

The Cornelius Vermuyden School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	115336
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	379064
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	884
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeffrey Stanley
Headteacher	Carol Skewes
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2009
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Brewerton

Additional Inspector

Stephen Hume

Additional Inspector

Gay Tattersall

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. On the first day of the inspection, Year 10 students were attending a college taster day. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; minutes of management and governing body meetings; reports from external consultants; records relating to assessment, attendance, behaviour and the school's own monitoring; bullying and racist incident logs; and the single central record of safeguarding checks. The inspectors observed 43 lessons taught by 41 different teachers, each for 25 to 30 minutes. They validated the accuracy of senior leaders' lesson judgements through joint observations. They examined a sample of students' English work and observed students receiving learning support. Meetings were held with the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, various leaders and managers, groups of students, teachers and teaching assistants. They analysed questionnaire responses from 40 parents and carers, 103 students and 42 members of staff.

Information about the school

The Cornelius Vermuyden School is an average-sized secondary school. The school is in the process of being rebuilt. Many of the new facilities have been occupied for the first time this year.

Most students are of White British heritage, and very few come from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average, as is the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs, or are supported at school action plus. The school meets the government's current floor standards, the minimum levels expected of schools for attainment and progress. It holds a number of awards, including the Artsmark, Sportsmark, ICT Mark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Careers Education Quality Mark, and has Healthy Schools and Investors in People 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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Its rapid improvement in recent years is a credit to the leadership of the headteacher and her senior team, and to the hard work of the whole school community. The school is not outstanding because students' literacy skills are not fully developed and a minority of teaching is satisfactory, rather than good.
- The proportion of students gaining five good GCSEs has doubled since the school was last inspected, and results in English and mathematics have improved by a full grade on average. Students make good progress with no groups or subjects underachieving. However, students are not always able to articulate their knowledge and understanding when speaking or writing, and these aspects are not consistently corrected by teachers.
- Teaching is good in a large majority of lessons and some is outstanding. The most effective teaching encourages students to think for themselves and develop independent learning skills. Inadequate teaching is rare but a minority of lessons feature satisfactory teaching that does not respond so well to students' different needs or involve them quickly enough in active learning.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students are polite, courteous and respectful to each other and to adults. In lessons, students respond well when given opportunities to work in teams and when teachers structure discussions to help those who are less confident. Almost all students feel safe in school and most feel that any bullying is handled well.
- The school's rigorous self-evaluation leads to well-focused improvement plans that have raised attainment and addressed previous concerns about the achievement of certain groups. Performance management is effective at all levels. Robust intervention and support helps teachers to improve and helps students who are at risk of underachievement to catch up.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further, particularly in literacy, by:
 - ensuring that students are able to articulate their ideas clearly in standard written and spoken English
 - providing students with specific, personalised guidance on how to improve their literacy work.

- Address the most common weaknesses of satisfactory lessons to ensure that teaching is consistently good or outstanding by:
 - ensuring that students are engaged in purposeful activity at an earlier stage of the lesson
 - making sure that lessons cater for the full range of students' learning needs within each class
 - encouraging teachers to deploy any teaching assistants to maximise the benefit of their expertise for all students
 - improving the consistency and regularity of marking, and encouraging teachers to check that their guidance is being followed by students.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

When students join the school in Year 7 their attainment is below average with literacy skills that are less well developed than mathematical skills. Their good progress in both key stages means that they catch up with national expectations by Year 11 so that attainment for current students is now just above average. In the large majority of lessons that are well taught, students engage well, are eager to learn and make good progress. They collaborate with each other and raise their own questions to further their learning. Their understanding of mathematics is well developed because their lessons include exploratory work that allows them to make sense of each topic. Students' literacy skills are not as strong, especially their use of standard English when speaking and writing. Weaker readers sometimes struggle to extract meaning from some of the texts they meet.

Students' achievement has improved each year since the last inspection. By 2011, the proportion gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics was at a record level for the school and close to the national average. However, boys were underachieving and progress was below national expectations in English and GCSE science. In addition, there were a few disaffected students placed on alternative programmes who gained few qualifications. Over the last year, the school has targeted the underachieving groups and subjects. The school's own assessments, which have been reliable in the past, suggest that boys' progress is now satisfactory and results have improved in English and science. Students on the alternative programme are now gaining GCSE grades in English and mathematics alongside

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vocational qualifications. Consequently, the learning and progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is now good and the attainment gaps have closed for boys and for students known to be eligible for school meals. All but one of the parents and carers who completed questionnaires felt that their children were making good progress.

Quality of teaching

Students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are making good progress as a result of good teaching and a very strong programme of extra classes and one-to-one support for students who fall behind. Most of the parents and carers and nearly all of the students who returned questionnaires felt that teaching was usually good. The inspection confirmed that a large majority of lessons are well taught and some are outstanding.

In the best lessons observed by inspectors, students were helped to overcome their inhibitions and contribute their ideas and opinions to class discussion. Students were given an active role, for example in researching information, taking notes during video clips, or planning their own experiments. Group work featured strongly in an outstanding Year 9 mathematics lesson on sequences. Several lessons tackled moral and cultural issues or caused students to reflect on their beliefs. The most effective teachers assessed students' understanding and progress unobtrusively throughout the lesson, enabling them to adapt their teaching where necessary. For example, a geography teacher realised that Year 8 students' writing on deserts was mainly descriptive so asked probing questions to encourage students to explain the lack of rain in terms of the shadow effect of mountains.

