

The County School

36 Mayfield Road, Hartford, Huntingdon, PE29 1NL

Inspection dates

15-16 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in English and mathematics because they are taught well.
- By Year 11, pupils gain good work-related skills and valuable vocational qualifications.
- Almost all Year 11 pupils succeed in gaining a place at college when they leave school.
- The care and support pupils receive is outstanding. They are very safe in school.
- Most pupils make rapid gains in confidence as their reading improves. Most say the school, 'turns our lives around'. Parents and carers agree with the views of their children.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils' understanding of how to keep safe is outstanding.
- All leaders, including members of the management committee, are committed to removing obstacles that get in the way of learning for pupils. They help pupils overcome their emotional difficulties and support them in believing that they can succeed.
- Thorough checking of teaching and listening to each pupil so as to find out how pupils best learn has resulted in changes which have contributed to raising pupils' achievement. This new school improves daily.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a few lessons, teachers do not plan work that helps pupils to build on what they already know. Marking is a little inconsistent and so pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work. Occasionally, teaching assistants do not contribute sufficiently to pupils' learning in lessons.
- Some pupils do not come to school as often as they should. This slows their progress.
- Money given to mainstream schools to provide extra support for pupils entitled to free school meals is not passed on to this school when such pupils, who are also at risk of permanent exclusion, are sent here by their mainstream schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 11 lessons taught by 11 different teachers across all three sites and in the local college classroom. Five of these lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also heard pupils read from different classes and conducted a work scrutiny.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils and a representative from the local authority, who also attends management committee meetings regularly, in a governance role.
- The inspectors looked at assessment information, pupil re-integration figures (the number who return to their mainstream schools), the school's plans for improvement, the school's monitoring information, curriculum plans, the school's website, a range of policies including safeguarding policies, and minutes of management committee meetings. The lead inspector examined 27 staff questionnaires.
- There were eight responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) at the time of the inspection. These views were taken into account by inspectors, along with letters sent in to the school marked for the attention of the inspection team. The lead inspector also spoke face-to-face with three parents who visited the school during the inspection.

