

# Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115329
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	357733
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Derrick Baughan HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1162
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	135
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Steve Whiting
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miles Bacon
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 March 2008
<b>School address</b>	Maypole Road Tiptree, Colchester CO5 0EW
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 51 lessons and held meetings with staff, groups of pupils and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of school documents including meetings of minutes, self-assessments and improvement plans. Inspectors looked at questionnaire responses from staff and students, and 242 responses from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What is the progress of students in mathematics?
- How well is the school's specialist status used to benefit students?
- What learning and progress are students making in lessons?

## Information about the school

Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre is a larger than average secondary school. It has specialist sports status, the gold status for healthy schools, and a sixth form. Most students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is low as is that of students whose first language is not, or believed not to be, English. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than found nationally.

**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

Thurstable is a good school. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average, although they have a much lower than average number of higher achieving pupils. Standards on exit are satisfactory and improving rapidly. In 2009, the percentage of students gaining five GCSEs at A\* to C including English and mathematics dropped to significantly below national average. As a result of action taken by the school, mostly to raise attainment and rates of progress in mathematics, the 2010 results improved to national average. Results from those taking English and mathematics early, and students work seen during inspection show continued improvement and are good. Although historical progress in mathematics is still low, it is improving as are most other indicators of achievement. Other outcomes are all at least good, with that for adopting healthy lifestyles outstanding.

Students in the school are cared for well, with the vast majority of them feeling safe in school. Most parents and carers agree with this. Staff at the school work well to help students integrate well with the local community. However, the next audit of this work has been delayed due to maternity leave. The headteacher and staff have worked well to minimise the impact of a range of adverse problems that the school has had to face, for example the loss of 'Building Schools for the Future' funding. The school has introduced an ethos of building positive relationships and restorative practice. Although not fully understood by all staff, this has worked well to improve behaviour and attendance.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In many lessons, students and staff work together extremely well to create positive learning experiences. Students show good co-operative and independent learning skills. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory overall, with some examples of outstanding marking. However, a minority of marking is too cursory or motivational rather than developmental. Lessons are generally well planned but, in a few, the planning does not result in sufficient challenge for all students. The school's specialist status is used well to improve outcomes for students, for example in being healthy.

The headteacher and his staff have successfully identified key areas for improvement. Indeed, inspectors agreed with all the development points that the school has in progress. Self-evaluation is very accurate. Challenging targets are set and met and the governing body is exceptionally effective. The school has effectively turned round the drop in achievements and other outcomes are all at least good. Therefore it has good capacity to improve.

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

- Maintain the rate of improvement in outcomes by:

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- embedding high-quality marking and assessment for learning across the whole school.
- further developing the understanding of the school's ethos of relationships and restorative justice.
- Further improve teaching and learning by better sharing of outstanding practice.
- Further develop community cohesion by completing the audit process and widening participation.

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

Attainment at the end of Year 11 is broadly average but improving rapidly. In 2009, the percentage of students gaining 5 A\* to C including English and mathematics dropped to significantly below the national average. However, the school had predicted this and efforts to make swift and secure improvement have been successful. The 2010 results are at the national average and the results from the 2011 cohort of early entries indicate that this improvement is continuing. In 2010 standards in English had improved to just above the national average. However, those in mathematics had not improved as quickly and were below the national average. Attainment seen in lessons is good.

Progress in English is above the national average. However progress in mathematics, in 2010, was significantly below the national average. The school has identified the reasons for this - a middle ability group of students who were not receiving sufficient support - and has established good intervention strategies to improve performance in mathematics. Historical progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is satisfactory. However, they make good progress in lessons. The achievement rates of boys have improved and there are no significant differences in the attainment and progress of different groups. Historical data show broadly average attainment over the last three years. However, attainment and progress, as observed in lessons, is good. Students enjoy and engage well in their learning. Excellent co-operative learning is a feature in many lessons.

Due to the care, guidance and support that the school provides, coupled with the ethos of a caring school, students feel safe at school. They are confident that they are well cared for and enjoy their learning tremendously. They have a very good understanding of risks and how to assess them. For example, in information and communication technology (ICT) lessons, they focus well on e-safety. Behaviour around the school is good. The school's initiative on restorative justice is not fully embedded and the school has not carried out a detailed review of staff and students' views about this.

