

Chelmer Valley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115345
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	367406
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Frank Knowles

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1141
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gill Sturman
Headteacher	David Franklin
Date of previous school inspection	26 September 2007
School address	Court Road Chelmsford CM1 7ER
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 47 lessons taught by 44 teachers. They held meetings with groups of pupils in Years 7 to 10 and Year 12, with staff and with members of the governing body. Inspectors analysed the school's data on students' attainment and progress, and reviewed a wide range of documentation provided by the school, including policies, subject evaluations, and records of the school's monitoring of teaching and learning. They observed the school's work, and looked in detail at the school's arrangements for safeguarding students. Inspectors also analysed the responses to 330 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 150 from students and 43 from staff.

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

- Are students, particularly more-able and lower-ability students, making sufficient progress to ensure the school improves on its current performance?
- Does teaching build in enough learning activities throughout the school that develop students' higher-order thinking skills?
- Does the school's provision for more-able students, lower-ability students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensure they make fast enough progress that matches that of their peers?
- Are the school's leaders bringing about improvement at a fast enough rate?

Information about the school

Chelmer Valley is a larger than average non-selective school. Most students come from White British backgrounds and the very small minority of students from minority ethnic backgrounds come from a range of different heritages. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small number of students speak English as an additional language, and about half of these are at an early stage of learning English.

The school has been a specialist engineering school for eight years and has recently been granted a second specialism as a leadership partnership school. As well as providing leadership support to other local schools, Chelmer Valley is the lead school in a federation with St Peter's College, another local secondary school that will close at the end of the summer term 2011. Substantial numbers of St Peter's students have now transferred to Chelmer Valley.

The school has achieved national Healthy Schools status and has been awarded the Sportsmark and the Recognition of Quality Award for Careers Education and Guidance. A major building programme is nearing completion with the addition of a new sixth form building, specialist spaces for creative subjects and other adaptations of existing buildings.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The main reason for Chelmer Valley remaining an outstanding school is the high quality of its leadership, management and governance. The school has a clear focus on improvement and this is supported by high expectations for all, and by rigorous and systematic approaches to evaluating its performance, the quality of teaching and learning, and the progress of individual students. As a result, teaching has improved so that more is now good or better, and students are fully engaged in their learning. Responses to questionnaires from parents and carers, students and staff are extremely positive in their support for the way the school is led and managed. This high quality of leadership extends from the executive headteacher through to middle leaders, who work very effectively and collaboratively to support whole-school initiatives and those in their departments or areas. Developments are well considered and thoroughly planned, for example in the support provided through the federation for St Peter's College as it moves to closure.

Students make good progress. An analysis of assessment data for the current school year shows improved progress throughout the school and higher attainment in both Year 11 and the sixth form compared with that in 2010. These improvements are the result of some curriculum changes, a strong focus on improving marking, and well-targeted support for those students at risk of falling behind. The smaller number of GCSE equivalent subjects taken by students at Chelmer Valley means that, on some measures, the school's results in 2010 were not high, but the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was well above the national average. Improvements in the sixth form have taken the A-level and AS-level pass rates to above the national averages.

Students do well because the very large majority of teaching is good or outstanding and provides stimulating activities that engage them in their work. Some good and all the outstanding teaching observed during the inspection supported students at all levels in developing higher-order thinking skills such as evaluation, interpretation and problem solving. Teachers' planning does not always include activities designed specifically to develop these sorts of skills and, in some cases, students are not challenged to think deeply enough. Students enjoy their learning, and their enjoyment is recognised by parents and carers in their responses to the questionnaire. Students also have a good understanding of their current levels or their expected grades, and are highly adept at describing what they need to do to improve their work so that they can achieve their challenging targets.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate, particularly in senior leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning, and this enables well-targeted support to be provided where it is needed. Analysis of the progress made by different classes and the range of different groups of students in the school is done informally, but it is not used

