

The Westlands School

Westlands Avenue, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 1PF

Inspection dates 24–25 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding 1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding 1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding 1
Leadership and management		Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The Trust principal is relentless in his drive to ensure students succeed. He sets exacting standards for all and will settle for nothing but the best.
- Leaders at all levels are passionate about the difference they can make. They routinely check how well students are doing and provide extra support where necessary to ensure no-one lags behind.
- GCSE results have risen from way below to above average since 2009. This is because of leaders' attention to detail and their insistence on raising students' views of themselves and what they are capable of achieving.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They approach learning with growing confidence and enthusiasm. Mutual respect is at the heart of this vibrant school community.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers have unequivocally high expectations of all students. They manage their classes exceptionally well to ensure that all students are actively involved in their learning.
- The governing body and trustees have an excellent understanding of the school, the challenges it faces and its strengths. They have played an active part in securing improvements.
- The sixth form is good and rapidly improving. Results are above average this year and it is growing in numbers and courses offered.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 52 lessons taught by 51 teachers, around a fifth of which were joint observations with members of the senior team, including the Trust principal. A number of briefer visits to other lessons also took place.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, the Director of the board of trustees, the Vice-chair of the Governing Body, and with school staff, including senior staff and heads of subjects. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including students' work. They also considered 29 responses to the on-line questionnaire Parent View and 98 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Lesley Farmer, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Howard Jones	Additional Inspector
Helen Neal	Additional Inspector
Christine Mayle	Additional Inspector
Jason Hughes	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Westlands School is a converter academy, established in September 2010, from The Westlands School, a maintained secondary modern school in the control of Kent local authority. When it was last inspected in 2008, The Westlands School was judged to be outstanding overall; teaching, behaviour and overall effectiveness of the sixth form were judged to be good.
- The school is a larger than average-sized non-selective secondary school, located within a selective area. It is the lead school in an academy trust consisting of two primaries and an additional secondary school.
- The Trust principal is responsible for the leadership of all four trust schools. Other staff also provide support within the schools.
- The school does not make use of any alternative educational provision.
- The proportion of students that are looked after or known to be eligible for free school meals (for whom the school receives additional money known as the 'pupil premium') is slightly below average.
- The proportions of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action, or at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, are above average.
- The school has an on-site centre known as the 'Pyramid Centre' where two units are located, providing specialist support for students with physical disabilities or dyslexia.
- Relatively few students are from minority ethnic groups and few speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching in more lessons from 'good' to 'outstanding', by ensuring that all teachers:
 - consistently adapt tasks to match the full range of abilities in their classes, including the more able and those for whom the school receives pupil premium funding.
- Enable students to make consistently rapid progress across all subjects in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that leaders and teachers continue to make sharper use of sixth form national comparative data so that they build on and sustain recent improvements.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students make outstanding progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, most from exceptionally low starting points. As a result of skilled teaching and well-targeted additional support, they make exceptional gains to achieve above average standards by the end of Year 11.
- Students' progress in mathematics and English is outstanding. This is because the school's leaders have provided additional lessons in both subjects in Key Stage 3 for those that need it to ensure that they catch up quickly and are able to work successfully alongside their peers.
- There is very little difference in achievement between groups of students from all ethnic heritages and from backgrounds of differing social or economic advantage. Pupil premium funding has been used successfully to provide extra help for these students in mathematics and English, so as to speed up their progress. This has made a difference in 2012, with many progressing rapidly and better than in the past, although they are not yet reaching the same standards as some of their peers.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those in the school's special units, make outstanding progress. This is because work for them is judiciously pitched at the right level and extra help is planned to ensure that it makes a difference.
- In the sixth form over time, there has been some variability in progress across subjects particularly for the more able, as the school has had to adjust to the growth in numbers and the need to expand the subjects and types of qualifications on offer. However, as a result of effective targeting, 2012 has yielded significant improvements. Overall, standards are up and rates of progress at both A and AS levels have increased, with some subjects securing outstanding results, such as in mathematics, law and psychology.
- Across the school, in all subjects, teachers are aware of the need to develop students' skills to read, write and communicate effectively. They fully exploit every opportunity to hear students read aloud and encourage them to discuss and debate. Consequently, most students read and write well and speak very confidently in lessons.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The school's own records of monitoring of teaching indicate that it is rarely less than good in this school. This was confirmed on inspection, where lessons offered an exceptional degree of consistently effective practice.
- Teachers have very high expectations of all students. They are required both to contribute and to respect the needs of others in the class. Consequently, they are keen learners and, regardless of their abilities, they are resilient and willing to challenge themselves. For example, in an outstanding Year 7 English lesson, students, some of whom had weak literacy skills, worked enthusiastically, rapidly developing their punctuation, reading aloud and writing. All students participated fully and were 'kept on their toes' as a result of carefully targeted support provided by additional adults and probing questioning of all on the part of the teacher.
- Students' work is marked regularly, with helpful comments making clear what students have done well and how they can improve. Students value this kind of feedback greatly. They almost invariably know their targets for each subject and are readily able to talk about the aspects of their work or the particular skills they need to develop to meet or exceed their target grades.
- The school's leaders have worked hard to successfully develop teachers' use of assessment information to help them plan their lessons. There is now remarkably consistent practice across all subjects and year groups in planning for the progression of 'all, most and some' students as a vehicle to address the varying needs of all students within a class. However, some teachers' rigid interpretation of this policy means that the needs of the more able students or, occasionally, those supported through the pupil premium are not always fully met.