A large majority of students take school dinners. These are very healthy and the school is extremely successful in encouraging students to pick the healthy choices. Participation in physical education and extra-curricular activities is very high. In Key Stage 4, all students study for a Level 2 physical education qualification and all Key Stage 3 students study a food technology option. Because of this, students have an excellent understanding of being healthy. This is further reinforced by a range of additional support and guidance about health issues from partner organisations.

The school's specialist status has been used well to make a substantial contribution to the school and its local community. Students take part in a range of leadership and voluntary activities. The school council is very active and has its own budget, which the members

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manage well to make improvements to the school, such as flower beds, outdoor seating and other environmental projects. Year 10 students give good support to help primary school pupils make the transition to secondary. Sixth form students are very involved in helping the school and the local community. The school contributes well to local events. Students are extremely proud of their school. Attendance has been continuously improved and is above the national average.

A large majority of students progress to sixth form or further education. Good interventions and additional tutorial work mean that even students whose literacy and numeracy are not as strong as others still develop good workplace skills. The high level of participation in a range of activities means that these skills are well rounded. All students study religious education in Key Stages 3 and 4. They demonstrate both a deep understanding of their place in the world and creativity and imagination. The school's ethical programme helps students develop self-confidence and a strong sense of community. Multi-cultural days and events contribute well to furthering students' understanding of social, moral, spiritual and cultural issues.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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?**

Teaching and learning are good, as shown by the school's own observations, as well as inspection evidence. Additional interventions, such as one-to-one tutorials, are used well to help individual students. In the better lessons, planning is thorough and based on good

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assessment data. Teachers set high expectations and work well with students to create a very good learning environment. Planning for students with different abilities is used well to challenge higher ability students whilst ensuring all students make progress. Students enjoy their learning and are good independent learners. In a minority of lessons, assessment is not used so well and students are not sufficiently challenged. In these lessons, students do not show as much independent learning and only made satisfactory progress.

Students have a clear understanding of their targets and, in general, what they need to do to achieve, or exceed, them. The quality of marking is varied and broadly satisfactory. Examples of outstanding marking were seen. In these cases, the comments are particularly helpful to students and focus well on what they have achieved with that piece of work, what they need to do to move to a higher grade, and how they can do that. Much of the students' work is marked satisfactorily. However, there is too much marking which is cursory, or purely motivational rather than developmental. The school is aware of this and effective marking has been a high priority in staff development with clear evidence of improvement.

The curriculum is subject to regular review and is matched very well to students' needs. In addition to the core requirements, the school provides a diverse range of extra-curricular activities and visits, both social and educational. These activities include music and drama work for students. Curriculum innovations include a Year 7 accelerated group, which focuses on literacy and social skills, and a Year 7 humanities programme to support transition from primary schools. A range of pathways give Key Stage 4 students a good variety of options, including vocational ones, and the school works well with other providers to help vulnerable and disaffected students. Another curriculum review is planned for 2011/12 to provide further opportunities for students.

The good support that the school provides contributes significantly to students' well-being. This support has contributed to the improvements seen in progress and attainment. The monitoring of attendance is rigorous and follow-up action, in the event of absences, is swift and effective. Transition arrangements for primary school pupils are particularly good, with a range of activities, some involving secondary school students, helping all students and especially those who are vulnerable or have special educational needs.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher has worked well to establish a culture of improvement with a very strong focus on students' achievement. Senior leaders are equally effective in sharing the vision.

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Changes to the school structure have been effective and implemented well. The great majority of staff are clear about the aims of the school and committed to excellence. The school knows itself very well and had clearly identified the probability of the drop in GCSE success rates. Improvement and intervention measures had already been planned, and some put in place, before the results were received. Because of this, recovery was swift and the school is on target to further improve achievement.

The process for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is rigorous. Leaders' assessments of lessons are thorough and extremely accurate, as shown by paired observations with inspectors. Good use is made of development opportunities for observers. Evidence from observations is used well to help both individual and whole-school development. The school is clearly working towards improving the areas identified by inspectors' observations.

The governing body is exceptionally supportive and fully involved in holding the school to account. Members are involved directly in a range of activities within the school. They take the lead on a number of issues to challenge the school and to help it improve, for example by conducting their own health and safety audit. The professional expertise of members of the governing body is used exceedingly well to give excellent guidance to senior, and other, staff on a range of issues. The governing body has a deep and insightful understanding of how the school works and what it needs to do to improve.

