

The Gilberd School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115357
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357739
Inspection dates	22–23 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Ian Seath HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Hildreth
Headteacher	Linda Exley
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. A total of 34 lessons and teachers were observed. In addition, a number of short visits were made to many lessons to evaluate particular aspects of learning and progress. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at many school documents including those concerning self-evaluation and the monitoring of teaching and learning. By the end of the inspection 634 completed questionnaires had been received from parents and carers, as well as a significant number from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which the decline in students' achievement and attainment evident in 2009 has been successfully tackled
- the extent to which the school successfully provides for the most and least able.

Information about the school

The school is much larger than the average secondary school. The proportions of students eligible for free school meals and those of ethnic minority heritage are lower than average, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has had specialist mathematics and computing college status since 2002, and has Artsmark and Sportsmark awards. It has a BECTA award for information and communication technology. It is an active participant in local arrangements for the training of teachers and is widely used as an exemplar for foundation provision.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Gilbert is a solidly good school where students are happy and where they fulfil their expectations. It is well placed to improve further. As one Year 11 student remarked with the agreement of her peers, 'It's been like part of my family for the last few years and I will be sorry to leave.'

In recent years, standards have been higher than average but dipped significantly in 2009 so that many students did not make the progress expected. However, the school has made concerted efforts to improve the quality of its provision with the result that standards rose significantly, as reflected in the most recent examination results of 2010 and indications that they will improve further in 2011. Standards of attainment are now above average, as they were prior to 2009. This has been done by improving the curriculum, together with care, guidance and support, and these aspects are now outstanding.

The school is demonstrating good capacity to sustain improvement and has a good understanding of the issues that led to the decline of 2009. Measures that have resulted from this have been incorporated into improvement plans at all levels, and they are monitored effectively. In particular, the school now places a much greater emphasis on the monitoring of individual progress. This process is accurate, and in many classes it is used effectively to ensure that all students learn well. However, this good and occasionally exceptional practice is not uniformly applied across the school so that in a minority of classes opportunities to drive up students' progress are missed. The school has a good lesson observation system that gives an accurate picture of teaching. However, it is less effective at precisely evaluating learning and progress in class.

The excellent curriculum that has been developed since the last inspection means that all students, and in particular those who are a little reluctant to learn, can achieve in alternative ways. Coupled with exemplary support, this has done much to ensure that every student gained at least one qualification in 2010. The most able are well catered for through the school's gifted and talented scheme, and this has resulted in an improvement in the proportion who gained the highest GCSE grades in 2010.

Leadership and management are good at all levels. Self-evaluations are good, and they are monitored effectively by governors who bring an extensive range of skills and community links to their role. They challenge the school well, but do not monitor the effects of policies regularly or rigorously enough. Governors ensure that the school complies with all statutory responsibilities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Within 9 months, improve teaching and learning by:

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- ensuring that the excellent and accurate assessment practice seen in some classes is more evenly disseminated so that it is seen in all
 - making sure that these practices effectively stimulate the learning of all students
 - improve lesson planning to give a greater focus on learning and standards rather than teachers' activities
- Within 6 months, improve the lesson observation system to reflect a greater emphasis on learning and progress in class rather than teaching and teacher activities

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students demonstrate overall good achievement and they enjoy their time at school, a point confirmed by the overwhelmingly positive responses of the exceptionally large number of parental and student questionnaires received.

In lessons, the learning and progress that students make is mostly good across all year groups. This is because both the curriculum and the monitoring of progress have improved since the last inspection. Students' good behaviour in lessons is a key factor in their learning. They are friendly, attentive and effective in discussion and group activities when given the opportunity. Around the school, they are sensible and show consideration for others and welcome visitors. The number of exclusions is now very low.

When students enter the school in Year 7, the standards that they have reached are above national averages. Until 2009, data indicate that as they progress through the school they make good progress and attain standards that are above national averages. However, in 2009, results of national examinations declined abruptly. Overall, students made much less progress than they should have.

