

Alde Valley School

Seaward Avenue, Leiston, IP16 4BG

Inspection dates 11–12 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
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 has serious weaknesses. It is not good because

- Students make inadequate progress in mathematics due to inconsistencies in teaching and leadership of the subject. Senior leaders have not tackled these weaknesses with enough urgency to prevent students from underachieving.
- GCSE results improved significantly this year, but this masks the underachievement of some students, especially those of average and low ability, disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The sixth form also requires improvement.
- Extra funding to help the school's most vulnerable students is not used effectively to ensure that they achieve equally as well as other groups.
- Leaders and managers do not monitor closely whether all students taught away from the school site achieve well enough in all subjects.
- Teaching requires improvement. Not all teachers maximise the time available, maintain the pace of learning or plan tasks matched to students' different abilities. Teaching assistants are not always used effectively.
- Low expectations of boys and their casual attitudes towards learning lead to many of them making less progress than expected. Girls consistently outperform boys in most subjects.
- Overall attendance is low. A significant proportion of older students are regularly absent from school.
- Most students behave well but a small minority are regularly excluded from school. A large number of these students are disabled or have special educational needs.
- The governing body does not sufficiently challenge senior leaders to secure improvements.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers are showing that they can raise achievement. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and leadership are securing improvements.
- Good teaching and leadership in English mean that standards are rising quickly.
- Standards achieved in a range of GCSE and work-related subjects are consistently high.
- Improved leadership of the sixth form is enabling it to firmly establish itself and provide students with a good environment in which to learn.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons, 11 of which were jointly observed with senior staff.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, five members of the governing body, three groups of students and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors checked and took account of the 34 responses by parents and carers to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 23 questionnaires returned by staff.
- The inspection team observed the school's work, scrutinised data about students' achievement, behaviour and attendance, looked at reports used by leaders to check the school's work, reviewed the minutes of meetings of the governing body and scrutinised students' work in lessons.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Rosemarie McCarthy

Additional Inspector

John Greevy

Additional Inspector

Joanna Jones

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- In September 2012, Leiston High School accepted pupils in Years 7 and 8 from two middle schools to become Alde Valley High School. Sixth form students are taught in refurbished buildings on one of the former middle school sites. Teachers regularly travel between the main school and sixth form centre.
- This reorganisation of education in the local area led to a number of significant challenges for the school and its local community. Some middle school staff transferred to the high school and existing staff taught students in Years 7 and 8 for the first time. During this period the headteacher was acting as the executive headteacher of one of the former middle schools, which was placed in special measures following its Ofsted inspection in 2010.
- Most students are White British, and very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for particular groups of students including those eligible for free school meals) is similar to that found nationally.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, mostly behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, supported by school action is below average. The proportion supported by school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A small number of students are taught for some of the time in the North Suffolk Skills Partnership in Halesworth or 4RCE Training in Lowestoft.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students, especially boys, are capable of achieving
 - maintaining the pace of learning by balancing teacher-talk with time for students to learn by themselves and in small groups
 - providing all students with sufficiently challenging work that captures and retains their interest for the full duration of lessons
 - planning and teaching different tasks matched to the needs and abilities of all students, especially those who are disabled or have special educational needs
 - making full use of classroom assistants to support students of lower ability who need help with their work, and evaluating the impact they have on students' learning
 - making regular checks in lessons on how well students are progressing.
- Raise achievement in mathematics so that most students make the progress expected of them and do as well as in English by:
 - prioritising rapid and sustained improvements in mathematics in the school's improvement plan
 - enhancing the monitoring of teaching and learning in mathematics lessons and acting

decisively when the quality is found to be less than good

- ensuring that there is a permanent leader of mathematics in place to secure long-term, sustainable improvements to the quality of teaching and the achievement of students.

■ Improve leadership and management by:

