

Therfield School

Dilston Road, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 7NZ

Inspection dates

28 February–1 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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

- Shared ambitions ensure that governors, senior leaders and middle leaders have high expectations for the school. As a result, the school has made significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Students do well in their GCSE examinations because there are very good systems in place to check how much progress they are making and because action is taken quickly to support them if they are falling behind.
- Teaching is typically good and some is outstanding. It has improved since the last inspection because school leaders have taken effective action to tackle any inadequate teaching.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They are polite and respectful and feel safe. The number of exclusions has fallen significantly and attendance has improved since the last inspection.
- There are many opportunities for students to attend clubs and extra classes. The focus on providing opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills has enabled the school to develop good links with the community, local businesses and other schools.
- The sixth form is good. Students are well taught and make good progress from their starting points to achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement is not yet outstanding because students' progress and attendance in the sixth form are not checked as well as in the rest of the school. Data is not used sufficiently well to cater for the needs of all students in the sixth form.
- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding because marking and feedback are not used consistently to help students to improve their work, and some activities are not matched sufficiently well to the needs of every student in the class.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons, ten of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, they made a number of shorter visits to lessons as part of themed learning walks.
- Inspectors spoke to six groups of students and looked at examples of students' work, focusing on the quality of marking and assessment.
- Meetings were held with staff, including middle and senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 143 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the 45 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised examination results for 2012 and assessment data for students currently at the school. They also looked at statistical information about students' attendance and exclusions.
- Inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, safeguarding documents, records of the impact of professional development on the school's performance, anonymised performance management records and information about how the pupil premium is used to improve outcomes for eligible students.

Inspection team

Caroline Dearden, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Trevor Woods	Additional inspector
Tracey Briggs	Additional inspector
Kanwaljit Singh	Additional inspector
John Collins	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Therfield is larger than the average-sized 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school. There are more boys than girls in the school.
- The school holds specialist status in sports.
- Nearly all students are of White British heritage. A very small proportion speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding (additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority, students known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school makes arrangements for a small number of students in Year 10 and 11 to access alternative provision or work-related courses through 'The Link', a school-funded facility accommodated off site.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise the good achievement in the sixth form by ensuring that leaders and managers use data as effectively in this part of the school as it is used everywhere else to track and monitor students' progress and attendance, thereby ensuring that the needs of all students are catered for and that persistent absence is reduced. Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers follow the best practice in the school by:
 - marking students' work regularly with clear guidance about next steps, so that they always know what they need to do to improve
 - providing students with clear verbal feedback during lessons so that students have the opportunity to develop their answers and think more deeply about what they are learning
 - making better use of information about students to match activities more closely to the needs of every student in the class.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the school with attainment that is generally in line with national averages. They make good progress throughout the school so that they do well in their GCSE examinations, where attainment is significantly above the national average.
- Results in the key measure of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, have improved since the last inspection, with a big rise in 2012. Detailed information held by the school indicates the upward trend is likely to continue.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium funding make good progress. Average point scores across a wide range of GCSEs, including English and mathematics, show that these students attain at least as well as all students nationally. Other students in the school have higher average point scores than all students nationally. The in-school gap between those eligible for the pupil premium and their peers is closing because the extra funding has been used to provide a range of support to help these students to achieve well and to participate in the wide range of learning opportunities on offer.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs also make good progress because the school supports their learning very effectively, for example, through the alternative provision offered by the school and the extensive support provided by specialist staff. The very small proportion of students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language also achieve well.
- Some students are entered early for their GCSE examinations but only when they are ready. Those who achieve the highest grades are given opportunity to study for higher-level qualifications, such as AS mathematics, whilst still in Year 11.
- The small number of students who are educated off site attend regularly, behave well, are kept safe, enjoy their learning and achieve well.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form and make good progress from their starting points, which are lower than those nationally. However, monitoring of students' progress and attendance is not sufficiently robust to enable the school to effectively support any individual who is underachieving or persistently absent.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection. Teaching is good in the majority of lessons and some is outstanding. Leaders and managers have challenged inadequate teaching, and skilled staff work with others to share the good practice which is in the school.
- Where teaching is good or better, teachers have high expectations of students and encourage them to work collaboratively in pairs or small groups. They plan activities that engage and give students the confidence to think for themselves. As a result, relationships are supportive and this promotes students' learning very effectively. For example in a Year 10 drama lesson, students applied skills developed in previous sessions to work together to portray complex human relationships.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and explain clearly to students what they are expected to learn. They use a variety of teaching methods to engage and motivate students. For example in a Year 8 music lesson, the teacher's strong subject knowledge, confident explanations and understanding of the range of needs in the class ensured that all students contributed to the performance of a multipart piece of classical music.
- Teachers use questioning well to remind students of previous learning and to check understanding before moving on. Some teachers also use questioning skilfully to encourage students to think deeply about their learning and to give extended answers. However, a few teachers miss opportunities to challenge students in this way, thereby limiting progress.
- Assessment and the use of student progress information have been consolidated at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 since the last inspection. Teachers have confidence in the systems for

identifying underachievement and are able to act quickly to provide support where necessary.

