

Cranbrook School

Waterloo Road, Cranbrook, TN17 3JD

Inspection dates 28–29 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher's and governors' compelling vision for the school is informed by a non-negotiable decision to put 'first rate' learning at the top of everyone's agenda at Cranbrook.
- At all levels, leaders are committed to developing curiosity and an appetite for learning in students. Where this works best, achievement is outstanding and students' responses to the daily diet of challenges in their learning are impressive.
- Teachers know each student extremely well. Very high levels of achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form have been sustained since the school became an academy. In 2014, the percentages of top GCSE passes far exceeded national norms and trumped Cranbrook's previous best.
- Excellent teaching is characterised by teachers' notable command of their subject, coupled with an expectation that all students will excel. Students value, and respect greatly, the skills and knowledge that their teachers bring to bear.
- The broad range of courses on offer meets students' needs exceptionally well. In particular, high quality enrichment and sporting opportunities provided through the Cranbrook 'co-curriculum' add breadth and depth to the students' personal and academic development.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Students feel very safe and happy in the school. They express well-founded confidence in the adults in the school to attend properly to their well-being.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Results are routinely high, with many students proceeding to leading universities. Students are well informed about the choices on offer. They leave Cranbrook well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Governors are conspicuous in their knowledge of the school, the wider community which it serves and the interpretation of their roles and statutory duties. They provide excellent challenge and support to leaders, which have resulted in improvements in teaching and achievement.
- The development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs is a strength of the school. In lessons, students demonstrate a keen awareness of others' needs and respect for individual differences.
- Teachers' breadth of knowledge and abilities to unconsciously model the school's values ensure that students are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a total of 32 lessons of which eight were jointly observed with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also made a number of shorter visits to lessons and to assemblies.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors discussed lessons they saw with teaching staff. Work across most subjects was scrutinised during lesson observations.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentation including leaders' self-evaluation, their plans for improvement and current assessment information. Inspectors also scrutinised all child protection and safeguarding policies, including health and safety risk assessments.
- Inspectors took account of 112 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, Parent View. They also took account of the 200 responses to the school's own recent questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered questionnaires completed by 45 members of staff.
- This inspection was carried out in response to a complaint made to Ofsted which raised concerns. The complaint was deemed to be a qualifying complaint and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether safeguarding procedures are adequate, staff are suitably trained and able to seek advice and support when required, and whether leaders and the governing body are effective in monitoring and evaluating policy and practice for safeguarding within the school.

Inspection team

Lesley Farmer, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Brian Oppenheim