- ensuring that new procedures for monitoring and evaluating lessons by middle leadership become firmly embedded and lead to a higher proportion of teaching that is consistently good
- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of teachers and of staff responsible for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, so that these students remain in school and receive the additional support they need to help them achieve as well as others
- making sure that additional funding to support the school's most vulnerable students is used wisely so that they achieve equally as well as other students
- strengthening procedures to promote regular attendance
- increasing the level of challenge provided by the governing body in holding senior leaders to account for the school's performance.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of pupil premium funding, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Students join the school in Years 7 and 8 with skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are below those found nationally. The school's assessment data shows that in Key Stage 3 attainment in English and in particular mathematics has remained low since the last inspection. This trend continued in 2013 and less than half of all Year 9 students attained the expected levels in English, mathematics and science by the end of the key stage. This year, extra funding has been used effectively to provide students in Year 7 with additional learning opportunities during the school holidays to enable them to catch up in their reading.
- In Key Stage 4 standards remain below average. The turmoil caused during the reorganisation of the school led to a notable decline in the percentage of students attaining five C grades including English and mathematics last year. Senior leaders responded quickly by implementing a range of additional support to prevent this from happening again and overall results improved significantly this year. These improvements mask the significant underachievement of some students, most notably boys, who persistently do less well than girls. For example, this year almost three quarters of Year 11 girls attained at least a C grade in English compared with less than half of Year 11 boys.
- Not all teachers are able to accelerate students' learning and progress in English in Years 10 and 11. Pupils achieve well in art, physical education, and some sciences. By the end of Year 11 the percentage making expected progress was close to the national average in 2012 and improved further this year. This good progress is not matched in mathematics, where ineffective teaching and weak leadership have led to many students underachieving. Entering students in GCSE mathematics examinations early in Year 10 has made little difference to raising overall standards.
- In the main school and in the sixth form, students make good progress in lessons when teachers know them well, prepare suitably challenging tasks for them and retain their interest and their enjoyment of learning. When teaching is less effective, progress slows as the interest and attention of some students, especially boys, begins to wane. Some of them become passive and do the bare minimum of work because teachers do not make regular checks to see if they are working hard enough.
- Additional funding through the pupil premium has not been used wisely to raise the achievement of those it is intended for. It is used to provide one-to-one tuition, additional learning resources and revision classes, but students known to be eligible for free school meals do not achieve as well as their peers. Their attainment is much lower when measured by average points scores. A lower percentage attain five or more C grades including English and mathematics.
- Most more-able students achieve well, including those identified as gifted and talented, particularly when teachers set high expectations for them. They study three sciences and pursue a range of suitable awards to prepare them for further study in the sixth form. Less-able students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, do less well than others because teachers do not plan suitable tasks for them and the quality of additional support provided in lessons is too variable. Many of these students struggle because work is too challenging and they are not given enough help to enable them to progress.
- Alternative arrangements are made for a very small minority of students to be taught at a local skills centre or in specialist provision. Most of them make expected progress and attain suitable work-related awards, but their progress in school is not closely monitored so senior leaders are

unable to show how well they achieve overall by the end of Year 11.

- In the sixth form increasing numbers of students join to study a range of advanced level courses. A significant proportion also join to do GCSE and level 2 vocational awards but choose to leave at the end of Year 12 to pursue higher work-related awards in partner schools, colleges or the local skills centre. Attainment on entry is slightly lower than found nationally. Standards are below average but improved significantly in 2013. Good teaching and pastoral care enabled the vast majority of students to gain pass grades and go on to secure a place at university, further training or employment this year.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement. Improved leadership and management of teaching and regular staff training are eradicating inadequate teaching and highlighting where the best practice lies in the school. The impact of senior leaders is reflected in the high proportion of good teaching seen during the inspection and the much better results achieved in the majority of subjects this year. Senior leaders acknowledge that further improvements are needed because overall standards are not high enough.
- Where teaching requires improvement, teachers do not plan well enough to maximise the 100 minutes of lesson time available. These lessons start briskly but begin to slow as teachers talk for too long or planned tasks fail to appeal to students, with the result that some students lose interest and concentration. Teachers identify in their planning the different abilities of students but do not adapt learning to suit their particular needs. They ask questions regularly but often take the first response from those eager to contribute, leaving others, especially boys, to sit back and let others do most of the work.
- Too much teaching in mathematics requires improvement. Not all teachers are aware of what students already know and can do, so lessons do not provide enough opportunities for students to acquire new knowledge and apply it in meaningful ways. Students spend too much time copying work from textbooks and worksheets. When activities fail to provide enough challenge or teachers' questions do not test their knowledge, students' progress slows.
- Not all classroom assistants are deployed effectively. In some lessons with high numbers of low-ability students, no additional support is provided. Some assistants spend too long listening to the teacher rather than helping students to learn. The very good practice seen in a Year 7 English lesson, where a classroom assistant provided intensive, high-quality support for students with low literacy skills, has not been shared well enough across all subjects.
- Students achieve well in English, art, science, drama and information technology because teachers know them well, have high expectations of them and make full use of the time available to set them interesting and challenging work to complete. They promote students' literacy by exploring words and phrases and clarifying spellings. Regular assessments linked to target grades and GCSE criteria help students to understand what is expected of them and what they need to do to achieve well. Students enjoy practical, hands-on learning and working together in small groups.
- Teaching in the sixth form is often good because classes are small, enabling teachers use their good subject knowledge to facilitate group work and independent study well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- Behaviour requires improvement because the school's own records show that over time, a high proportion of students are referred to the internal isolation room, and a small minority of students who display more challenging behaviour are regularly excluded, some for misdemeanours that could be resolved easily in school. Analysis of these records shows that a high proportion of these students are supported at school action or at school action plus due to their special educational needs.
- Throughout the inspection, students behaved in a courteous and friendly manner. Students told inspectors that behaviour is generally good. Most of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire feel that behaviour in the school is well managed. Older students said that they feel safe and free from all types of bullying. Younger students told inspectors that physical bullying and name-calling are rare, and when such incidents do occur they are confident that their teachers will tackle them. However, they also said that this did not always stop them from happening again.
- In lessons there were very few incidents of disruptive behaviour. The large majority of students are eager to learn and cooperate with staff and their peers. However, some students, especially boys, become passive learners when teaching is too dull or when teachers do not make regular checks that they are working hard enough.
- Action to improve attendance has led to some improvement and the high rates of persistent absence seen in 2012 have fallen significantly this year. Overall attendance remains low, especially in Key Stage 4. The school has not fully investigated why students' attendance tails off in Years 10 and 11, or the detrimental effect this is having on their achievement.

