

Brentwood County High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115375
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	379072
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2011
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
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	1404
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tom Craven
Headteacher	Carol Mason
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2009
School address	Shenfield Common Brentwood Essex CM14 4JF
Telephone number	01277 238900
Fax number	01277 200853
Email address	bchs@bchs.essex.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 59 lessons taught by 54 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, nominated staff, members of the governing body and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at a wide range of documentation and reviewed 586 questionnaires returned by parents and carers. A total of 101 student and 103 staff questionnaires were evaluated.

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

- How well do students achieve in public examinations?
- What is the impact of curriculum provision on the standards attained and the progress made by all students?
- How good are students' behaviour and attendance, and has persistent absence reduced in recent years?
- How effective is the quality of teaching in all year groups?

Information about the school

This is a larger than the average secondary school. The large majority of students are White British. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is half the national figure; the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language is low. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students registered by the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, as is the number with a statement of special educational need or receiving support at 'school action plus'. In each year group, there is a number of children who are looked after by the local authority. The school has specialist status in science, mathematics and computing. This has secured the following national accreditations: Investors in People, Eco School Award and Healthy Schools status.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school with a good sixth form. The senior management team's self-evaluation judged the school to be good but the inspection team was unable to validate this view. Only two of the seven outcomes that relate to the Every Child Matters agenda are good; these are the adoption of healthy lifestyles and the students' positive contribution to the community. Inspectors noted the concerns about behaviour expressed in the questionnaire returns from parents, carers, students, and staff, and found evidence to support these concerns.

Attainment has been average for the last three years, although results in science have varied and those in modern foreign languages have been significantly below average. The percentage of students making expected progress in English has improved significantly. However, outcomes in mathematics, one of the school's specialisms, are less consistent. Overall, the value added by the school improved in 2011 and was broadly average. Students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, and those who find learning difficult, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress. Students from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds progress as well or better than their peers.

In the best lessons, the students' current learning and progress are improving. However, in lessons where teaching failed to develop the students' learning effectively, not enough emphasis was placed on developing new knowledge and understanding or the enhancement of subject-specific literacy and numeracy skills. Teaching is satisfactory overall. However, not all students are consistently involved in their own learning. Students of all abilities responded well when they were engaged and challenged by the tasks provided. A feature of the more effective lessons was the use of assessment led learning. Although some inconsistencies remain in marking, the use of assessment to inform learning is good.

Curriculum opportunities provided are now broadly satisfactory, although the variations in the quality of provision within subjects are reflected in the examination results of different departments. The care, guidance and support provided are satisfactory and the students speak positively about the school's mixed-age tutor periods. However, the attendance and punctuality of some groups of students remains a concern. On the first day of this inspection, 10 of the school's population was late for school.

Students make good progress in the sixth form because they are more involved in their own learning. Teaching and the use of assessment are more consistent and an effective leadership team provide appropriate academic and pastoral guidance. In the school as a whole, leadership and management are satisfactory. However,

curriculum changes have not kept pace with more effective schools nationally and the senior staff's view of the quality of teaching is too optimistic, lacking sufficient focus on the quality of learning. Nevertheless, governance is good. The governing body is well-informed and reacted positively to helpful guidance from the local authority by providing significant support to the senior management team on the introduction of assessment led learning. Successful partnership work with local secondary schools has helped to broaden the range of post-16 opportunities provided. The school's capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

Up to 40 of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged 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?

- Improve standards and achievement by:
 - focussing leaders' monitoring and evaluation of teaching on the quality of students' learning
 - reviewing the breadth and quality of the school's curriculum provision.
- Improve behaviour and attendance by:
 - ensuring the consistent application of the school's behaviour management policies
 - robustly monitoring punctuality and the attendance of underachieving students.
- Enhance the quality of teaching by:
 - using the examples of best practice to ensure students make good progress
 - ensuring that marking and the use of assessment are always consistent with school policies.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment on entry is average. In 2011, the proportion of students who gained five higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, was just above the national average. The average points scored by students in their best eight examination courses improved significantly to a point just above the national average. Progress in English and mathematics varies. The school's specialist subjects of mathematics, science and computing have not consistently helped to raise standards. The percentage of students securing the English Baccalaureate is half the local authority average.

Students made good progress in 40 of the lessons observed. Outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and they respond well to this challenge. In a good English literature lesson, the teacher made good use of examination board criteria to guide the students through an assessment task that required them to edit a prepared text in order to secure a higher GCSE

grade. Students were engrossed in the tasks and worked well together. There are not enough of these strong lessons to allow students to make good progress.

Students, parents and carers were generally positive that students feel safe in the school. However, many expressed concerns regarding behaviour and a quarter of the staff questionnaire responses expressed a view that behaviour management was inconsistent. The school strongly encourages students to adopt a healthy lifestyle. A wide range of healthy school meals is available and the proportion of students engaged in sport is rising. The students’ contribution to the school and the local community has been strengthened through the work of the mixed-age tutor groups where older students work effectively to support younger individuals.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils’ behaviour	3
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Students’ make satisfactory progress in the majority of lessons. They make good progress where staff focus on the quality of learning and make appropriate use of the new ‘assessment led learning’ initiative. On some occasions, progress is hindered by a lack of clarity within the tasks set or the pace and challenge of the work. Where opportunities for students to participate are limited some become disengaged.

