

# The Towers School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	136583
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	384259
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 May 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Jones 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>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Community
<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>	1508
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	427
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rita Hawes
<b>Headteacher</b>	Malcolm Ramsey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 May 2008
<b>School address</b>	Faversham Road Ashford TN24 9AL
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons, saw 31 teachers and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and several groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence including the school's evaluation and development plans, information about students' performance and questionnaires completed by staff, students and 135 parents and carers.

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

- Achievement of students, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Leadership and management and provision in the sixth form and the outcomes for students.
- The impact of the vertical learning communities on the care, guidance and support of the students.

## Information about the school

Towers School and Sixth Form is much larger than most secondary schools and is a non-selective high school in an area where a quarter of students go to local selective schools. From 1 April 2011, the school converted to an Academy in chain with a local grammar school.

Students come from a wide range of backgrounds, but most are White British and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is just below the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational needs is just above the national average. Towers School is a specialist Business and Enterprise college and has gained specialist status for Applied Learning. The school has been awarded Full Service Extended School status.

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

The Towers School provides a satisfactory and improving standard of education for its students. This is a result of the efforts and hard work of the senior team and school staff who are all determined that their students will succeed. Students make good progress and their attainment in Year 11 is average. Sixth-form students make satisfactory progress and reach average levels of attainment.

Making improvements has not been an easy task for the school. Attainment on entry to the school is low and much work is needed to improve the learning skills and attitudes of the students. Teachers have developed their own 'Towers School Learning' and this is increasingly successful in improving attitudes to learning. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall. Students within that group who have a statement of special educational needs or less severe needs perform well and make good progress. However, those with more significant needs, especially behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, have only recently started to make the progress they should.

Students say they enjoy coming to school and feel safe and well cared for. Most come to school regularly and on time and attendance is average. However, in the sixth form, attendance and, particularly, punctuality are not as good and too many students do not come to lessons on time. This disrupts teaching and wastes learning time. Students know the school helps them to reach higher levels of attainment in their work but several expressed concerns that their learning was sometimes interrupted by other students who, as one student said, 'mess about too much'. Students also said that not all teachers used the school's behaviour management strategies in a consistent way. A small minority of parents and carers felt that unacceptable behaviour was not always dealt with appropriately. Limited evidence to support this view was seen during the inspection and behaviour was found to be satisfactory.

Students are well aware of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle and the healthy options provided by the school canteen are popular. Many students add to the two hours of physical education and sport they receive weekly by participating in the wide range of sporting activities organised after school. Students are keen to take up opportunities to contribute to school life, especially where this involves helping others as mentors. For example, a group of students have volunteered to act as 'cyber-bullying mentors' and made clear presentations at assemblies to all students. Students appreciate the organisation of the school into four mixed-age learning communities and take the lead in organising activities and fund-raising events.

Effective teaching results in good progress where students are engaged and interested in a variety of well-planned activities. Teachers have good subject knowledge and have high expectations and good relationships with their students. One student said, 'Teachers make

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learning fun and that keeps me interested.' Teaching is supported well by the good curriculum, which is innovative, broad and balanced and provides personalised learning pathways for the students. The school's specialist 'business and enterprise' status brings many opportunities to the students through business partnerships and good vocational provision.

Towers School takes good care of its students and follows a fully inclusive agenda, where no students are permanently excluded. Those at risk of failure and exclusion are helped at the school's own recently opened off-site provision where they receive considerable help and support from the dedicated staff.

Good leadership steers the continuing improvement of the school. There is good capacity for further improvement as the strong leadership team has an accurate picture and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and knows what needs to be done to improve performance.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

- Monitor attendance and punctuality of sixth-form students more rigorously to improve their outcomes and pace of learning.
- Improve the behaviour of the minority of students who disturb the learning of others through:
  - making sure all staff use of the school's behaviour management strategies consistently.
  - encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their own behaviour.

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

<b>3</b>
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Inspection evidence found that students are making good progress and achieving well from starting points which are low. This was confirmed by the most recent examination results achieved by Year 11 students in 2010, which were markedly better than in previous years. The percentage of students gaining 5 A\*- C GCSE grades improved significantly as did those gaining 5 A\*- C including English and mathematics. Almost all students gained 5 A\*- G grade GCSEs. Information on student performance provided by the school and observations of lessons during the inspection indicates that this improvement will continue in the current Years 10 and 11, and outcomes are predicted to be higher.

Students make good progress in lessons and enjoy learning, especially where they are actively involved. Behaviour improves where tasks are engaging and lively and teachers have clear expectations of students' behaviour. Students' social skills are improving and most have good relationships with each other. A small minority of students indicated in their response to the questionnaire that they did not feel safe in school. No inspection evidence was found to support this and, in interviews, students were adamant that they feel safe because they trust staff and know whom to approach if they have any concerns. A few did have concerns that bullying is not always dealt with as effectively as it could be, especially where they felt under pressure from their peers to conform, for example in how they wear their uniform.

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Through their learning communities, students raise considerable funds for charities at local, national and international levels. They make a good contribution to the school community through their involvement in projects, such as developing students' view on what helps them to learn best. While attendance overall is in line with the national average, it is on an improving trend. Attendance in Year 11 has been a serious issue in past years but recent improvements reflect the improvements in attainment. Students gain a clear understanding of the relationship between education and the world of work through the school's strong business links.

*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	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</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>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>3</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?

Teachers present lessons clearly and often make good use of well-prepared resources. In well-planned lessons that are designed to improve learning, good activities are organised to both challenge and engage the students. This was seen in a history lesson, where students worked individually and in groups to evaluate source material and to think about their own opinions. In these lessons, students usually know the standard of their work and how it could be improved although a few teachers do not always use assessment consistently. Where the support from teaching assistants is clearly directed and closely targeted, it promotes the progress of students with learning needs well.

