

The Billericay School

School Road, Billericay, CM12 9LH

Inspection dates

16–17 October 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.

- Students across the school make good progress, including in English and mathematics. Standards are rising due to the determined work of school leaders to improve the progress of different groups of students.
- The very small number of students on vocational courses do well. They benefit from the opportunity to work on practical courses such as beauty and construction.
- The sixth form is good and improving. It prepares students well for higher education and their future careers.
- Students are taught well. Hence, they grasp new ideas quickly and use well-developed skills in literacy and numeracy to support their learning across different subjects.
- Students are very well looked after and cared for. They feel very safe and parents agree.
- Behaviour is good and students are keen to learn and do well.
- Students choose from a wide range of courses in Key Stages 4 and the sixth form that are tailored exceptionally well to their interests, aptitudes and future aspirations.
- The school's leadership, including governors, is highly focused on establishing quality teaching across the school. This is having a positive impact on students' enjoyment of learning as well as improving their achievement.
- Governors provide a good oversight of the school's work and know how well it is performing. They ensure that students receive a well-rounded education, and this is promoted exceptionally well through the extensive range of opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A few, small differences in the achievement of different groups of students or across different subjects remain. Subject leaders are not always rigorous in checking for, and tackling, these.
- The quality of written feedback from teachers, when they mark work, is inconsistent, including in the sixth form.
- Occasionally, work is not sufficiently challenging for the more able students.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed parts of 47 lessons. A number of these observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, governors, subject leaders, other staff and a representative from the local authority.
- They spoke informally to students in lessons and around the school as well as holding more formal discussions with representative groups of students from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, the inspection team took account of the 131 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Members of the team observed the work of the school. They looked at the school’s self-evaluation summary, the improvement plan, a range of policies and procedures, and the arrangements for ensuring that students are safeguarded. Documentation reviewed included data relating to students’ attainment and progress, records of behaviour and attendance and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

Inspection team

Gulshanbir Kayembe, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Linda Austin	Additional Inspector
Angela Skinner	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
John Greevy	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It converted to become an academy school in July 2011. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding. Teaching and achievement were judged to be good.
- There are more boys than girls at the school.
- The very large majority of the students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Alternative part-time education is currently provided, usually on the basis of one day a week, on vocational courses for a very small number of students at South East Essex College, Prospects College and Circles Farm.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.
- The school works closely in a number of strategic partnerships with other primary and secondary schools in the local area. It also provides initial teacher training for graduates wishing to become teachers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement further by:
 - making sure that all teachers provide work that is suitably challenging for all students in their classes, especially the more able
 - ensuring that, when work is marked, all teachers provide students with precise and constructive guidance on how to improve
 - making sure that the folders in which sixth form students make their notes are properly checked and that the sixth form students are given effective feedback on the accuracy and quality of these notes.
- In order to raise achievement to outstanding, develop the leadership roles of subject leaders by ensuring that they are forensically rigorous in checking the progress of different groups of students and taking actions to address any differences in performance no matter how small.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students begin at the school with levels of attainment that are above national norms. They not only maintain but further improve on these standards as they move through the school.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average and was much more comfortably so in 2013 than in 2012 when, on some indicators, results were average rather than above. For example, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics was in line with the national average in 2012 but significantly above in 2013. The proportion gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C were similar in both years if English and mathematics are not included.
- Results in mathematics and science at GCSE were above national averages in both 2012 and 2013. English GCSE results improved to above average in 2013 and current Year 11 students are on track to achieve at least as well if not better.
- The amount of progress that students made between the ends of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 also improved between 2012 and 2013. Last year's Year 11 students progressed well in both English and mathematics during their five years at the school. The proportions making expected and more than expected progress were good.
- The school's data and lesson observations indicate that students currently in the school are making good progress in their learning and many are making accelerated progress. This is helped by their positive attitudes and keenness to learn. It is also because the school is driving their progress in a coordinated and coherent way. For example, Year 7 students feel they are working at a good level and finding work harder than when they were at primary school.
- However, more able students sometimes do not make as much progress as they could because they are not always given work that is hard enough for them. Examination results reflect this in that the proportions of students gaining the best grades of A* and A, while improving, are not consistently high across all subjects.
- While students eligible for pupil premium funding did not perform as well as others in 2012, attaining on average half a GCSE grade lower in English and just over three-quarters of a GCSE grade lower in mathematics, their results were better than those of similar students nationally. Their performance in 2013 was similar to that of 2012.
- Data within the school indicate that the gap in attainment between pupil premium students and others is narrowing at a good rate. In addition, these students are keeping up with others in terms of the progress they are making across all year groups currently in the school. This is an improvement on the results of both 2012 and 2013 where eligible students made less progress than students who were not eligible for pupil premium funding. This is down to the increasing effectiveness of extra support secured through the pupil premium funding, such as individual tuition.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. Their performance has also improved since 2012 and most are making expected levels of progress.
- There are occasional variations between subjects, year groups and other groups as to the

numbers making accelerated, or more than expected, progress. In the main, however, the proportions of students making more than expected progress are good.