In the best lessons, teachers provide good resources and use their good subject knowledge to plan activities that motivate the students and enhance their enjoyment. In many cases, this includes the use of information and communication technology (ICT), for example, data projectors and interactive whiteboards. In these lessons, challenging tasks help all students to make progress and peer group discussions help to deepen their understanding. Relationships are positive. Where learning is less successful, some tasks have too low a level of challenge for students as for example,

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

when all students across a range of abilities are expected to complete the same tasks. In these weaker lessons, teachers do not give individuals sufficient opportunities to collaborate and discuss their work. This limits opportunities for students to express themselves in oral exchanges and written tasks. The introduction of assessment led learning, although not fully developed, was a notable strength in some lessons.

The curriculum is satisfactory. The reorganisation of science courses, one of the school’s specialisms, has been important to the improvement in attainment and achievement in 2011. The impact of the English curriculum has helped to raise attainment, but the mathematics curriculum is not as successful and inconsistencies in provision remain. The variations in the quality and extent of subject provision are placing a constraint on the proportion of students securing the English Baccalaureate qualification.

The pastoral support for individuals is generally well regarded by students, their parents and carers. Similarly, they speak positively about the work of the special educational needs team and its coordination. However, exclusions are on a rising trend and bullying was a concern noted by parents and carers, and observed by inspectors. Punctuality to school on the first day of this inspection was not helped by the absence of staff on duty. Groups of students sought out inspectors to comment on the inconsistency of behaviour management.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership team’s view of the school has been overly positive. While standards and achievement have risen nationally, the school’s examination outcomes have remained broadly average. Some weaknesses in curriculum provision have been addressed too slowly and the senior leadership team has been inconsistent in embedding ambition and driving improvement. Nevertheless, there are strengths in leadership at most levels, although there remains variation in the impact of curriculum leaders on the monitoring of provision and attainment. Senior staff were invited to accompany inspectors in the joint observation of teaching: the views they expressed were generally more positive those of inspectors when a judgement was close to a grade boundary. Data from the monitoring of teaching over time were scrutinised by the inspection team and found to be more positive than inspection evidence could support because senior staff focus on what the teacher is doing rather than on what the students are learning. Equality of opportunity is broadly satisfactory, although middle ability students are less successful than might be

expected.

Governance is good, with a clear focus on enhancing provision at every level. The governing body has taken appropriate action to support the introduction of assessment led learning as a focus for school improvement. Safeguarding procedures are good overall, with strengths in those related to staff recruitment and risk assessment. Monitoring by the governing body of procedures against practice is robust. Engagement with parents and carers is broadly satisfactory but insufficient to address the behaviour and attendance issues identified in this report. The school’s partnership working is otherwise good. A constructive relationship with other local secondary schools has been a positive feature of sixth form provision. Community cohesion is satisfactory with significant support for some feeder schools and charitable donation. Senior staff and the governing body deploy resources satisfactorily.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Examination outcomes at A level are improving and progress is good. Attendance is satisfactory and rising rapidly. The proportion of students staying on from Year 12 to Year 13 is above average. Teachers’ subject knowledge is good and teachers succeed in engaging students as active participants in their own learning. Lessons have a focus on thinking skills and evaluation. The curriculum, which is offered in conjunction with two other local schools, allows students to take the subjects of their choice. A strong enrichment programme takes students out of school on appropriate occasions. The leadership and management of the sixth form are effective and well respected by students who praised staff ‘who push us to our maximum, but are always there to help’.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
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

The views of parents and carers varied significantly and were echoed by the results of the questionnaires issued to students and staff. For example, a fifth of parents and carers expressed concerns regarding behaviour, echoing similar concerns expressed by students and staff. Parents and carers were also concerned that the school does not take sufficient account of their views with regard to behaviour and bullying. However, parents and carers attending a consultation evening took informal opportunities to speak positively regarding communication with the school. Inspectors found students to be generally polite, articulate and helpful, but witnessed some inappropriate behaviour and weaknesses in supervision.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Brentwood County 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 586 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1404 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total		Total		Total		Total	
My child enjoys school	200	34	322	55	46	8	14	2
The school keeps my child safe	179	31	357	61	39	7	6	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	240	41	300	52	29	5	5	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	188	32	316	54	50	9	9	2
The teaching is good at this school	148	25	366	63	38	7	4	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	168	29	352	60	46	8	8	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	108	19	364	63	82	14	7	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)	143	25	345	59	42	7	6	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	143	25	379	65	45	8	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	124	21	315	54	83	14	21	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	121	21	344	59	57	10	9	2
The school is led and managed effectively	183	31	341	59	25	4	15	3
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	222	38	306	53	39	7	13	2

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



28 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Brentwood County High School, Brentwood, CM14 4JF

I would like to thank all of you who gave up your time to speak with members of the inspection team and for the courtesy and consideration you showed to us.

Your school is satisfactory and the sixth form provision is good. However, students in the main school should be making more progress and I have asked the headteacher to improve teaching, standards, achievement and behaviour.

Many of you were concerned about the inconsistent way behaviour is managed and many of your parents, carers and staff agreed. Attendance is average but there are some of you who do not attend school regularly enough. Too many students were late for school during the inspection. Although bus travel is an issue for some of you, others were dawdling.

Sixth form provision is good because older students are involved in their own learning and, as some students noted, they are supported by staff 'who push us to our maximum, but are always there to help'.

I look forward to hearing about your future successes.

Yours sincerely

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

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