Students appreciate the wide range of curriculum experiences and option choices the school provides. While the core business and enterprise subjects provide a secure basis for

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learning, the school ensures that these are developed in all areas of the curriculum. A creative mix of options allows GCSE students to pursue both academic and vocational subjects enhanced and supplemented by 'Enterprise Days' and other projects. The vocational subjects reflect the local employment market and the range of business partnerships and links with the school.

There are thorough and effective arrangements in place for the care, guidance and support of students. Transition for new students joining the school is good and appreciated by many parents and carers. There is a strong commitment by all staff to working with a range of agencies to sustain the learning, development and well-being of every student.

*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 and his effective senior team are united in their commitment to helping all students in their care achieve their best. Good self-evaluation draws on a wide range of information to focus on key priorities for improvement. Managers routinely make use of the outcomes of secure monitoring procedures to plan for successful improvements. Progress towards meeting challenging performance targets is monitored carefully to ensure satisfactory value for money. The governing body provides good support and satisfactory challenge in holding school to account for tackling important weaknesses. However, they are not involved systematically in rigorously evaluating the school's performance. The school plays an important role in its local community and engages partners effectively in order to benefit the students. These strong community and business links, as well as links with schools and charities in other countries, enrich students' experience of cultural and ethnic diversity. No form of discrimination is tolerated and, although the gaps in performance of different groups are closing, some still remain, especially where the students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The school works hard to involve parents and carers, although some parents and carers are often reluctant to respond. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust. All staff are well trained and the school identifies dangers well, fostering a realistic understanding of risk which helps students to keep themselves safe.

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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>3</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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Sixth form

This satisfactory and improving sixth form is large and inclusive, with many students coming from the school's own Year 11 groups as well as other schools. Outcomes overall were below average in 2010, although attainment improved and was significantly higher than in previous years. Students make satisfactory progress overall. Students who take the vocational courses make better progress than those studying more academic subjects. A significant number of students do not continue with their courses at the end of Year 12 but many start again or change courses in Year 13, with some staying on into Year 14. Attendance is an issue. Too many students are frequently late and this impacts on the pace of learning as teachers often have to recap and restart lessons.

Teaching is good overall, although some students hold the view that teachers' expectations of their achievement are sometimes too low. Some subjects provide students with high-quality assessment and written feedback on their work that gives clear guidance on how to improve. The curriculum is very inclusive of all abilities, with a wide range of courses on offer. The full impact of this very good curriculum is limited by some students not taking the courses that are most appropriate to their needs. Students acknowledge they are well cared for by the school and take part in as many school activities as their studies allow.

The current sixth-form leadership and management team works hard to develop provision and introduce new strategies to improve students' achievement. These new approaches have not had time to have a significant impact on outcomes. In particular, the monitoring of attendance and punctuality needs is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure students attend school more regularly and arrive to lessons promptly.



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*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

In comparison with most secondary schools a below average number of parents and carers returned a response to the questionnaire. The response was largely positive and supportive of the school. Parents and carers were mostly impressed with the school, and transition arrangements from junior schools were described as 'excellent'. Several parents and carers who have had more than one child go through the school acknowledged the recent improvements the school has made. A small minority of parents and carers felt they were not given enough help to support their children's learning and that the school did not prepare children well enough for the future or help them to have a healthy lifestyle. The inspection could find little evidence to support these views. A small minority of parents and carers also felt that the school did not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour, an issue with which the students agreed in their responses to the student questionnaire and interviews with inspectors. Inspection evidence found that behaviour was satisfactory overall and could be improved.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Towers 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 135 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1508 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	43	32	75	56	10	7	6	4
The school keeps my child safe	40	30	76	56	11	8	5	4
My school informs me about my child's progress	50	37	71	53	11	8	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	44	33	77	57	9	7	5	4
The teaching is good at this school	35	26	91	67	6	4	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	17	82	61	22	16	5	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	21	74	55	22	16	7	5
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)	41	30	69	51	10	7	5	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	25	80	59	10	7	8	6
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	31	23	73	54	15	11	15	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	16	84	62	16	12	8	6
The school is led and managed effectively	36	27	77	57	9	7	9	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	42	31	75	56	11	8	7	5

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.**



20 May 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of The Towers School, Ashford TN24 9AL**

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting with you. This letter is to tell you what we found; you may also like to read the full report.

- The Towers is a satisfactory school that is improving, with many good features.
- Sixth-form provision is satisfactory and students make satisfactory progress.
- In the main school, you make good progress overall and your achievement is improving rapidly.
- You tell us you feel safe in school and you enjoy lessons that are lively and interesting. Some of you are concerned that behaviour of others in lessons is not always good enough and this interferes with your learning.
- Many of you attend school regularly and on time, although for some of you this could be improved especially in the sixth form.
- You make a good contribution to the school, particularly through your learning communities, and are keen to take on extra responsibilities, such as leading on 'cyber-bullying'.
- The good curriculum gives you many opportunities to take interesting courses especially those linked to the school's business and enterprise status.
- Many of your teachers plan for interesting lessons, although they do not always use the new behaviour management systems effectively to encourage good behaviour and deal with those who behave poorly.
- The headteacher and his staff are committed to making sure you are always well cared for and able to fulfil your potential.

We have asked the school to look at the following areas to help you improve;

- make sure all teachers use the behaviour management systems in the same way. You can help here by taking more responsibility for your own behaviour.
- keep a closer watch on how regularly you come to school and arrive in lessons, especially in the sixth form.

Good luck and best wishes for the future

Christine Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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