

The Centre School

High Street, Cottenham, Cambridge, CB24 8UA

Inspection dates 9–10 May 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The drive and commitment of the head of the Centre School, supported by the executive headteacher, governors and other senior leaders, has led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching, achievement and the behaviour of students.
- With the wide range of starting points in the school, all students make good progress and all students leave the school at the end of Year 11 with externally recognised qualifications.
- Good monitoring of teaching and professional development of staff have increased the levels of consistently good and sometimes outstanding teaching.
- Teachers make lessons lively and fun. They know what interests the students and build lessons around them.
- Individuals and groups of students make huge improvements in their behaviour because of the positive and well-ordered atmosphere throughout the whole school community.
- As a result of the excellent relationships, behaviour is outstanding. Students have very positive attitudes to their lessons. They work hard, are polite and look out for each other.
- Senior leaders know the school well and have good plans to support the school to improve further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to enable students to make exceptional progress.
- A few teachers spend too long talking to the whole class instead of allowing the students to get on with tasks.
- Marking and feedback does not always involve the students in assessing their own progress, or give them the opportunities to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed nine lessons, all of which were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors observed students participating in a range of optional activities, as well as photographic displays which illustrate a range of student achievements, school and community activities.
- Meetings were held with the head of the Centre School, the executive headteacher and other members of the leadership team, a representative of the local authority and a member of the governing body.
- Many documents were reviewed including those relating to students' behaviour and progress, school self evaluation and improvement, curriculum and lesson planning, governance, keeping students safe as well as work in students' books.
- Inspectors met a group of students to gain their views about the school, their progress, likes and dislikes. Inspectors also listened to students read during lessons.
- The views of parents and carers were gained through the school's own survey. There were insufficient responses to Parent View (the online questionnaire for parents) to be reported.
- Inspectors also reviewed 17 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Lynda Walker, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Aileen Thomas

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is located on the same site as Cottenham Village College. The two schools are federated and have a joint governing body. In September 2011 they gained academy status. The executive headteacher is the head of the Academy i.e. the two schools, the head of the Centre School is also a deputy head teacher of the Academy. There is a strong partnership between the two schools in terms of professional development and the sharing of good practice.
- The Centre School provides for up to 50 students across Cambridgeshire who have a statement of special educational needs mainly for their behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. At the time of the inspection there were 48 students on roll, only four of whom were girls.
- Students often join the school at older ages and at any time during the school year. Some have been out of school for extended periods of time.
- Some students in Key Stage 4 take work-related courses at The Phoenix Centre in Cambridge.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage.
- A larger proportion of students than average are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional funding provided by the government to support the achievement of particular groups of students at risk of underachieving.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by:
 - making sure that teachers do not spend too much time talking to the whole class and that students are allowed to get on with the tasks set for them
 - making sure there is consistency in marking students' work to support students understanding of the next steps in their learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the school at different ages and enter with attainment levels which are well below the national average. Some students may have also had learning interrupted by poor attendance before they start at The Centre School. Almost all make rapid progress from their starting points so that by the time they leave they have all gained passes in Functional Skills English and mathematics, AQA Entry levels and other courses accredited by the National College Open Network.
- The flexibility of the curriculum allows students to contribute to decisions about accreditation and activities are tailored to their interests. The recently expanded range of accreditation matches different levels of students' ability and the current Year 10 and 11 are on track to achieve GCSE courses in English and mathematics.
- Students are fully engaged in their learning and are strongly motivated to push themselves to increase their rates of progress. They speak confidently about their personal targets for improvement.
- Most students have very weak literacy and numeracy skills when they join The Centre School. There has been a very clear focus on providing the students with opportunities to practise these skills in all activities. All staff use the data available on how individual students are doing to make sure that tasks are tailored to meet individual needs.
- Students make exceptionally good progress in their reading and writing skills. This was evident in an effective science lesson where the students presented their findings about the direction of travel of the air balloon cars they had made and in a humanities lesson, where the students imagined that they were children being evacuated during the Second World War and wrote about their feelings.
- The building of positive, supportive and trusting relationships with staff helps students to feel confident and to learn how to succeed. Students describe the school 'as being like a big family where you learn a lot!'
- Comparison of data on achievement of different cohorts and groups is of limited value because of the low number within each group. Nevertheless indications are that boys and girls in all age groups, from all backgrounds, heritage and family circumstances, including being looked after by the local authority, make similar progress.
- Students receiving support through the pupil premium make similar good progress to the others because the extra funding is used effectively to provide additional staff, music therapy and equal access to enrichment activities. Overall there is no significant difference between the achievement of eligible students and the others.

The quality of teaching

is good

- In the best teaching, teachers and other adults are very skilled in their use of questioning to check what the students already know and adapt their teaching where necessary to improve learning. Lessons have effective pace and well-established routines so that the students know what to expect.