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systematically or frequently enough to support rapid improvements in provision where it is needed or to ensure the school's understanding of any variation in the progress made by different groups. Improvements in the curriculum, the sixth form and in teaching and learning have all resulted in significantly improved provision which has shown through this year in greater progress and higher attainment. This improvement, together with the considerable confidence of parents and carers, staff and students, means that the school has outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

Underpinning the success of the school is the outstanding care, guidance and support it provides for its students. The transition from primary schools to Year 7 is excellent and students settle in quickly. The school provides outstanding support for students who speak English as an additional language and those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive very good care and support. Students feel very safe in the school and the school's procedures for safeguarding students are outstanding. The school frequently seeks students' views through questionnaires and the school council, and acts on the outcomes. Students behave with high levels of courtesy to each other and to adults around the school, and their exceptional behaviour in lessons supports a fast pace of learning. One parent reflected the responses of many when commenting, 'Brilliant school, couldn't fault them on anything. Keep up the good work.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching further by consistently and explicitly planning activities in all lessons that develop higher-order thinking skills, including in the sixth form and for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Make more frequent use of the analysis of the progress made by different groups of students, classes and subjects to identify strengths that can be shared more widely and areas where improvements are needed.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students make good progress from their average starting points because of the good and outstanding teaching they receive. Little time is lost in learning as students are punctual and eager to begin lessons. Careful tracking enables teachers to provide support where students are working below the level determined by their challenging end of key stage or GCSE targets. Analysis of the school's data shows that students are making good progress overall, although there is some variation between subjects. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress because of well-targeted support, particularly in Year 7, but their progress in mathematics is not as fast as that of their peers. Observations showed students making good progress in lessons. Lower-ability students, including many with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieved notably well in art in Year 7. The school's assessment of students in Key Stage 4 shows that more are on target to achieve five or more GCSE grades A* to C than in previous years, taking into account GCSE results already awarded through early entries and assessments such as BTEC and other courses taken this year. The impact of the school's engineering specialism can be seen in the above-average performance of the school in

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related subjects such as design and technology, information and communication technology, and science.

Students are excellent ambassadors for the school. Students take a very responsible approach to their behaviour in and out of class. They enjoy learning and maintain very positive relationships with adults. They have a good understanding of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and make good choices of food at lunchtime, but their choice of break-time snacks often does not match their intentions. Students contribute very well to the school and the local community through fundraising for their chosen house charity and through links with a special school and care home. Students take on responsibilities as prefects, house captains and school councillors, and a substantial number have been trained as peer mentors. The school council has active committees in the Every Child Matters areas listed in the table below. Students are very well prepared for future education and employment through their achievement in literacy and numeracy and their use of these skills across the curriculum, and also through their good attendance and their very well-developed experiences of team working. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good rather than outstanding as they have fewer opportunities for spiritual development, for example, in thinking deeply about ethical issues.

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	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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

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How effective is the provision?

Consistently good or better teaching means that students engage readily in stimulating and interesting activities and move through their tasks at a brisk pace. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are creative in designing interesting learning activities. For example, in a science lesson on light, students were fully engaged in creating the lighting design for a music festival that involved mixing different light colours. Learning objectives are universally shared with students at the start of the lesson. Support and extension activities are widely provided for the lower-ability and more-able students in the class, and activities usually involve a variety of ways of learning during lessons, with a strong focus on paired and group work. Many teachers build in, either specifically or informally, the development of higher-order thinking skills, for example when students evaluated their own and each other's performances in physical education. Teachers' very good questioning of students, frequently asking them to explain why they gave a particular answer, supports an increased depth of thinking. Problem-solving activities, for example when matching algebraic expressions in mathematics, engage students in groups on a common task and encourage good teamwork. The use of 'freeze frames' in an English lesson encouraged creative responses that led to hypotheses about potential endings to a play. Where these higher-order skills did not appear in teachers' planning, opportunities were missed to engage students fully in their learning. For example, a group containing many students with special educational needs and/or disabilities focused more on drawing a 'function machine' in mathematics than on the mathematics the function represented. Marking, the focus of recent professional development, provides a clear indication of the quality of students' work and how it might be improved. As a result, students have a very good awareness of what they need to do to improve their work.