- The school enters a small number of carefully-chosen students to take their GCSE in mathematics early. This enables them to gain a grades A* to C and then concentrate on other subjects.
- Sixth form students join with below average levels of attainment as the school provides fairly open access to post-sixteen courses. Students do well, nonetheless, and achieve A level results that provide them with the right qualifications for higher education or further training. Many go on to degree courses at prestigious universities.
- The school is working hard to improve the consistency of performance between different sixth form subjects but small differences persist.
- Across the school, girls perform particularly well, often reaching very high standards of work. Boys generally do well but their performance is not as consistent or as high as that of girls.
- The school is making good use of special funding for Year 7 students who start with low levels of attainment. Extra help with reading, for example, is enabling these students to catch up with others. These students are also being well supported to gain a better grounding in basic mathematics. Consequently, their skills in number work are improving at a good rate.
- Students on alternative education programmes achieve good qualifications that help them to take the right courses for their future career choices.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in most subjects, including English and mathematics, is usually good, with examples of outstanding teaching, particularly in creative and performing arts subjects. As a result, most students, including those in the sixth form, make good progress and achieve well over time.
- The excellent relationships that teachers build underpin the high levels of cooperation that they secure from students. Consequently, no time is lost when teachers move from one activity to another and students concentrate well on activities when working on their own or with others.
- Teaching assistants are used well to support different groups of students, especially disabled students and those with special educational needs. They are good at asking questions that help students to think through the work and solve problems on their own.
- While most teachers pitch work at the right level for students in their classes, sometimes work for more able students is too easy. Consequently, they do not always make rapid enough gains in their learning.
- Ongoing support and oral feedback by teachers to students are thorough and precise. Teachers are usually good at using questioning or observation to see how well students are developing new knowledge and skills. Based on these, they provide constructive advice on what individual students need to do to improve their work. However, written guidance and advice are not consistently clear or specific to enable students to make their work better.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good, with many lessons that are outstanding. Marking

and checking of the notes that students make in lessons, however, are not as effective as other features of the teaching, including written feedback on assignments which is very thorough.

- Many teachers use a very effective coaching approach, especially in the sixth form, which helps students to develop their subject skills. In the best lessons, varied teaching methods keep students engaged and interested and also ensure that there are different approaches to suit the ways in which different students learn best.
- Overall, teaching staff create a very positive climate for learning within which students are motivated to give of their best.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- A key strength in the attitudes of students is the high level of respect they show to others. They are very polite to all, open doors for visitors and are helpful to staff and their peers. Students get on exceptionally well with one another.
- Students are keen to do well but are sometimes passive in class especially in lessons where work is less demanding. The school is developing more independent approaches to learning and this is helping to encourage all teachers to involve students more actively in their learning.
- The responses to Parent View indicate that parents feel that their children are happy and safe at school. Bullying is very rare and parents and students are confident that, when it does occur, it is dealt with effectively by the school. Students interviewed could all identify an adult who they could go to should they have any concerns or worries.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students are exceptionally well managed and implemented. Students are taught how to keep themselves safe, for example, through the use of powerful film material in assemblies, which are tailored carefully to the different age groups within the school.
- A wide range of pastoral support programmes ensure that all students are fully integrated into the life of the school. An inclusive approach means that students who have behavioural needs are supported exceptionally well and successfully modify their behaviour.
- The school looks very carefully at attendance and punctuality and has many different strategies in place to encourage good attendance. As part of the checks made, the school has robust arrangements for ensuring that students receiving education at alternative sites, such as Basildon College or the farm, attend regularly and that they are safe when attending. Attendance for these and other students is regular and in line with national averages.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher sets a clear direction for the school and has high, clearly communicated expectations of staff and students. She works very effectively with her senior team to ensure that standards continue to rise. Accurate self-evaluation adds to the school's capacity to become even better.
- Teaching is checked regularly and the information gathered from this is used effectively to inform training and staff development programmes as well as to provide helpful feedback to individual teachers so that they can improve their practice.

- The performance of teaching staff and the objectives they are set to improve their performance are linked well to students' progress.
- There is a very thorough approach to linking pay to performance so that those teachers who are paid more are making a strong contribution to the teaching across the school. Any shortfalls in performance are tackled promptly.
- The sixth form is well led and managed. Self-evaluation of sixth form provision is effective; well-focused priorities based on thorough analysis of data and trends support continued improvement.
- Senior staff work closely to support subject leaders and to hold them to account for performance of their areas. Subject leaders are thoughtful and have a reasonably good understanding of the quality of teaching and students' progress in their areas of responsibility. The thoroughness with which subject leaders check and/or tackle any lower performance amongst a particular group is a little variable, however. Consequently, there are still a few differences in the achievement of different groups and subjects including in the sixth form.
- The school benefits from strong partnership with other local schools. These are mutually beneficial in identifying and sharing best practice and in supporting effective transition from primary to secondary.
- Being a teaching school adds to the school's capacity to promote the most up-to-date teaching methods and helps the school to recruit teachers more easily. A number of the teachers at the school have been trained there.
- Students are very happy about the courses on offer and the range of extra-curricular opportunities, visits and visitors available to them at the school. Consequently, they are motivated to do well.
- The quality of guidance and support for future careers, including independent advice, information and guidance, are of high quality.
- The local authority and the school work well together in partnership. Because the school is doing well, it requires little support from the local authority but this support is effective when provided.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are well-informed about the school's work. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and understand the data on students' performance. Governing body and committee meetings provide governors with good opportunities, which they use, to ask probing questions about the school's performance. Governors make prudent decisions about pay rises based on performance, and support the headteacher well where she needs to tackle any underperformance. They manage the budget well so that funds, including additional funds such as pupil premium, are used to best advantage for the students.

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	136861
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	428919

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1733
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	332
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Breathwick
Headteacher	Susan Hammond
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01277 655191
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