- Disabled students and those who need extra help, including students in the school's units receive support of an excellent quality, including from additional adults. Teachers and additional adults work creatively in partnership, jointly planning lessons so that expectations of students are high and they are continually challenged to reach the highest possible standards.
- Teachers are confident in their interpretation of school and national assessment information and they understand the need for continual challenge if they are to succeed in their drive to further exceed national standards. In the sixth form, however, this has been less well developed until recently.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' behaviour is exemplary. They arrive on time to lessons, follow expected routines naturally and contribute strongly to their own learning.
- Inclusion is at the heart of the school. For example, students in the Pyramid Centre are very much part of the school. A particular strength is the way in which their achievement alongside that of others is celebrated by all.
- Between lessons, students' safe and mature behaviour in the sometimes crowded corridors and in outdoor spaces reflects their sense of responsibility and respect for others very well.
- Students' awareness of the dangers of bullying, including in forms such as cyber bullying and prejudice-based bullying, is very well developed. They know what to do when it occurs, including reporting it to adults and they are confident that it is dealt with effectively.
- Support for students who find it difficult to behave properly is outstanding. The school works in partnership with a range of external partners, and tailored support packages ensure that these students are kept going and achieve well. This is borne out by the sharp drop in the rate of exclusions in recent years and the improvement in attendance, which is above average.
- Parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire feel that students behave and progress well and that their children are safe in school. Staff agree.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The Trust principal provides uncompromising leadership. He is passionate about teaching and is 'hands on' in developing and guiding practice. He is highly valued by the local authority as a source of support for other schools.
- Improving teaching further has been a high priority since the last inspection. Observations of teachers by senior and subject leaders, alongside analysis of their long-term impact on students' progress, are used effectively to target a wide range of training for staff. This has resulted in excellent improvements in teaching over time.
- Well-developed systems and processes are in place to enable leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's performance. These are clearly linked to the targets set for teachers and to their pay and performance.
- Leaders act tenaciously to correct any weaknesses. Recognising that achievement in the sixth form was not as strong as in the main school, action was taken to secure improvement and to excellent effect in 2012. Further well-considered plans are in place to continue this trend.
- Teachers new to the profession receive rigorous support and induction. They are guided and coached by senior staff in all of their lessons for at least their first term in the school. This approach is appreciated and it is highly effective in ensuring that the teachers concerned quickly adopt school policies and students do not experience inconsistency.
- Leaders in the school routinely monitor students' progress towards targets. In addition to extra English and mathematics lessons in Key Stage 3, they also provide intensive extra tuition in small groups for those that still need extra help in Year 11, thereby building their skills and confidence and ensuring success.
- The school enters students early for mathematics, to build their confidence. However, this does not prevent them from securing the top grades. No students targeted for grades higher than

those that they achieve on early entry are permitted to drop the subject. Results of those who continue with mathematics in the sixth form at AS and A level are exceptional.

- The curriculum meets students' needs very well. It provides a wealth of opportunities to support their spiritual, cultural, social and moral development. Students, including those in the sixth form, are extremely positive about the range of courses available to them.

- **The governance of the school:**

- Governors and trustees know the school well. They have supported the Trust principal in addressing weaknesses, such as in teaching, and to excellent effect. They also back him in ensuring that teachers' pay is directly linked to effective teaching. Their expectations of his performance are equally robust. Well-documented minutes attest to their insistence on continual improvement such as in the sixth form, which was highlighted from discussions in 2010. Additional funding such as the pupil premium is monitored and governors expect to see further improvements for these and all other students in 2013. Systems to keep pupils safe meet government requirements well.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136286
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	395706

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community
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	1742
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	307
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	George Clifton
Headteacher	Jon Whitcombe
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01795 412475
Fax number	01795 479461
Email address	office@westlands.kent-sch.gov.uk

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