The school's broad and balanced curriculum meets the needs of the vast majority of students exceptionally well. It is focused mainly on GCSE courses, although there are few vocational options, at present. However, senior leaders are continually checking for additional ways of providing better support for those students for whom a GCSE pathway is not ideal. Courses leading to alternative qualifications have been introduced for those students who might not benefit from a more traditional GCSE route. The school is flexible in meeting the needs of learners, for example through the wide range of activities that help extend and challenge students who are gifted or talented. A small number of students benefit from an alternative education programme, partly off site, that helps them remain in education. The school's engineering status supports students with an interest in engineering well and enables them to see this area as a career option. The specialism has had considerable influence on the design of science and technology courses, with some innovative practice in technology. Cross-curricular literacy is a strong feature in ensuring all students have access to all elements of the curriculum. The school is currently reviewing its programme of early entry for GCSE subjects to ensure that the curriculum provides greater personalisation and ensures outstanding achievement. The good range of enrichment activities have a high take-up by students, particularly in sports, music and drama activities.

Outstanding care, guidance and support are particular strengths of the school, resulting from an exceptionally thorough set of policies and procedures. Fortnightly 'well-being' meetings focus on the needs of students whose circumstances or lack of progress may make them vulnerable, drawing on the expertise of a range of staff, including some visiting professionals, and set out clear support strategies. This very good practice mirrors

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on a smaller scale the multi-agency approach used nationally. Record keeping is excellent. Very well sustained and effective work with a variety of external agencies supports the school's own programme for students most in need. Parents and carers are fully involved in this process, and one commented about her son's progress, 'He is very well supported... The special educational needs department have been excellent and pro-active in helping him with his needs.' Students' views are valued highly in the school, and questionnaires are frequently used to identify issues and bring about improvement, for example in the marking policy.

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?

A shared strong sense of purpose drives the school's senior and middle leaders and their effective team working means a consistent approach throughout the school. The school sets itself challenging targets for student outcomes and sets out high expectations for all. Leaders have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in the school. Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous, and trained student observers take part in the programme, providing feedback to teachers on students' learning. A focus this year on marking and assessment has resulted in a substantial increase in the quality of marking and assessment in the school. A focus on gifted and talented students has resulted in an increased range of challenging enrichment activities aimed at these students and more consideration of this aspect of learning in departmental planning. The lack of clear data on the progress of different groups of students and classes means that some departments have developed their own systems to identify where progress is slower, but these are generally not frequent enough to ensure improvement takes place during the year. There is exceptionally strong support for the school's leadership among the staff.

Governance is also outstanding. The governing body has a long-standing strategic plan for its own work and that of its committees, highlighting timescales and success criteria for the school's accountability. The governing body has a powerful voice in taking the school forward, drawing on excellent relationships with staff and challenging discussions with them about the school's performance and development. Governors relate well to parents and carers but have not yet engaged fully with some of the parents and carers whose circumstances make them hard to reach. The school's excellent safeguarding policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated by the governing body. Safeguarding and child protection training for all governors and staff is fully up to date and the school promotes an extremely thorough approach to the recruitment of staff and the safety of

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students, for example ensuring checks are made on the contractors working on site and training peer mentors in safeguarding procedures.