Teachers often encourage students to assess their own work and that of others. This was highly effective in an outstanding Year 7 drama lesson because the teacher had given each student a personalised target that was easy for other students to check, such as 'stay in character without giggling' or 'make sure your character speaks at least four lines'. Occasionally, teachers refer students to assessment criteria that are expressed in language that is difficult to understand. The quality and regularity of marking are variable. Most teachers provide feedback for students on how well they are doing, but advice is not always specific enough to help the student, or followed up when work is next marked.

In the minority of satisfactory lessons, long introductions gave students too much information to remember before they got a chance to use it in context. Opportunities were missed to give students an active role in their learning and to provide different levels of support or challenge to enable students to maximise their achievement.

Withdrawal programmes to improve reading or to support disabled students and those who have special educational needs are very effective. Teaching assistants were deployed well in the best lessons, for example to teach a small group or to support several students in turn, but were not always directed clearly by the teacher.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

In their questionnaires, a large majority of students, parents and carers reported that students' behaviour is good. The school's behaviour records show that good behaviour has been the norm for a considerable time. This is reflected in the low rates of exclusion. Students with behavioural difficulties benefit from the school's very good pastoral care and are helped to manage their behaviour. Students arrive punctually to lessons and show positive attitudes to learning. During the inspection some younger classes were reticent when observed, though the most effective teachers had a range of strategies to overcome this. Students grow in confidence as they move through the school.

Students get along well with each other and with adults. Students from minority ethnic groups are fully integrated in the school community. There have been no recorded racist incidents for over a year. Students understand different types of bullying and how to avoid it, for example through safe practices in social networking. Students recognise that they will sometimes fall out with each other but say that repeated harassment and bullying is rare. Most students, parents and carers consider that bullying is usually dealt with promptly and effectively.

Students feel safe in school and enjoy attending. Attendance has shown a sustained and convincing improvement and is just below the national average. Encouragingly, the proportion of students who are persistently absent is below average. Students behave safely and recognise hazards. For example, they understand the need for extra caution during the building programme and behave responsibly. Students in the Year 10 hospitality class washed their hands and donned protective clothing without being reminded.

Leadership and management

The school and its governing body are ambitious for its students and for the future quality of provision. Rigorous and accurate self-evaluation is used to identify priorities for the school development plan. The school's leaders and managers have shown a good capacity for improvement and a commitment to equal opportunities by raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching to benefit all. Especially notable is that these improvements have been secured during a prolonged period of reconstruction of the buildings, which now provide a number of innovative teaching spaces.

Students' achievement is monitored regularly and prompt action is taken to tackle any variations in performance, such as the performance of boys and of students in the alternative programme, and the weaknesses previously evident in English and science. The school's detailed and accurate observations of lessons show that teaching has improved to good since the last inspection. This has been achieved through good leadership of teaching and learning and a commitment to professional development. Performance management, including that of the governing body in respect of the headteacher, is effective. Leadership capacity has been improved by

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increasing the school's expectations of middle managers through effective line management and training. Effective leadership in mathematics is bringing about a greater focus on progressively building up students' understanding. Good leadership in English has led to a sharp increase in attainment, although the recently introduced literacy project has not had a significant impact on improving literacy skills because it is not yet embedded in the fabric of lessons and assessment.

The curriculum meets students' needs well as a result of recent changes. These include extra time for English and mathematics in Year 7 and the inclusion of more qualifications in the alternative programme for students at risk of disaffection. It provides a good range of options, including triple science, humanities and a modern foreign language for academic students as well as a range of vocational courses. There are many opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through lessons and extra-curricular activities, and through the school's caring ethos and commitment to community cohesion. Students benefit from a wide range of cultural events, visits and links with schools in Europe and Africa.

The quality of the school's pastoral care remains good. Safeguarding meets current requirements and the school tackles discrimination effectively. The school is adopting an increasingly effective range of strategies to engage parents and carers with their children's schooling, including newsletters and focus groups.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



29 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Cornelius Vermuyden School, Canvey Island SS8 9QS

On behalf of the inspection team, I want to thank you for making us welcome in your school and sharing your views with us. We talked to as many of you as possible and analysed over a hundred student questionnaires. Most of you told us that you are mostly taught well and learn a lot, that you usually feel safe in school and that any bullying is handled well. A small minority of you felt that behaviour is sometimes a problem, but we felt that behaviour and safety are good overall.

Your school is led well by the headteacher and senior staff, and it provides you with a good education. Last year, a record number of students gained five good GCSEs or the equivalent. However, some students – especially boys – had not achieved as well as expected. In the past, English results were disappointing but we were pleased to find that the school has now tackled these important issues. Boys' achievement has improved all round and you are now getting better English results. However, some of you still find it difficult to explain your ideas and thoughts in standard spoken and written English, so we have asked the school to work on your literacy skills.

The inspection team agrees with you and the senior teachers that a large majority of teaching is good and some is outstanding. We have made some suggestions about how to improve the minority of weaker lessons, which you can read in the main report. We have also suggested that the school improves the quality of marking and other feedback. While most of you know your levels and targets, we felt that some teachers could be more precise when telling you how to improve your work.

You can help by working hard on your literacy skills and by taking a full part in class discussions. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

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