- The main strength in teaching is the way in which all teachers and adults in the room work together to enable students to make the best progress possible in relation to their individual learning targets. The school's skilled instructors and teaching assistants know individual students very well and make a strong contribution to the typically good learning in lessons.
- Marking of work is regularly carried out and advice is usually offered about next steps. In some lessons written advice is not as informative as verbal advice and does not give the students the opportunity to respond and improve their work.
- The well-planned and carefully tailored range of learning activities means that most teaching is lively, interesting and challenging. As a result, students respond positively and enjoy their learning.
- All students are tested on entry to the school to make sure teaching programmes are based on accurate and current information. This assessment is generally used well to plan activities which provide appropriate challenge and take good account of needs and abilities.
- The vast majority of parents and carers agree that the school is a welcoming place and that teaching is good. One parent described the teachers as 'angels' and explained how she felt 'teary eyed' after attending a celebration evening as she could not believe how outstanding the quality of work was that had been produced by the students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Because of the consistent and skilled behaviour management of all of the staff, a conspicuously positive climate for learning exists in all classes. All staff are well trained in supporting students and the focus is clearly on developing self-management skills and self regulation. Students' social and emotional progress is efficiently tracked and supported by individual opportunities for counselling or targeted support.
- A particularly strong feature in lessons is the efficient review of behaviour and participation which is carried out by the adults and the students. Students are encouraged to score their own involvement in the lesson and they demonstrate tremendous levels of self awareness.
- The high quality of students' behaviour is evident by the enormous respect they have for each other and the school environment. Many who have formally regarded themselves as failures when they have been removed from other schools are proud of their achievements at this school. They describe themselves as, 'All being in the same situation as we were all in trouble at our last school but now there is no need to fight or argue because people here are a lot more chilled – and we get help when we need it!'
- Students have very clear views and understanding about bullying and its consequences, particularly regarding text or email intimidation. They are adamant that any occasional instance of untoward behaviour is swiftly and openly dealt with by staff.
- Students say they feel safe in school and parents and carers overwhelmingly agree. They recognise the excellent lengths the school will go to in order to ensure the well-being of all of the students, particularly for those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

The leadership and management are good

- The very effective head of The Centre School is highly ambitious for the school and leads by example. She and her team, including the governing body, are constantly seeking ways to improve learning and secure the well-being of the students who are admitted to the school. The closer working relationship with the Academy school has provided opportunities for staff from both schools to share good practice and reflect on areas which could be improved further.
- School leaders make sure that every student has the best opportunity to succeed. There are good relationships at all levels and staff try to make sure that every student is treated fairly. The local authority has supported the school well in its drive for improvement, checking the accuracy of school judgements on teaching and behaviour, and giving advice and support to teachers.
- The school is effective in tackling discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. The progress of the students is effectively analysed and the information is used to make sure that timely interventions are arranged for students to achieve their targets. This includes specific help, where appropriate, for students known to be eligible for pupil-premium funding.
- The management of teachers' performance is very strong. All teachers have targets to improve student achievement, to improve their professional skills and to support the school's plans for improvement and these are linked to salary progression.
- The school works exceptionally well with parents and carers and goes out of its way to build good relationships. Termly home visits to all parents and carers mean that they are fully aware of all aspects of their child's progress and surveys show that they would recommend the school to others.
- The stimulating curriculum is effectively matched to the needs of all groups of students. It enables them to engage fully and enjoy their learning. The school's effective partnerships with its off-site providers support students' progress to further education and the world of work well.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally well promoted. Great emphasis is placed on students working together, valuing the opinions of others and making good choices. Students learn about similarities and differences among different faith groups and lifestyles during the half termly cultural days.
- Safeguarding arrangements are securely in place both in the school and in the alternative placements student attend. The school works very closely with other agencies to secure the well-being of those who may be at risk because of their learning difficulties or because of their circumstances.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - through the involvement of the link governor, the federated governing body has a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and students' achievement. It knows the school's strengths and weaknesses and is fully behind the head of the Centre School's drive for improvement.
 - all members of the governing body have visited the school and intend through the introduction of a Centre School strategy committee to be more involved in monitoring key aspects of the school's provision.
 - the governing body ensures that the school meets statutory safeguarding requirements and

that finances in the school are well managed.

- the use of the pupil premium funding and the impact it is having on the achievements of students is evaluated and kept under review. As a result, the governing body is able to hold the school to account for any differences in the progress of students.
 - governors know about the targets that are set for teachers and what the school is doing to reward good teaching and to tackle any underperformance.
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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	137594
Local authority	
Inspection number	400168

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Harradine
Headteacher	Steve Ellison (Executive Headteacher) Sue Raven (Head of Centre)
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2011
Telephone number	01954 288944
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