However, measures taken by the school have improved this situation markedly. Provisional examination results for 2010, together with observations of standards and progress in class and early examination entry results for Year 10, indicate a much improved picture. The proportion of students gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A* to C, with and without mathematics and English, improved to above national averages. Both boys and girls improved, but the increases were most marked for girls. The proportion attaining the highest grades A* and A improved to around that expected. Students eligible for free school meals improved their performance markedly, although attainment remained below national averages for this group.

In 2009, the progress made by those with special educational needs and/or disabilities was better than their peers and this was maintained in 2010 though attainment remained below national averages. Attendance has improved markedly because of the school's well-focused actions. The proportion of those who are persistently absent is now well below that of similar schools.

Older students act as excellent role models for those who have just joined. Relations with teachers are excellent and teachers are trusted by students. Overwhelmingly, students feel safe. The student voice is well developed and most of the older students develop a maturity that equips them well for further study when they leave. Often, they have high aspirations for themselves. This is a happy school.

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The school's specialisms of mathematics and information and communication technology have benefited students well. These subjects are used effectively throughout the school, students being especially skilled in the use of computers.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Inspectors agreed with the school's view of teaching, learning and assessment being good, and that the school's curriculum and provision of care, guidance and support have improved and are now outstanding. These improvements have been a major factor in the recovery of the school's overall performance from the dip in 2009.

Teaching is good overall. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and positive relationships with students allow them to plan lessons that are well structured, interesting and proceed at a good pace to help students learn quickly. The most effective teaching is supported by detailed knowledge of students together with a variety of approaches and high expectations. Students learn most effectively when they work collaboratively, but they are not always given opportunities to do this. Students usually work with enjoyment and enthusiasm. Where teaching is satisfactory, some teachers do not give students sufficient opportunity to improve their learning through discussion or active self-evaluation, and they dominate the lesson. Activities are sometimes mundane; there is a lack of challenge in group and independent work, so learning is limited.

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Assessment is used well to support learning in the best lessons. Here, there is a common approach to assessment which enables both staff and students to know what went well and what could be improved. There are good examples of students being encouraged to evaluate their own work and learn effectively from each other. They demonstrate well-developed skills of giving and receiving positive criticism. These opportunities are not consistently given by all teachers, so limiting the progress that students can make. Although the standard of marking by some teachers is good, it is not consistent across the school. While students know their current levels of performance and what to do to improve, occasionally the feedback they receive is not sufficiently detailed to help them to improve their work. Poor spelling and grammar are not routinely corrected in subjects other than English.

The school's curriculum is outstanding because it enables many students who would not otherwise do so to achieve their best. It is continually reviewed and developed, in consultation with students and their parents, to fully meet the needs and aspirations of all students. A very wide range of academic and vocational courses is available in the school and in conjunction with other schools, colleges and organisations. This helps to ensure that all students are motivated to succeed. The strong curriculum has helped bring about improvements in students' attendance, behaviour and achievement because they enjoy what they do at school. The range of extra-curricular activities is very well developed.

For those who are experiencing difficulties in fully participating in school life, the Foundation Learning scheme provides outstanding opportunities for both academic and personal development. Students who need extra help to improve their key skills and self-confidence are taught in small focus groups until they feel confident in moving into a larger class. The adventure-based learning programme is a strength of the school, providing students with opportunities to experience activities such as canoeing and orienteering, while developing their skills in teamwork and risk-taking. The school's foundation curriculum is used as an exemplar by other schools.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The work of the pastoral team has contributed greatly to the establishment of a very positive climate for learning where students feel safe. Staff provide a high level of support for all students, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are striking examples of how staff meet the individual needs of students who face particular challenges. Highly effective support is in place for those whose behaviour puts them at risk of exclusion so that there are now very few exclusions. The provision of individual education plans for looked-after children and others who need them is now excellent, having been an issue at the last inspection. Transition arrangements for those entering and leaving the school, and between key stages, are outstanding so that all students quickly settle in school and follow pathways appropriate to their needs and interests. Actions taken have resulted in sustained high attendance.

