

# Meridian School

Garden Walk, Royston, SG8 7JH

**Inspection dates** 10–11 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	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		Good	2
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

- Students' achievement in English is not as good as in mathematics. In particular, the most able students do not make sufficient progress in English to reach the highest standards.
- Students' writing is often let down by errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Teachers do not always match the work set precisely to students' abilities, so some groups of students are not making good progress. They do not always ask probing questions in class to help the most able students develop their ideas.
- Despite some improvements to teaching, leaders have not done enough to ensure that it is consistently good, and do not always identify underachievement at a sufficiently early stage to provide effective support.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Not enough students are helped to make the good progress necessary to achieve the highest grades.
- The governing body has not been effective in holding the school to account for its performance. Governors do not challenge senior staff strongly over the achievement of different groups of students, including those supported by the pupil premium.

### The school has the following strengths

- Students' achievement in mathematics is good and many students exceed nationally expected progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do well thanks to good help and guidance.
- Students behave well. They feel safe in school, are polite and treat each other with respect.
- Attendance has improved and persistent absence has fallen.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning. They work well with each other and on their own.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, three of which were jointly observed with a senior leader.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the governing body and three groups of students. The lead inspector also spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority over the telephone.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; records of teachers' performance; the analysis of students' progress; students' work; and records relating to the behaviour and safety of students.
- Inspectors looked at the 99 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took account of responses to an inspection questionnaire by 60 staff.

## Inspection team

Neil Stanley, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Michael Stanton

Additional Inspector

Brenda Watson

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Meridian School is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school and numbers of students have fallen in recent years.
- The school converted to academy status in November 2011 and now works in formal partnership through a multi-academy trust formed by the three schools. The predecessor school, which had the same name, was judged to be good when last inspected by Ofsted.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for achievement and progress at the end of Year 11.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is below average. This additional funding is for particular groups of students, including those who are known to be eligible for free school meals in local authority care.
- The proportion of disabled students and those supported through school action, school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is above average.

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

- Make more teaching good or outstanding, including in the sixth form, by making sure that:
  - lessons are planned with a range of activities that fully involve and challenge students of all abilities, particularly the most able
  - teachers use questions in class to help students fully develop their ideas
  - students routinely respond to feedback on the quality of their writing, particularly so that their spelling, punctuation and grammar improve.
- Raise standards and quickly tackle any instances of underachievement, including in the sixth form, by:
  - using the systems for tracking students' progress more effectively to identify individuals and groups of students who are falling behind, including the most able and students supported by the pupil premium
  - promptly providing extra help so that they catch up.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management on the school's performance by:
  - using additional financial resources effectively, particularly funding received through the pupil premium, so that eligible students make accelerated progress
  - monitoring the progress of groups of students more closely and tackling underachievement more quickly
  - making sure that the governing body holds senior leaders to account for the performance of different groups of learners in all subjects.