Additional Inspector

Roger Fenwick

Additional Inspector

Graham Tyrer

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Cranbrook School is a smaller-than-average-sized selective secondary school. The school converted to become an academy in December 2012. When its predecessor school, also known as Cranbrook School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium funding (additional government funding for students entitled to free school meals and in the care of the local authority) is very low. The numbers of disadvantaged students in Year 11 in 2014 were too low to report on their attainment separately.
- There are no students eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding. This is funding for students who did not achieve National Curriculum Level 4 (the nationally expected level) in English or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportions that have a statement of special educational needs or who have education, health and care plans are below average.
- No students attend alternative provision.
- The headteacher is a Local Leader in Education (LLE).
- The school met the government's floor standards in 2014, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the best practice being developed through the 'Cranbrook Learning' strategy, to raise achievement still further by ensuring that:
 - teachers are able to observe teaching in subjects where deep learning approaches are working best
 - teachers hone their questioning techniques and do not necessarily accept first answers as best answers.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher, backed by the governing body and ably supported by his senior team, has taken bold and necessary steps to build a firm foundation for the future of Cranbrook School. His principled actions place students firmly at the heart of all decision making.
- A relentless focus on learning and teaching informs leadership activity. Dips in attainment have been identified and successfully addressed. Standards, particularly the proportions of students attaining the top grades in all examinations, are exceptionally high and improving.
- Leadership at all levels is strong. Leaders understand and embrace their accountabilities to ensure the best possible outcomes for Cranbrook students. Since the headteacher's appointment, teachers' pay and performance have been rightly linked to students' outcomes. Pay increases are informed by a range of judicious performance indicators and are not automatic.
- Subject leaders know about the quality of teaching in their areas and can correctly identify where the best practice exists. Consequently, teachers are well supported to reflect on, and improve, their practice through a strong programme of development and training. The success of this approach is reflected in the outstanding achievement and the above-average proportions of top grades secured across all subjects.
- Students are set challenging targets on their arrival in Year 9 based on a thorough assessment of their ability. Their progress is checked at regular intervals and reported to parents so that concerns can be shared and appropriate action taken. Students with whom inspectors met were able to articulate precisely what they needed to work on to improve.
- Leaders ensure that students are very well prepared for life in modern Britain. They can access a broad range of subjects, including in the sixth form, that is well tailored to their aptitudes and abilities. Mutual respect and understanding underpin the school's values, permeating both the academic and co-curriculum, where opportunities to rehearse balanced arguments abound, for example, through the school's Academic society and other student-led societies.
- Leaders, including governors, are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all students. Discrimination is not tolerated. Senior and middle leaders diligently check the progress of different groups of students at routine intervals and trigger extra support where necessary. The excellent progress secured by disadvantaged students, disabled students and those who need extra support provides testimony to the success of this approach.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust and meet statutory requirements. Within the last year, at the request of the governing body, all procedures have been the subject of a rigorous external review led by Kent local authority officers. Recommended actions have been fully implemented. Policies are closely monitored by a dedicated governor for safeguarding. Students at risk of harm are quickly identified and supported well.
- Leaders' strategies to enable disadvantaged students to achieve well, through the use of additional pupil premium funding, have been very effective. These have been tailored to individual students' needs and have included additional tutoring and the use of external support.
- A very large majority of the parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, agreed that their child feels safe in school. Inspectors agree.
- Careers advice is comprehensive and highly effective. Students are able to access independent advice and work experience during the period between the end of their GCSE examinations and their entry to the sixth form. Pathways available to them are broad and include vocational options, such as apprenticeships, thereby ensuring that they are very well equipped for the next stage in their education, training and employment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors discharge their duties very effectively. Their response to a qualifying complaint with safeguarding implications has been thorough and transparent. For example, as a result of the complaint, governors have held meetings with parents in which they have made explicit their duties to inform and involve external agencies when child protection disclosures arise. They have an excellent knowledge of the school and are ambitious for its students. Their long-term aspirations to better serve the Cranbrook community through expansion are fuelled by a strong moral purpose to make the school more accessible to local children who have the potential to succeed in a selective setting. They have a clear understanding of where the best teaching lies within the academy and have fully participated in after-school sessions for parents and governors to experience the 'Cranbrook Learning' philosophy. They employ an external adviser to assist with the headteacher's performance management and are involved in all decisions about pay progression. They monitor closely the achievement of groups within

the school and their analyses include both the impact of premium funding for disadvantaged students and how well the school compares with other selective schools nationally.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Students concentrate well in lessons and work with enthusiasm and energy. Staff know students well. These strong relationships, based on trust and mutual respect, are key ingredients in the excellent progress that students make.
- During social times and at changes of lessons, students conduct themselves impeccably well. They are smart in their appearance and take evident pride in the school. They appreciate the beauty of the external environment and ensure it is kept litter free. They express themselves well; during the inspection, inspectors witnessed no use of derogatory language.
- Students are adamant that bullying and racism are not part of the school's culture. Leaders do not permanently exclude and fixed term exclusions are very rare. In a religious studies lesson, students listened to and reflected upon Muslim views about racism. Their discussions were mature and balanced and reflected fully the school's strong values.
- Students' excellent punctuality and above average attendance rates attest to their obvious enjoyment of school and pride in its success. This is reflected across each year group and in the sixth form.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Students say that they feel extremely safe and the very large majority of parents responding to the online survey, Parent View, agree.
- Students know about the different types of bullying that exist, including homophobic and cyber bullying, but say that such incidents are rare. If they do arise, they are dealt with immediately and neither neglected nor condoned.
- Students' spiritual moral, social and cultural development is promoted extremely well. There are many opportunities for students to learn from and support each other, both during the taught day and in the co-curriculum after-school activities. In particular, students rate very highly the opportunity to consider moral decision making through philosophy and ethics, a compulsory subject for all on joining the school in Year 9, which many pursue to A level.
- Adults working in the school and in the sixth form have received appropriate safeguarding training. Leaders maintain strong links with external agencies and draw on expert advice where necessary to ensure that students' well-being is properly addressed.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers' impressive subject knowledge and broader pedagogical skills ensure that their planning is precise and largely well executed. The 'Cranbrook Learning' philosophy, introduced last year, is already yielding a conspicuous culture of resilience and reciprocity in the best teaching, where deep learning results in outstanding achievement.
- Students from all year groups work enthusiastically as a result of the high levels of trust and respect between them and their teachers, built up over time. They work confidently, either independently or in groups. Group work routinely features good quality discussion and healthy challenge of each other's ideas.
- Mathematics teaching is exceptionally strong at all levels; it is characterised by students' confident and articulate debate, underpinned by their abilities to reason and problem solve effectively. Outstanding results at GCSE and A level attest to the success of this well-considered approach.
- Strategies to help develop the literacy skills of a small number of students, whose skills on entry to the school are lower than their peers, have been highly successful. All students are encouraged to read widely and teaching across all subject areas includes a focus on spelling, syntax and vocabulary extension.
- Teachers generally make good use of the assessment information made available to them, which has resulted in no discernible difference between the achievement of different groups within the school. However, although the 'Cranbrook Learning' philosophy is evidently informing most teachers' planning, in a very few instances, learning is shallow because teachers' questioning is too rushed or insufficiently forensic.