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Hermione Horne

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school makes provision for pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion or who, in a few cases, are pupils placed from out of county and are permanently excluded.
- It is located on sites in two different towns and a city: March which caters for pupils from Year 9–11; Huntingdon which caters for pupils from Year 7–11; and Cambridge which caters for pupils from Year 9–11.
- In addition there is a Year 11 class at Huntingdon Regional College as part of the 'Step-up-to-College Programme' which is a course to prepare pupils to be ready to cope with going to college. Most of the vocational courses are delivered by teachers within the school. A few, such as hair and beauty, are delivered by college staff.
- All except for a few pupils (those placed from out of county) are dual registered. This means they remain on the roll of the mainstream school from where they come as well as being placed on the roll of this school.
- All pupils were on the special educational needs register in their previous schools because they were not coping in their mainstream schools, but none have a statement of special educational needs.
- Most pupils are White British. However, the number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly from Eastern Europe, is increasing as is the proportion from families where English is an additional language.
- An above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium which is extra funding from the government for pupils in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- This school opened in September 2011 following the merger of an outstanding pupil referral unit with one that was in special measures and one which had been identified by the local authority as being at risk of failing to provide an adequate education. There is an executive headteacher with oversight of the three settings and a teacher-in-charge based on each site. The executive headteacher and the three teachers-in-charge all worked previously in the outstanding pupil referral unit.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is all consistently good or better across all three sites and in the college so as to speed up pupils' progress and raise their attainment by:
 - making effective use of information about pupils' prior learning to plan new and challenging work that is set at the right level for them so that they maximise their learning in every lesson
 - ensuring that teaching assistants always make a contribution to pupils' learning in all lessons
 - making sure that pupils' books are marked in such a way that they are given very clear guidance about what exactly they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve the attendance of those few pupils who are absent from school far too often by 10% within a year so as to raise their achievement.
- Work in partnership with the local authority (in its governance role) to ensure that, when pupils eligible for a free school meal are placed in this school, the schools from which they are sent pass on the pupil premium funding so that it can be used to raise these pupils' achievement further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- From low starting points, because of gaps in their education as a result of poor attendance in their previous schools, most pupils make good progress in English and mathematics. However, because the catch up needed in such a short period of time is so great, their attainment in English and mathematics by Year 11 remains below the national average.
- Overall, the rate of progress is faster in mathematics than in English. Often gains in mathematics are outstanding. Although pupils' progress in English is good it is a little inconsistent across the different sites. However, as a result of support given to teachers during the first year of this new school this is improving rapidly. Only occasionally do pupils sit in lessons which do not move them on quickly enough with new learning. Pupils' progress in most lessons is good; in a few it is outstanding.
- From the beginning of this year each pupil receives one-to-one support every week with reading and writing. Work in these sessions is based on their specific needs. Pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their reading and writing. One says, 'I need to use the comma rather than letting my writing ramble on and on'; another says 'I must always use a dictionary when I come across a word I don't understand when reading'. Consequently, the achievement gap between them and their mainstream peers is closing rapidly.
- The school is adept at developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through their wide range of vocational subjects. In a garage setting, pupils made good progress in their understanding of capacity when changing the oil in a car and in spelling when entering data about the car engine on the computer. Pupils make good progress in all vocational courses including those delivered by college staff.
- Some Key Stage 3 pupils make enough progress and gain sufficient confidence that they return to mainstream schools and succeed once back there. All Key Stage 4 pupils who attend regularly get good English, mathematics and vocational qualifications and secure good college placements on leaving school.
- Some pupils do not come to school as often as they should. This slows their progress and they do not do as well as those who attend regularly.
- The pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, receive high quality individual support. As a result, they make good progress in English and mathematics. Pupil premium funding is used to purchase resources for children looked after by the local authority so as to take away obstacles which might otherwise hinder their progress. For some steel toe-capped boots and overalls are bought so that they can achieve in construction activities; for others it funds a laptop to be used in the foster or children's home to support their homework, which raises their achievement.
- All pupils admitted were on the special educational needs register in their previous schools. A deterioration in emotional and/or mental health slows the progress of a very few pupils for short periods of time. With outstanding support most bounce back quickly and make good progress.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most teaching is at least good. There are pockets of outstanding teaching, particularly in some of the vocational subjects. Teaching of English and mathematics in the Year 11 classroom, based on the college site is consistently good.
- When this school was launched as a new school some teaching on two sites was a concern. Since then there have been rapid improvements, linked to the good advice and training teachers receive following their lesson observations by senior leaders. The weaker teaching which existed in English on two sites has been tackled and eradicated and pupils on these two sites are catching up rapidly with those on the third site.
- In the one-to-one literacy lessons teaching is outstanding. Pupils gain confidence in reading; improve their comprehension skills; and become much better at writing.
- In the best lessons, teachers use their knowledge of what pupils can already do to match work to challenge them and speed up their learning. In such lessons pupils make good progress. In a Year 11 English lesson pupils wrote a powerful 'agony aunt column' for a newspaper and at the same time improved their pieces of writing because they worked on their specific targets, which linked to effective use of tenses and paragraphs.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not use information about what pupils can do to plan work that will help to move them on to new learning quickly enough. In these lessons pupils who have 'got it quickly' sit for too long not being challenged to go further with their learning. Mostly teaching assistants support pupils with their learning but this is not yet consistent; on a few occasions they are insufficiently involved in helping pupils to learn. Marking of books is always positive, but comments do not always make it sufficiently clear to pupils as to what they must do to improve their work.
- Outstanding lessons accelerate pupils' learning. In a motor mechanics lesson, there was a real buzz and the atmosphere was energetic. Each pupil engaged enthusiastically in relevant and stimulating activities, and made outstanding progress not only in understanding how to service a car engine but also in solving problems.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- On entry all pupils lack confidence and their behaviour is challenging. Most soon change their attitude and become keen to learn and succeed. Occasionally, a few pupils have a bad day and attempt to disrupt lessons. When this happens teachers are skilful at managing the situation and usually successfully re-engage these pupils with learning. Classrooms are mostly calm and orderly; pupils are polite most of the time. Year 11 pupils delight in helping younger pupils. Overall, behaviour is good.
- Parents and carers say that their children's behaviour has improved significantly since being at this school. Their views are typified by the parent who said, 'My child has become a lovely kid since being here'.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They can talk about their worries with a trusted adult. Overwhelmingly, parents and carers say that their children are safe at school. Bullying and fights are exceptionally rare. Such instances are tackled swiftly and positive outcomes result. There have been no racist incidents this year.
- Pupils have an outstanding knowledge of the different types of bullying. They speak passionately about the wrongs of cyber and prejudice based types of bullying. They told of what they learnt

through an anti-bullying week project at school; speaking passionately of the wrongs of homophobic bullying.