The leadership and management**requires improvement**

- Senior leaders are demonstrating that they have the capacity to improve the school. Against a backdrop of significant reorganisation of local educational provision and rebranding of the school they have ensured that students have remained safe and mostly engaged in learning. They acknowledge that during this time not enough attention was paid to monitoring the work of the school and that not all students achieved as well as they should have done. They have responded promptly to this and their swift actions led to a significant rise in standards in 2013. However, weaknesses remain in mathematics and the underperformance of different groups of students.
- The headteacher, ably supported by his deputy headteacher, has the full confidence of governors in raising achievement further as the school moves towards conversion to an academy in 2014. The school's own evaluation shows that senior leaders know its strengths and most of the weaknesses raised in this inspection. Plans are in place to make further improvements but mathematics is not prioritised sufficiently. Improved procedures for assessing students' progress and setting them aspirational targets are firmly in place in most subjects but the resulting information is not being rigorously checked to make sure that all students, especially the most vulnerable, are making enough progress.
- Senior leaders have strengthened procedures to monitor lessons and scrutinise students' work. This added rigour is providing them with a much more realistic view of the quality of teaching. The school's drive to improve teachers' planning and promote students' literacy skills was evident in many lessons seen by inspectors. Expectations of teachers are much higher. They are all set personal targets for improvement and are routinely monitored, but this is not always linked to salary progression. Last year some were rewarded for managing aspects of the school

as it changed to accommodating younger pupils, rather than for raising achievement.

- Middle leaders are expected to drive improvements through regular lesson observations, analysis of data and scrutiny of students' work. They meet with senior leaders to discuss individual students' progress and are held to account for signs of underachievement. The leader of mathematics has left the school. An expert practitioner has joined the school to secure much needed, rapid improvements in the subject. This appointment is temporary. It is unclear in the school's improvement planning how improvements will be sustained without a permanent leader of mathematics.
- Improved provision and higher pass rates in Years 12 and 13 reflect the improved leadership and management of the sixth form. Students are provided with good facilities in which to learn. A broad range of advanced-level courses and links with other local providers enables them to pursue work-related awards. Their well-being and progress are closely monitored to ensure that they attend regularly, are kept safe and enjoy school. In the main school the curriculum provides students with a suitable range of GCSE and some work-related awards and is enhanced by a range of enrichment activities, especially in sport. Students in all key stages told inspectors that they value the good advice and guidance provided for them about which courses to study and the work experience and career opportunities available to them.
- Senior leaders strive to engage with the local community but only a minority of parents and carers regularly visit the school to support their child's learning or find out about its plans for improvement. The school promotes students' social, moral and spiritual education effectively through assemblies, enrichment days and events, but this is not firmly embedded throughout the curriculum. In meetings with inspectors students showed a limited understanding of different cultures and backgrounds.
- The school has not been supported well enough by the local authority. It has been unable to support the school effectively or prevent it from being judged inadequate. The support they have offered is not valued highly by school leaders.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are knowledgeable, experienced and fully committed to improving the school. Many of them live locally and their children attend the school. Recent training has strengthened their understanding of data but they are not using this information well enough to hold senior leaders to account for the school's performance. For example, they monitor closely how additional funding is spent but are unclear about the full impact it is having; they know where the most and the least effective teaching lies but are unclear about which teachers moved up the salary scale last year. They are not fully aware of the differences in the achievement of students, especially those who are disabled or have special educational needs, and are not ensuring that they have an equal opportunity to succeed. They meet their statutory duties and ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet current national requirements, including the single central record. The risk posed by public access to the school site has been assessed and measures are in place to maintain students' safety.

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	124819
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	425150

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	642
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	153
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Rushbrook
Headteacher	Ian Flintoff
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2010
Telephone number	01728 830570
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