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

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because students of all abilities, but especially those who are most able, are not progressing as rapidly in English as they are in mathematics.
- Students join the school in Year 9 having spent two years in middle schools after they took Key Stage 2 tests. When the academy opened it inherited students in Years 10 to 11 from the predecessor school. Inspectors therefore took into account starting points partway through the usual secondary age range when assessing progress in the academy.
- Results in Year 11 are broadly average, but improving. In 2012, 56% of the students gained five or more good GCSE grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics. These pupils were in the academy for only its first year of operation, but their results were not as high as Key Stage 2 test scores suggested they should have been.
- In 2013 the percentage rose and 61% gained good GCSE grades. However, the Year 9 entry data show that this year group made more rapid progress in Years 7 and 8 in their middle schools than in Years 9 to 11. Year 9 was spent in the predecessor school and Years 10 to 11 in the academy. The improvements the academy has made are only showing in the current Years 10 and 11. These students are now making more rapid progress.
- Students are now doing well in mathematics. In 2012, 68% gained GCSE grades A\* to C and this rose to 80% in 2013. English results have improved less, rising from 72% to 74%. Despite the slight rise in standards, students' different starting points meant that progress in English was not as good in 2013 as in 2012.
- In the sixth form, the proportion of students gaining grades A\* to E has increased. However, the proportion gaining grades A\* to B has fallen. Students' progress has not been tracked closely enough to identify weaknesses and tackle them promptly.
- In September 2013, the school introduced a new scheme to encourage reading for pleasure. Students say they are enjoying this new scheme, but it has not been in place long enough for the impact to be measured.
- In recent years, the school has entered students early for GCSE in mathematics, but not in English. Students who have not achieved their targets in mathematics repeat the examinations at the end of Year 11 and they improve their grades as a result.
- The progress made by students who are supported by the pupil premium is in line with that of most other pupils. School data show that they have made steady progress in the past, although gaps in attainment are beginning to close for those currently in the school. In 2013, they were on average half a GCSE grade behind their classmates in English and mathematics.
- The most able students make uneven progress. In mathematics, their progress is at least in line with, and often above, national expectations. However, in English and science, the numbers of students gaining grades A\* to B are not high enough. This is because teachers do not always plan activities that are closely matched to their individual needs.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are typically making good progress and catching up with their classmates. This is because of the help they receive from

teachers and support staff.

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

- Inspectors saw much good and outstanding teaching but there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, and a small number of lessons were seen where the teaching was inadequate. Despite improvements over the last two years, teaching over time is not yet consistently good enough, particularly in English, to promote good achievement.
- Teachers often plan lessons with an awareness of the different groups of students in their classes, including gifted and talented students, disabled students and those who have special educational needs and students supported through the pupil premium. However, in too many lessons, they do not vary the activities to meet students' differing needs.
- Teachers' marking pays attention to students' spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, students do not always respond to teachers' comments and make corrections as a result. This means errors are often repeated and students are not making rapid improvements in the quality of their writing.
- Teachers usually ask questions effectively in class to check individual students' understanding. However, they often miss opportunities to use more challenging questions to encourage students, particularly the most able, to develop their answers. This is one reason why more-able students do not make good enough progress in some subjects.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is inconsistent. In the best lessons, students use highly-developed skills to evaluate evidence and extend their ideas. This was evident in a business studies lesson on products and branding. However, in too many lessons the most able students are not fully challenged. As a result, not enough students are achieving the highest grades.
- As they progress through the school, students gain confidence. This is because of the respect shown by their classmates and the support given by their teachers. As a result, they become increasingly willing to try out new and more challenging activities.
- In the best lessons, students are encouraged to learn from each other. In a Year 11 English lesson for middle-ability students on descriptive writing, all students made good progress as they looked at their classmates' work and showed them how to improve it. Such lessons keep up a brisk pace, with students challenged to think quickly. This was evident in a Year 9 geography lesson on the Haiti earthquake, and all students made rapid progress as a result.
- Teachers set regular homework. This helps students to build on what they have learnt in class and make further progress.
- Support staff provide effective help in class. They have a clear understanding of the needs of the individual students they are supporting, and this helps them to support the students who most need it. Where this was observed during the inspection, the supported students made more rapid progress than the others.
- The school makes sure that students receive appropriate independent advice to help them prepare for their next steps in education, training and employment.