The school's approach to promoting community cohesion is outstanding. It is very well organised into local, national and international strands, and promotes cultural understanding, for example through regular assemblies and visits related to a range of faiths. An annual visit by Chinese teachers has a significant impact on students' understanding of a very different culture, as do large-scale fundraising activities for local and national charities and international causes. All events are evaluated carefully, including by students, to ensure continued improvement. The school promotes equality well and tackles any form of discrimination robustly. For example, an English teacher immediately noted a prejudicial comment when a student answered a question, challenged its use, and sensitively related its use in a historical context to its unacceptability today.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Sixth form

The sixth form has improved significantly since the last inspection. A-level and AS-level results are much better and many more students in Year 12 than previously are exceeding the initial target grades set for them. Students about to leave Year 13 have also made gains and their results are on target to be above average. Retention rates from Year 11 to Year 12 and from Year 12 to Year 13 have increased and are now high. Over half of the students in Year 13 move on to higher education. Students contribute to the school through the house system, charity work, paired reading with students in Key Stage 3, support for sports days in primary schools and modern foreign language teaching to students in Year 6 on induction days. They take part in challenging activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award and World Challenge. Students feel safe and well supported

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through good pastoral and academic guidance. Sixth form students leave the school as well-rounded, mature young adults.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form have the same positive characteristics as in the main school. The questioning of students and assessment are both particular strengths. The curriculum matches the needs of students joining the sixth form and includes some vocational options. The care, guidance and support provided for sixth form students are of high quality and are delivered through a team of specialist tutors. A more rigorous academic tracking system now provides better quality support and intervention strategies where they are needed. Consultation with parents and carers supports students in Year 11 in their choice of sixth form subjects.

Recent changes in the leadership and management of the sixth form have brought with them significant improvements, including in teaching and learning, links with local industry, rigour in tracking students' progress, and rigour in course allocation. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of sixth form provision and have generated a clear vision of how the sixth form should develop. Strategic planning successfully identifies priorities and sets out the actions needed to bring about change.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
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

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are overwhelming positive about the school. About a third of parents and carers wrote comments in response to the questionnaire, some highlighting the same point for praise that was a concern elsewhere, for example support or lack of support for their children, and communication with the school. A few parents and carers noted that some unchecked bullying still existed but all groups of students indicated during discussions that bullying was rare and that it was dealt with effectively. Inspectors found that procedures are robust and well applied. Several parents and carers commented on the lack of healthy options at break times compared with the positive picture at lunch time. Inspectors noted the same point and it was reflected in some discussions with students.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Chelmer Valley High 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 330 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1141 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	146	44	164	50	15	5	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	164	50	156	47	3	1	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	163	49	153	46	11	3	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	163	49	150	45	9	3	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	149	45	170	52	4	1	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	107	32	187	57	26	8	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	82	25	220	67	19	6	2	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)	108	33	188	57	8	2	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	131	40	174	53	12	4	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	136	41	158	48	22	7	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	87	26	177	54	24	7	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	178	54	137	42	5	2	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	185	56	131	40	8	2	3	1

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).

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">■ 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.



13 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Chelmer Valley High School, Chelmsford, CM1 7ER

Thank you all for the very warm welcome you gave the members of the inspection team when we visited your school. We were impressed by the courtesy with which you treat each other and adults, and found our discussions with you very helpful in gaining a clear picture of the school and its day-to-day life.

You go to an outstanding school. Teaching and learning are consistently good or better and the interesting lessons that teachers prepare mean that you enjoy learning, make good progress and achieve well. We were particularly impressed with the clear understanding you had of what you have to do to improve your work. You told us that you feel very safe at school and that the few instances of bullying are dealt with quickly. Overall, you develop into very mature young people, ready to move on to the next stage of your life.

One of the main reasons for the school's success is the excellent way it is led and managed, and we know you feel this too, from almost all of your responses to the questionnaire you completed.

We have left the staff with two areas of action to make the school even better. One is for all teachers to be more specific in their planning about how the activities in lessons can challenge you to think deeply about the topic you are learning, as happens in many lessons already. The second is for senior staff to find out more about students' progress in different groups, classes and subjects to help the school target where further improvements are needed.

For your part, we hope you will continue to play a very active role in your learning in all lessons and maintain your clear enthusiasm for learning well beyond school.

Yours sincerely

Frank Knowles

Lead inspector

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