The school has a very active and effective parent/teacher association made up of current and past parents and carers. They give good support to activities such as fundraising events. The school works well to engage parents and carers. Parents' evenings are well attended and parents and carers have a range of ways to provide feedback, including the school's website and parent forum meetings. Partnership working to support learning is strong. The school is the hub site for the Colchester-Blackwater school sports partnership. The school works well with other partners to promote family learning. Links with Colchester Football Club are positive and provide a range of opportunities for students, including leadership qualifications. Links with other schools contribute to students' success, for example links with primary schools help transition for these pupils. Links with other groups are also strong but not always led by the school.

School child protection policies are clear, regularly reviewed and well written. They underpin a strong approach to safeguarding, which is linked well to good promotion of equality and diversity. Staff are well trained in a range of aspects of safeguarding. Monitoring and recording of safeguarding issues is detailed and rigorous. Incidents are rare but when they happen they are dealt with swiftly and effectively. The staff know the school site and risks particularly well. A key feature of the programme is the development of students' awareness of e-safety risks.

The school has a clear impact in the local area. A range of activities, involving the students, are provided for older people in the area, for example helping develop ICT skills. Volunteers provide a good service to the community, such as fundraising projects. The Year 10 mediation scheme has improved students' understanding of the school's local community. Less secure are the links with wider United Kingdom and international communities. These are still being developed.



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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

There are a wide range of post-16 options available locally. In response the school has worked well to develop a flexible sixth form experience based on tailored academic and vocational provision and the development of personal and leadership skills. Students are full engaged in decisions about the sixth form and its provision. Achievement has improved and is now good. Teaching and learning are good and, indeed, stronger than in the rest of the school. Care guidance and support are good and set at the appropriate level. Sixth form students benefit from their involvement in helping the rest of the school. Students speak highly of the provision. They develop confidence and make a very valuable contribution to the school and the local community.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Challenging targets are set, and met. Staff and students are united with a single purpose of improvement. The school has worked well to establish a sixth form that is responsive and gives students opportunities which meet their needs and to help them stay on in this school.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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## Views of parents and carers

A large majority of parents and carers are happy with the school. Most parents and carers state that their child enjoys learning the school and that it keeps them safe. However, a minority believe that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. A very large majority state that they are kept well informed about their child's progress. However a minority of parents are unhappy with the progress their child is making and are dissatisfied with the quality of teaching. Inspectors' evidence on these aspects has been reported fully elsewhere.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre 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 242 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1162 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	24	153	63	26	11	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	44	18	179	74	13	5	3	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	45	19	150	62	41	17	6	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	14	148	61	52	21	5	2
The teaching is good at this school	21	9	159	66	47	19	4	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	10	126	52	67	28	9	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	8	161	67	50	21	1	0
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)	23	10	136	56	39	16	6	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	14	156	64	38	16	5	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	10	127	52	63	26	13	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	12	124	51	47	19	11	5
The school is led and managed effectively	44	18	137	57	39	16	11	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	19	158	65	30	12	8	3

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



25 March 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre,  
Colchester, CO5 0EW**

Firstly let me thank you for the warm welcome that you gave to me and my team when we visited your school. It was a pleasure to discuss your school with you and consider your views.

We enjoyed looking at your work and watching how well you work with your teachers, and each other, to help you all learn. We noted that the GCSE results dropped in 2009 and that you are still working to improve your performance in mathematics. However, we note the improvements that you are making, your learning and progress in lessons, and your other outcomes. Therefore, we have judged your school to be good.

Your behaviour around the school is good and we were impressed with your co-operative learning in many, but not all, lessons. The headteacher and staff lead and manage the school well. We also were pleased to see the improvement in attendance and the stronger focus on building positive relationships.

In order for your school to do even better, I have asked your headteacher and staff to work with you on the following points.

Maintain the rate of improvement in outcomes by improving the quality of assessment of your work and by further embedding the ethos of restorative practice and relationships which will help you all to work together and improve your learning.

Further improve teaching and learning by sharing outstanding practice.

Give you greater experience of national and international communities.

Yours sincerely

Derrick Baughan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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