

The Gilbert School

Brinkley Lane, Colchester, CO4 9PU

Inspection dates

26–27 November 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 make good progress in a wide range of subjects and are well prepared for the next stages in their education.
- Mathematics results at GCSE are consistently high. Students of all abilities make good progress and say they enjoy the subject.
- English results are improving and students are achieving well.
- Students' behaviour is good; they work at a good pace in lessons and support each other well.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because the support they are given is very well organised.
- The wide range of academic and work-related subjects meets students' needs very well.
- Students' progress towards challenging targets is monitored very well and extra support for those who need it is very well managed.
- The school system for tracking student progress is outstanding.
- The headteacher and senior leaders in their vision and clear thinking show an excellent capacity to improve student achievement still further.
- Governors are experienced and have a very good understanding of school performance data so that they offer very good support and challenge to school leaders.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not match the work well enough to students' previous learning in some science lessons.
- Achievement in German is not as high as in other languages.
- Teachers do not always plan work to challenge all students in the class.
- Marking does not consistently show students what to do to improve in all subjects.
- Students do not have enough opportunities in class to reflect on their progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 47 lessons, including ten joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made short visits to other lessons, tutor periods and assemblies, and looked at samples of students' work.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders, teachers, and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of school documents including the school's self-evaluation, school development plans, behaviour records, safeguarding records, governing body documents, and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors also considered the views expressed in 97 questionnaires returned by school staff, together with the 163 responses submitted by parents to Parent View, the on-line survey.

Inspection team

Roger Waddingham, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Helen Lee	Additional Inspector
Martin Wyard	Additional Inspector
Charlotte Evers	Additional Inspector
John Ubsdell	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Gilbert School is an above-average-sized school for students from 11 to 16. It converted to academy status in March 2012. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is broadly average. This is additional funding allocated by the government for groups of students, including those looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than in most schools of this size. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs receiving extra support through school action is below average. The proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.
- Support to local schools is offered by one staff member as part of the North East Essex Education Partnership (NEEEP).
- The school offers work-related training for a very small number of students through provision from Colchester Institute.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - all teachers plan work to challenge students at the appropriate level, based on their previous achievement
 - written feedback is given consistently to students in all subjects to indicate what they need to do to improve
 - students are given regular opportunities in class to reflect on their progress in response to teachers' comments.
- Further raise achievement by:
 - matching work more carefully to students' previous learning in science lessons
 - improving progress in German, especially at the higher GCSE grades.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress from their starting points on entry to the school. Standards are improving strongly from the results in 2012, and the proportion of students achieving five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics is now above average.
- Attainment in English has risen considerably in the past year. Changes to the teaching schemes, closer monitoring of teaching and detailed tracking of student progress have all contributed well to the improvement of standards. Progress in 2013 was above average for all students, including the more able, and the gap in performance between boys and girls has narrowed considerably. The school has well-founded evidence to suggest that these higher standards will be maintained in 2014.
- Students of all ages achieve well in mathematics. High quality teaching leads to above average progress in all year groups, especially for more-able students. GCSE results are consistently high and the proportions of higher grade passes are significantly above average. Early entry has been used for a limited number of students in both 2012 and 2013. This has not affected their results as the school made sure the students achieved their expected target grades.
- Science standards are improving. The 2013 results are in line with the national averages and work seen in lessons shows that the majority of students are making good progress. Standards in German are also improving but results are not yet as high as in other languages, especially at the higher GCSE grades.
- Results for students supported by the pupil premium show a clear narrowing of the gap in their performance compared to their peers. In English, Year 11 students were on average one third of a GCSE grade behind in 2013, halving the previous year's gap. In mathematics, the gap has narrowed from one grade to two thirds of a grade. The school's arrangements to support these students are increasingly effective and their progress seen in lessons was in line with nationally expected levels for this group.
- The progress of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language is above average, and they achieve well.
- The attainment of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is consistently above the national average in both English and mathematics. They make good progress overall because they are very well supported in lessons and their progress is tracked carefully.
- Students' communication skills are well developed. They practise their writing for a good range of different purposes in humanities and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) lessons, and reading is developed well through regular opportunities during tutor period. Students develop their numeracy skills very well because of the excellent attention they receive in mathematics lessons to building their confidence.
- Year 7 students who have fallen behind make good progress. They are very well supported in their literacy through paired reading opportunities with older students and with support staff, the school's Accelerated Reading programme and an Easter school.
- The school monitors both the attendance and the academic achievement of students educated

