk with should they have any worries.

Leaders work effectively with multi-agencies, including early help, to ensure that pupils get the timely support and help that they need. The school's personal, social and economic education (PSHE) curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils and students receive an age-appropriate education in how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils and students learn about the safe use of social media and how to maintain healthy relationships.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- On occasions, some teachers do not select the most appropriate activities to help pupils to learn the core knowledge identified in curriculum plans. As a result, some pupils do not learn new concepts, or make effective links between concepts, as well as they could. As they move forward, leaders should ensure that all teachers choose activities that allow pupils to gain a deep understanding of subject concepts.
- Some pupils have not developed a sufficiently strong knowledge of reading and language comprehension to help them communicate as effectively as they should. This has been exacerbated further by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, a small number of pupils are not learning the curriculum as well as they should. Leaders should accelerate their plans to address the remaining deficits in pupils' reading knowledge so that all of these pupils achieve well across the school.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2016.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## **Further information**

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104829
<b>Local authority</b>	St Helens
<b>Inspection number</b>	10200226
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1534
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	322
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Margaret Bellis
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Cameron Sheeran
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.cowley.st-helens.sch.uk">www.cowley.st-helens.sch.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	12 and 13 October 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school makes use of a small number of registered alternative providers.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, headteacher, other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, middle leaders, teachers and other staff.
- An inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. Inspectors also looked at the minutes of several governing body meetings.

- Inspectors spoke with the school improvement partner and representatives of the local authority.
- As part of this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: design and technology, English, history, physical education and science. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited some lessons, spoke with pupils and teachers, and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered other curriculum areas, including geography, modern foreign languages and mathematics.
- Inspectors met with members of the school's safeguarding team to consider the culture of safeguarding at the school. They scrutinised a range of documentation in relation to safeguarding, including leaders' pre-employment checks on staff. Inspectors spoke to governors, staff and pupils about wider aspects of safeguarding. They also considered survey responses from staff, parents and carers and pupils around safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including that relating to the curriculum, pupil behaviour, and the self-evaluation summary.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in lessons, in corridors and at lunchtimes. They also spoke to pupils about bullying and behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their programme of wider personal development, including the PSHE programme.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. This included the comments submitted via the free-text facility.
- Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's pupils' questionnaire and the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.

### **Inspection team**

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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