

# St Helena School

Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3LE

## Inspection dates

27–28 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching is variable within subjects and across the school, especially at Key Stage 3. Too many lessons do not provide enough challenge for students of different abilities.
- Standards are not high enough in some subjects, including English, mathematics and science.
- The quality of feedback and marking does not always help students with their next steps in learning.
- Whilst students behave well most of the time, their attitudes towards learning are not positive enough to help speed up their progress.
- Not all leaders make best use of evidence when checking the effectiveness of the areas for which they are responsible. This results in some policies not being consistently applied, for example in managing students' behaviour.

### The school has the following strengths

- Some teaching is good and outstanding and results in students making good progress.
- Students' achievement is good in some subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- Relationships between students and staff are improving. The attention given to students whose circumstances make them vulnerable is strong, and this contributes to a community which includes all students.
- Students feel safe and they are well cared for.
- The headteacher leads the academy with determination and the support of other leaders and governors. Leaders have an accurate understanding of what needs to be done and as a result teaching is improving.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 42 lessons or part-lessons. Lesson observations were shared with senior leaders. Short visits were made to observe the behaviour of students and best practice in teaching.
- Work in students' books was analysed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, evaluations of the school by outside consultants, minutes of meetings of the governing body and its different committees, records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke to students about reading, met with different groups of pupils, and interviewed a sample of staff. They also spoke to members of the governing body, a representative from the local school partnership, and from the local authority.
- The views of parents were sought through the school's surveys. Inspectors considered the 36 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). They also considered written comments from 49 staff.

## Inspection team

Brian Netto, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Martin Dale	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector
Alan Jarvis	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Helena is an average-sized secondary school. It converted to an academy on 1 March 2012, and works in a formal partnership with a group of other local academies. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory. Since it opened there has been a significant change in staff.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. This includes students in the care of the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 study vocational courses at local colleges, ensuring that they leave school with recognised qualifications.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching so that there is more consistency between and within different subjects particularly at Key Stage 3, by:
  - continuing to make full use of partner schools and the local authority to enable staff to observe best practice elsewhere
  - building on the improved monitoring systems so that teachers are supported to make improvements
  - making sure that teaching encourages more positive engagement from the students, and helps them take more responsibility for their own learning.
- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science so that it is at least in line with national averages by June 2014 by:
  - providing activities which engage and extend the learning of boys and more able students
  - making sure that marking and feedback consistently give students clear guidance on how well they are doing and explains the next steps for them to improve their learning.
- Increase the accountability of senior leaders and subject managers for improvements in the quality of teaching and feedback to students, by:
  - giving leaders training and support to help them make better use of information on how well the students are doing in order to speed up their progress in all classes.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils **requires improvement**

- Students who are more able as well as boys are not progressing as fast as many of their peers. Activities are not always designed to engage and stretch them. This is particularly the case in mathematics.
- In 2012, attainment in English and mathematics was well below average. The school enters students early for GCSE in these subjects. School information shows that this is having a beneficial impact on motivating students to exceed their target grades. As a result, attainment in both subjects is rising.
- Students enter the school with levels well below average. Progress is now much quicker, and for most students it is good across all subjects.
- Students given additional support through the pupil premium make good progress, as reflected in their average point scores in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11. The school has a small number of students from service families and too few looked-after pupils to be able to report on. Funds are used to make sure that they get good support in small groups, and that they have opportunities to go on visits without paying. As a result the school is effectively narrowing the gap with other students in school, and with other students nationally. This demonstrates the school's firm commitment to equality of opportunity and to eliminating any discrimination.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is in line with their peers because of the extra help they get.
- Students who speak English as an additional language also make progress in line with their peers, as their needs are well met through additional support.
- Plans are in place to support students eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium when it comes on stream with their literacy and numeracy skills, though it is too early for these initiatives to have an impact on their progress.
- There are regular checks on students who attend alternative provision, and they are making good progress on their chosen courses.

### The quality of teaching **requires improvement**

- Teaching requires improvement. There is too much variation within and between different subjects. In too many lessons teachers have expectations which are too low. This results in activities which do not offer sufficient challenge.
- The best teaching is characterised by effective planning to meet different needs. Year 7 made good progress in a science lesson on the symbols used in circuits. This resulted from the teacher's effective feedback, and work well-matched to the students' needs. However, too much variation in feedback and marking leads to inconsistencies in the teaching of science.
- Teaching is much better with examination classes than it is in Key Stage 3. There is more consistency in teaching in English than there is in mathematics or science.