- There is variation in the quality of marking and verbal feedback across the school. There is some outstanding practice, for example in English and in the performing arts, where teachers explain how students can improve their work and give them time to act on advice given. In the best lessons, for example as seen in a Year 8 textiles lesson, opportunities for students to self- and peer-assess are well established and they are able to analyse how to push themselves further. However, some marking and feedback from teachers simply confirms what students can do and fails to set targets for improvement.
- A small minority of teaching still requires improvement because teachers do not make enough use of available data to match their teaching closely to the needs of individual students in the class. As a consequence, where lessons lack pace or activities fail to engage them, students lose interest and become disengaged with learning.
- Teaching in the sixth form is usually at least good and students demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. As a result, the majority of students make good progress and enjoy their lessons. However, the systems for monitoring progress at Key Stage 5 are not as strong as they are in other parts of the school. Consequently, teaching in the sixth form does not always address underachievement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students enjoy their learning and are proud of their school. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They are polite and welcoming to visitors and are respectful of each other and of adults.
- The school has a rigorous approach to improving behaviour and students know how they are expected to behave. For example, during meetings, students were clear about the consequences of poor behaviour and also how good behaviour is promoted through the range of extra-curricular activities and support from teachers or other adults. Information held by the school shows that incidents of poor behaviour have significantly reduced. Exclusions, which were high, are now under half of those found nationally. The school has introduced a number of schemes to celebrate personal achievement and to develop students' leadership skills. These have helped to establish good relationships with the community and with local businesses as well as to raise the self-esteem and improve the motivation of all students, especially those previously at risk of exclusion. Students, staff and parents and carers agree that behaviour has improved considerably over recent years.
- Students feel very safe in school and have confidence in the systems to keep them safe. For example, one student described this as 'a good school that cares and makes you feel comfortable'.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and, when they do occur, they are dealt with quickly and efficiently by staff. Students have good understanding of the different types of bullying and of the risks associated with hazardous behaviour and with using the internet. They value the annual 'anti-bullying week' which helps them to understand how to both recognise different forms of bullying and how to intervene if they see it occurring.
- Assemblies, the school's programme of extra-curricular activities and teaching across the curriculum all contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students have a clear understanding of right and wrong. For example, Year 10 work in drama on homophobic bullying promotes students' acceptance of difference and helps to ensure that there is no discrimination.
- High-quality care is provided by the pastoral system and by those responsible for students with disabilities or special educational needs. This ensures effective transition from primary school and at other times when students make choices about which subjects to study. As one parent commented, 'When my children came to the school they were way below average in all subjects. They had very low self-esteem and felt that they couldn't learn. Within six weeks of attending Therfield I felt that the school knew them as individuals. Within half a term they were already

more positive about school and had a more determined attitude to succeed.'

- Attendance is tracked and monitored very well at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and, as a result, has improved since the last inspection. The proportion of students who are often absent is reducing.
- Behaviour and safety are not outstanding because students become disengaged when lessons lack interest and pace and, in the sixth form, procedures for tracking attendance and addressing the reasons for students' absence are not sufficiently robust. As a consequence, persistent absence in the sixth form is higher than that seen nationally.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is supported well by senior leaders and by governors. Her vision to 'achieve excellence' is clearly communicated and shared by staff and students alike. As a consequence of their shared focus on improving teaching and learning, they, and other staff with leadership responsibilities, make a strong contribution to the continuing improvement of the school.
- Leaders and managers, including those responsible for governance, are highly ambitious for the success of students. They work hard to ensure that all students are treated equally and that there is no discrimination.
- Self-evaluation is robust and leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the strengths of the school. They provide effective professional development for all teaching staff and are successful in addressing weaknesses.
- The system for performance management is now strong. It is linked to salary progression and identifies those teachers who are consistently highly effective in their teaching. This encourages, challenges and supports teachers' improvement so that the proportion of good or better teaching has improved greatly since the last inspection.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced at all stages. It takes into account students' equality of opportunity and is regularly reviewed to meet the needs of all students. It is well matched to further education, employment and training, especially in the sixth form. Alternative provision via 'The Link' supports vulnerable students particularly well. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are extensive and very well attended. Staff work hard to ensure that all students are treated equally and that there is no discrimination.
- Opportunities for students to build their leadership skills are very well developed. Members of the school council are elected by their peers and, as representatives on the governing body, ensure that students' views are accurately represented when decisions are made.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority provides light-touch support for this good school because it has confidence in the capacity of the school to secure further improvements.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because sixth form leaders and managers do not systematically check patterns of absence or progress for individuals or groups of students. As a consequence, intervention to address underachievement or persistent absence is not sufficiently robust at Key Stage 5 and retention from Year 12 to Year 13 is not as high as the national average
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governance of the school is strong. Representation on the governing body is extensive, including ex-students, members of the local business community and student governors, who take an active role. Governors actively monitor the work of the school through studying performance data, regular visits and frequent updates from senior leaders. As a result they have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and achievement in the school compared to national figures and are able to support and challenge effectively. Governors talk knowledgeably about procedures and targets for performance management and are therefore able to accurately evaluate leaders' decisions about pay progression. Training for governors has helped them to do this. Governors have the expert skills necessary to oversee the school's finances and to evaluate how the use of resources benefits students. They have good

awareness of how pupil premium funding has been used to support smaller class sizes, personalised tuition and alternative provision off site via 'The Link' and what difference this funding has made.

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	125252
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	406305

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Maintained
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	1,178
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	236
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Timothy Jones
Headteacher	Susan Willman
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 November 2010
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