- Homework is routinely set across all subjects. It is relevant, well planned and provides good opportunities for students to develop their learning. Students recognise the value of homework. This was evident in a lesson in which the homework was set in the absence of the substantive teacher, where no student had failed to complete the work set.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students join the school with attainment that is above the national average. They make excellent progress across all subjects, so that by the end of Year 11, levels of attainment are exceptionally high. For the last two years, two thirds of the GCSE grades have been at A* or A. Rates of progress in English and mathematics have far exceeded national norms.
- Across almost all subjects, students routinely secure at least a grade C at GCSE. In many subjects, including mathematics, physics, chemistry, French, Spanish, biology and history, at least three quarters of the grades awarded are at A* or A.
- A dip in attainment in English in 2013 has been effectively halted in 2014, bringing the pass rate back up to 100%. A range of strategies, which have included setting by ability, has ensured that in 2014 the percentage of top GCSE grades awarded in English was above average.
- The very small number of disadvantaged students achieve outstanding results. Their progress at least matches, and sometimes exceeds, that of other students within the school and far outstrips other students' progress nationally. In English and mathematics, their attainment is outstanding and exceeds that of other students nationally and within the school in both subjects.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are supported well. They make the same very outstanding progress and secure similarly high standards as their peers within the school.
- The most able students achieve at least as well as their peers nationally. Teachers ensure that in lessons an 'additional challenge' is planned for those with the greatest aptitude for the subject. A broad range of targeted activities has ensured that these students achieve in line with expectations, resulting in above average percentages of them securing places at leading universities on leaving the sixth form.
- Early examination entry is used to good effect for targeted students and in specific subject areas, such as mathematics. This practice has not adversely affected the percentages of students securing top grades. Students securing top grades are subsequently entered for IGCSE mathematics, with excellent outcomes, and some begin AS study early.
- Students' skills in reading, writing, oracy and mathematics are well-developed and promoted effectively across all subjects. Complementary initiatives, such as 'Curious minds' and 'Stop to read', have supported students well. As a result, invariably all students progress into the Cranbrook sixth form, with a strong foundation for guaranteed success at AS and A level.
- Sixth form achievement is outstanding. Motivated by teaching that supports and challenges them effectively to work independently or together, sixth formers act as outstanding role models for younger students within the school. Their work ethic is high which, coupled with high quality teaching, ensures that outcomes are routinely above average.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The sixth form is a vibrant and highly successful dimension of the school. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and achieve outstanding results. Almost all students continue from Year 11 into the sixth form, with virtually no drop out between courses. As a result of the high quality careers guidance and excellent teaching that they receive, almost all proceed to higher education and more than half proceed to leading universities of their choice.
- Over time, progress in academic qualifications has been significantly higher than national levels, with a higher than average percentage of top grades secured at AS and A level.
- Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and planning enable students to move forward rapidly in their learning. Levels of challenge are high and students benefit from judicious and incisive feedback which helps them improve their learning.
- The co-curriculum available to all Cranbrook students, also extends to the sixth form. However, leaders have rightly identified a need to provide greater depth of experience for sixth formers and are in the process of developing a formal 'Cranbrook diploma' to encapsulate the employability skills that will complement properly the programmes of study that are on offer.

- The behaviour and safety of sixth form students are outstanding. Students act as excellent role models to the younger ones. Changes to the dress code, requiring a smarter appearance, are now part of the culture. A sixth form student remarked that, 'Although it caused a stir initially, it was a good thing. No one really minds. It sets the right impression for the younger students and has created a better work ethos.'
- Leadership of the sixth form is excellent. The head of sixth form sets demanding targets and closely monitors students' progress, triggering support where necessary. Consequently, most students meet, and many exceed, their target grades.
- Students benefit from high expectations of what they can achieve. They attend regularly and contribute well to their learning. In conversations with inspectors they demonstrated a mature awareness of risk.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137739
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	463032

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	747
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	305
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Peace
Headteacher	John Weeds
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01580 711800
Fax number	01580 715365
Email address	Office@cranbrook.com

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