- Year 10 students were fully engaged in the making of bread in a food technology lesson. They responded well to the high expectations of the teacher and to the fast pace of the lesson, making good progress.
- There are good opportunities for media to be used to enhance the learning of the students across the curriculum. For example, Year 7 developed a good understanding of film techniques in analysing 'The Pirates of the Caribbean' movie. Similarly, a group of more-able Year 7 students explored three-dimensional rotation in a mathematics lesson by using a computer programme. Teachers used well-chosen examples from the design of jet engines, so students were fully engaged in the investigation and made excellent progress.
- Marking and feedback is inconsistent across the school. Too many books are left unmarked, and students are often left with little guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. The best marking and feedback provides students with clear next steps and detailed feedback against success criteria. This helps to engage the student in a dialogue with the teacher so that they can focus on any areas of weakness.
- This was seen for example in Year 11 revision classes in mathematics, where students developed confidence in assessing their own strengths and weaknesses. This is also more evident in some subjects such as French, textiles, art and photography.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils**

### **requires improvement**

- Some staff and parents expressed concerns about the way that the behaviour of a small minority of students led to disruption of learning. Students also said that although behaviour was improving, at times poor behaviour slowed the pace of learning. The inspection team observed a few lessons where this was the case.
- Students say that they appreciate the new system of credits and debits. This is helping them to moderate their behaviour. As a result incidents of unacceptable behaviour and fixed-term exclusions have been in rapid decline. However, procedures are not always consistently applied by all staff.
- Sometimes students do not give their full attention to their work and as a result its quality suffers. Some student books showed a lack of care in presentation. This was mostly related to teaching which failed to engage their interest.
- Students say that bullying does happen but that it is rare and is dealt with fairly by the school. They are well informed about how to deal with cyber bullying, and can speak confidently about other types such as racist or homophobic bullying.
- Students are generally well behaved around the site. Many take on roles and responsibilities which help those whose circumstances make them vulnerable feel supported and valued. This makes the community calm and orderly. Students report feeling safe.
- Attendance is improving and is above average.

### **The leadership and management**

### **requires improvement**

- Leadership and management require improvement because some leaders have not secured consistent improvements since the school opened. The quality of teaching remains variable, and

students' attainment below average by the time they leave the school.

- The headteacher is making a positive difference. From September 2012 the headteacher introduced a robust procedure for assessing the performance of staff. Staff are now accountable for the progress made by the students and for ensuring that school priorities are met. They are given extensive support to help them achieve these aims, though this is more effective for some than others.
- Information on how well the students are doing is collected regularly, and has been used effectively to give the school an accurate view of its strengths and areas for improvement. However, not all leaders and managers make good use of this information in their checks on learning.
- The school spends the additional funding which supports students eligible for the pupil premium to help speed up their progress. For example money has been used to employ additional staff to reduce class sizes, and to pay for early entry to examinations.
- Subjects and courses have been designed to meet the different needs of the students. College placements and other offsite provision are helping to make sure that students follow the best route to achieve their goals. Regular communication with these students helps to keep them on track. There is a wide range of visits including trips abroad. Alongside the varied after-school and lunchtime clubs, many of which the students have asked for, subjects are making a positive contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The local authority has supported the school well over time, and makes sure that its support complements that of the partner academies. Together they help to see that the school has the capacity to improve.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors contribute to the strategic direction and management of the school, including the effective use of resources such as the pupil premium. They use their knowledge and expertise to challenge leaders and managers about the school's performance in relation to national trends, and to the performance of their partner academies. They have rigorous systems in place to manage staff performance and this has helped to eliminate much inadequate teaching. They understand the link between quality of teaching and pay, and support the promotion of staff where this reflects improved student achievement. They make sure that arrangements to safeguard students meet statutory guidance and that all other requirements are met, including the features of the website. Their training has been strengthened through membership of the local academy partnership.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137944
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	402778

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy converter
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	933
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Kay Phillips
<b>Headteacher</b>	Zoë King
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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