The good grounding received in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, coupled with well devised career guidance and workplace experiences, means that students are well prepared for their future lives.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and her senior managers give good leadership to the school. Despite a marked decline in performance in 2009, the resilience of the school together with this leadership has enabled it to gain ground in 2010 and reach levels of performance that are at least as good as those seen prior to the dip. Although too soon to be sure, current indications are that these improvements are now embedded in the school because early indications of standards attained in the current year are good. Aspects of quality of provision are now outstanding. The school has high expectations that are reflected in the students' and parents' views.

Development plans are clear and realistic with appropriately challenging targets. The school improvement process is helped by accurate self-assessments at all levels. The school has a realistic view of its own strengths and weaknesses. The use of data to set targets that are measurable is good, and performance management is well developed. Actions to improve are generally clear with appropriate timescales.

Leaders and managers have proved to be effective in raising the quality of teaching, with the result that the great majority of teaching is securing good learning and progress. Clear expectations, coupled with effective provision to promote teachers' professional development, have increased the proportion of good and better teaching. The recent introduction of Teaching and Learning Communities provides high quality opportunities for sharing and developing the most effective classroom practice.

However, the lesson observation system currently places too much emphasis on what the teacher does rather than what students learn and what progress they make. The school has, rightly, placed an increasing emphasis on the close monitoring of students' progress and attainment by use of assessment. However, the school recognises that the extent to which this information is used in class to support the learning of individuals is uneven across the school.

Governors bring a very comprehensive range of skills to the school and are closely involved in school life, although a few staff feel that they have too little contact with teachers. Requirements for safeguarding and other statutory responsibilities are met. Governors monitor the school's performance well and they contributed greatly to the school's recovery from the dip in results in 2009. However, the extent to which they monitor the effectiveness of some policies, for example those concerning equality and the attainment of different groups, could usefully be coordinated so that they can demonstrate and monitor the effect of actions in these areas.

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The school takes good steps to ensure community cohesion. It evaluates its role in the community well and plans accordingly. As a result, students are well-prepared for life in a multicultural society. Governors aid this process well because of their extensive community links.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Inspectors received completed questionnaires from 634 parents and carers, an exceptionally high number. Inspectors agreed with almost all parents. A few raised concerns about the extent to which the school helped their children lead a healthy lifestyle or helped them support their children's learning. Inspectors did not find significant evidence to support these views, although where a few students raised concerns about healthy lifestyle they were often linked to concerns around queuing for school lunches.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Gilbert School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 634 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1350 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	239	38	366	58	22	3	2	0
The school keeps my child safe	274	43	345	54	7	1	2	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	226	36	352	56	29	5	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	220	35	346	55	32	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	226	36	373	59	14	2	3	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	167	26	391	62	43	7	2	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	140	22	418	66	42	7	5	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	207	33	365	58	8	1	5	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	200	32	376	59	23	4	3	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	210	33	364	57	24	4	7	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	131	21	396	62	38	6	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	246	39	356	56	10	2	3	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	297	47	309	49	12	2	3	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Gilbert School, Colchester, CO4 9PU

As you will be aware, I visited your school together with four other inspectors earlier this week. Throughout our visit you were polite, helpful and courteous and I would like to thank you for that. Your school has many strengths and one of them is you.

Your school is a good one and the pride that many of you displayed to us is justified. You told us many things, for example that you feel safe, that teachers are helpful, that you trust them and you are happy at school. We agreed, and so did almost all of the 634 parents who sent questionnaires to us!

In recent years, the school has performed strongly, with the exception of 2009 when standards dipped. The school has recovered strongly from this, however, and is now back on track. It has done this by improving the curriculum so that all of you can achieve in different ways, and by improving the support and care it provides.

The school is working hard to further improve teaching, and we have suggested a couple of ways to help with this. First, improvements in assessment and a concentration on your learning in class will help you to make better progress. Second, we have asked that the school makes changes to the ways that it checks learning in class so that it is more consistent.

You have an important part to play in this too. Remember that it is your education - you can help teachers by making sure that you understand the work you are doing, and by telling them if you don't. The chances are that you will leave the Gilbert School well-equipped for further study and with a good set of GCSEs.

Lastly, one of the things you told us is that the amount of bullying is very low. You can keep it this way by talking to a teacher if you are affected.

Once again, thank you and I wish you well.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath

Her Majesty's Inspector

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