- Pupils' understanding of how to keep safe is outstanding. They know that they must wear a helmet and protective boots when working on a construction site and wear a fluorescent jacket when riding a 'bike' in the dark. But their understanding is exceptional because of their awareness of the risks associated in becoming involved with religious fanatics; with gangs; their in-depth knowledge of the harmful effects associated with the misuse of drugs; and the emotional and health risks associated with unsafe sex.
- Pupils enter the school with poor attendance records at their previous schools. The majority improve their attendance; a few very significantly so because of the good support they receive. But a few persist in failing to attend and this has a negative impact on their progress.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher's relentless drive to improve teaching has very significantly improved the amount of good and outstanding teaching since the merger of three different schools in September 2011; particularly on the two sites where it was a concern just over a year ago. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching are checked regularly and rigorously; subsequent training is targeted to improve teachers' skills. Teachers have responded constructively and their teaching is much better than it was sixteen months ago.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. Decisive actions result from it, which benefit pupils. For example, recent analysis of pupils' reading and writing assessments demonstrated that their rate of progress, particularly on two sites lagged behind their rate of progress in mathematics. A decision was made to train all teachers in a new approach to teach literacy and a senior leader was given the brief to lead on this initiative. Since then the achievement gap which existed between the different sites has narrowed and all pupils currently make good progress in their reading and writing.
- The senior leadership team is highly effective. Each site has a teacher-in-charge and a pastoral lead; they work ceaselessly and largely successfully in supporting pupils in overcoming their fears about learning due to past failures and so raise their achievement. The executive headteacher has a strategic overview and keeps the subjects and courses offered under constant review. Changes to these have resulted in an increase in vocational courses which have enhanced pupils' learning. The decision to include a Year 11 classroom in a local college has both improved attendance and raised achievement for pupils.
- The local authority has a governance role and also expertise in advising about assessment. It has enabled the school to put in place a robust system to check what pupils know and can do in English and mathematics when they are admitted to the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils reflect on what has gone wrong in their education and explore their feelings; from this their confidence and self-esteem is lifted. They take responsibility for their learning. Year 11 students support younger children in their physical education lessons in other schools. Their awareness of cultural diversity is raised as they study units on racism in sport and the foods and festivals of a wide range of cultures within Britain and around the world.
- Leaders ensure that different groups of pupils receive equal chances to succeed and rigorously tackle any discrimination. However, very occasionally in a few lessons not all pupils are

sufficiently challenged and a few pupils who fail to attend school as often as they should do not reach their full potential.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governance is good. The local authority in its governance role works in an exceptionally effective partnership with the management committee. A lead officer from the local authority is actively involved in the management committee. The committee is involved in evaluating the strengths and areas for improvement within the school and in shaping the school's improvement plan. Committee members are well trained and know how to interpret the school's progress reports. This means that they are well-equipped to challenge any areas of concern about pupils' progress. There is documented evidence of tough questions being asked about any underperformance. Committee members are knowledgeable about the way in which external agencies such as health and the Youth Offending Team work to support pupils. Hence, they are able to support senior leaders well, but do not shy away from challenging them. Any teacher who does not perform well is not allowed to move up the pay scale. The local authority ensures the headteacher's performance is reviewed. Safeguarding meets all requirements. Committee reports show a dogged persistence to secure the pupil premium funding for the pupils' eligible for free school meals from their mainstream schools (that they pass it on for the pupils when they leave their mainstream schools and are admitted to this school), but this has not yet been achieved.

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	136744
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	400284

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	91
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Howard Gilbert
Headteacher	Janet Heathcote
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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