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

- In class, students' behaviour is consistently good. They enjoy their lessons and participate enthusiastically in discussions. When working in groups, students work readily with all their classmates and not just their best friends.
- Around the school, students' behaviour is also consistently good. They move quickly and calmly between lessons, showing consideration for each other and for visitors, who they are keen to talk to. In their discussions with inspectors they were thoughtful, articulate and mature.
- Through their positive relationships, students help each other to improve. They listen attentively to each other and respect each other's opinions. They share their ideas confidently in class, praise their classmates' achievements and support each other if they are not right.
- Students say bullying is very rare in the school. They have a very good awareness of the different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, racism, sex and gender bullying and other types of harassment. Students say they trust their teachers to take any bullying seriously and deal with it effectively. They say that they would have no hesitation in talking to a member of staff if they were worried about something.
- Students say they feel safe in the school. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe in a variety of situations, including when using the internet.
- Students say they like the tutor groups, which mix students of different ages. This helps them make different friends and allows older students to help the younger ones settle in quickly.
- Students are keen to take responsibility, and say that leaders listen to them. For example, the school council has successfully campaigned for improvements to the school library. Students say this is now a much more welcoming and comfortable environment.
- Students enthusiastically raise money to support the work of charities, many of which have links with the school. In recent years, students have chosen to support the Brain Tumour charity and Royston in Blue Teenage Cancer.
- The school has a clear approach to encouraging good behaviour and students say that they understand its expectations. Older students say behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved significantly in recent years, and instances of misbehaviour are very rare. Even when lessons do not fully engage all groups and learning slows, it is not disrupted by inappropriate behaviour.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs say they are well supported by teachers and support staff. They say this helps them to feel much more confident.
- More students than usual have medical needs. The school takes appropriate action to ensure they have work when being treated, and to settle them on their return. Apart from these students, attendance is above average and levels of persistent absence are below average.

### **The leadership and management**

### **requires improvement**

- The school's leadership team is very small and has lost members in recent years, so the headteacher and other senior leaders have had to take on extra responsibilities. Even so, leaders have not done enough to ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good and any underachievement is quickly identified and tackled.

- In their analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses, leaders have focused on the numbers of students achieving five good GCSE grades at A\* to C and have not given enough emphasis to monitoring the progress made by individuals and groups of students. This is why the underachievement of more-able students, particularly in English, has not been addressed.
- Subject leaders say that the headteacher and senior managers support them in developing their responsibilities. This is shown in the work they have done to improve the quality of reading and writing across the school, and the new systems to support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. However, these initiatives are too recent to have shown a clear impact.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have not always used the pupil premium funding effectively to make sure that it supports the students for whom it is intended. Leaders do not have clear ways to measure the impact of the extra support it provides. As a result, although the attainment gaps between students supported by the pupil premium and others in the school are beginning to close, this is not happening as quickly as it could be.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form require improvement. The systems for monitoring students' progress are not always used effectively enough to ensure that students who are capable of gaining the highest grades do so.
- Senior leaders have worked effectively to build a positive relationship with parents, including those who find working with the school difficult. This is shown by the good level of response to Parent View, and the levels of attendance at parents' evenings. Parents' views about all aspects of the school are overwhelmingly positive. Most say that they would recommend the school to others.
- The headteacher has ensured that the school plays an important role within its local community. For example, it supports local primary schools by hosting a mini-Olympic games twice a year. This gives the school's sports leaders the opportunity to develop their skills.
- Despite its small size, the school provides a broad and varied curriculum, particularly in Key Stage 4. It promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, and this in turn helps to maintain their positive attitudes to learning. Students are helped to gain a good understanding of the wider world through well-developed links with schools in Africa.
- Through its academy partnership with the town's two middle schools, Meridian School is beginning to benefit from sharing facilities and expertise. Since becoming an academy in November 2011, the school has received limited support from its local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body provides good support for school leaders when setting and monitoring budgets. As a result, despite steadily falling numbers of students, the school has been able to ensure financial sustainability and make some improvements to its facilities.
  - Governors closely monitor what is being done to reward good teachers and tackle underperformance. However, they have been less effective in using information on the school's performance to evaluate the quality of teaching over time and hold leaders to account for the achievement and progress of different groups of students. For example, with leaders they have focused too much on the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades, rather than the progress made by groups and individual students.
  - Governors have not clearly understood how the pupil premium is spent, and as a result they

have not asked probing questions about its effectiveness.

- The governing body works closely with school leaders to ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet national requirements.

## 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>	137656
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	425438

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>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	493
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	90
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gary Glover
<b>Headteacher</b>	Michael Firth
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	N/A
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