off-site for part of the school week. They make good progress in their chosen courses.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good overall and is improving in several key areas in response to the school's well-targeted training and support. Planning, questioning and target setting are all strong aspects.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to plan lessons that interest students and challenge them appropriately. They use a good variety of activities to involve students in their learning. For example, in a lesson on the environment, a short video clip led to a fast-paced writing task and a detailed follow-up discussion, engaging students' attention very well.
- In most lessons teachers plan well to build on students' previous learning. They relate new objectives to what has been covered before and plan activities to challenge students using tasks with different starting points. In the best lessons, students have good opportunities to develop their independent learning skills. In some weaker lessons, students were all expected to carry out the same task and it was not made clear enough what was expected of different abilities within the class.
- Questioning is often used well to set the scene for the main learning based on starting activities that promote discussion and student involvement. For example, in one lesson students reviewed what others had done for their homework and in another they looked at each other's answers on mini-whiteboards.
- During lessons, short questioning sessions are generally used well to identify any difficulties in understanding. In the best examples, students were given the chance to think about their answers through discussion with a partner before the teacher selected a range of class members to offer answers.
- Support staff are well managed and use their expertise to support individual students and groups of students well.
- Teachers assess students' progress regularly, setting them clear targets for their progress by the end of each year and often for each topic. Students report that this gives them good motivation to improve. Homework is used well to complement classwork and provide further assessment opportunities.
- Marking of written work has been a recent development focus for staff. Good examples were seen where clear guidance was given on a regular basis on what each student needed to do to improve. However, this detail in marking practice is not yet consistently offered by all staff. Students do not have enough opportunities in class to reflect on and respond to the comments staff have given.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' positive attitudes to all aspects of school life are a strength of the school as a learning community. Behaviour is good throughout the school, both in lessons and at other times of the school day. Students state clearly that they enjoy being at the school.
- Students arrive at lessons punctually and ready to learn, with a minimum of time wasted at the start of lessons or when moving between activities. They work at a good pace, present their

work well, and make a sustained effort throughout the lesson. They show excellent consideration for their fellow students, listening carefully to others, cooperating well in groups and taking a responsible attitude, for example, when asked to comment on other students' work.

- Teachers set high expectations for behaviour and attitudes in lessons and the students respond very well. There was a high level of trust and respect seen in many classes, with the effective use of humour in many cases demonstrating the maturity of classroom relationships.
- Students are very positive about the way the school cares for them. They feel well supported by the excellent relationships in class and feel that the school has a genuine concern to develop them as individuals. This is clearly demonstrated by the work of the mathematics department, where teachers show great skill in developing students' confidence to tackle challenging tasks.
- The students appreciate the way they are involved in the running of the school and give examples with pride on how they have influenced improvements such as the catering arrangements, school uniform, storage facilities and the development of student social areas. Their views on the school rewards system have helped to develop arrangements that promote good motivation and enjoyment in the school very well.
- There is a good range of opportunities for students to take responsibility in the school including the school council, prefects in different year groups, and taking part in school clubs and sporting activities. Students respond well to these challenges.
- Support for students with behaviour difficulties is very well organised, with careful monitoring and individual mentoring ensuring they are given good opportunities to improve. The low rates of exclusion and well-above average attendance demonstrate the effectiveness of the school's approach.
- Parents, staff and students alike feel that the school offers a safe and nurturing environment for students from all backgrounds. Students feel well informed about keeping themselves safe. They are well aware of different types of bullying, including cyber bullying. Students report that bullying is very rare and dealt with effectively.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and senior leaders demonstrate a clear commitment to high standards of student achievement and personal development. Recent senior appointments have led to a significant strengthening of the school's approach to many aspects of school life. The leadership team in their vision and clear thinking show an excellent capacity to improve student achievement still further.
- The school has a well documented programme for monitoring, self-evaluation and action planning. Senior leaders, subject leaders and other managers, together with members of the governing body, all play an active part in these processes. The resulting action plans at the departmental level are implemented increasingly effectively because line management meetings are regular and offer a high degree of challenge.
- The monitoring of teaching has developed very well in the past year. A comprehensive range of evidence sources is used to evaluate teachers' performance and identify their individual training needs. Staff feel that the school offers them good opportunities for their professional development. There are effective programmes to monitor and support weaker teachers, so that teaching overall is improving well.

- The school system for target setting is very well managed and ensures that high expectations are communicated clearly to all staff and students, as well as to subject leaders. Students' progress towards their targets is monitored very carefully. The school has excellent arrangements to ensure that appropriate support is offered to those falling behind, both through extra help in lessons and through a comprehensive set of interventions that are regularly reviewed. The new student tracking system that underpins this work represents outstanding practice in this area.
- The wide range of academic and work-related subjects offered meets the needs of students very well and is a strength of the school. The alternative education programme supports more vulnerable students very well. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and results in highly positive outcomes for their safety, welfare and confidence. Students are well prepared for the next stages in their education; they feel the guidance they receive on future career and education opportunities is very helpful.
- There is excellent provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The coordinator ensures that these students progress well by managing a very effective combination of support from specialist staff and training for class teachers.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well managed and all statutory requirements are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very well organised with a range of committees overseeing key areas of the school. Decisions are well informed by valuable first-hand monitoring information from governors' regular visits to the school.
 - Governors are experienced and well informed. They have a very good understanding of school performance data so that they offer very good support and challenge to school leaders. They have a detailed awareness of the school's self-evaluation of strengths and areas for development, monitoring the resulting action plans well.
 - Governors know about the quality of teaching in the school and receive regular reports on what the school is doing to develop teaching and to tackle any underperformance. They actively oversee the arrangements for teachers' pay progression.
 - Expenditure on the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up for eligible students is monitored regularly at meetings and governors know how well these students achieve.
 - The governing body ensures that external support is funded for the school for review, moderation, and training by the local authority and external consultants.
 - Governors contribute well to the life of the school, attending parents' meetings, school performances and awards evenings.

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	137926
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	428929

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Brazier
Headteacher	Linda Exley
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01206 842211
Fax number	01206 854756
Email address	headteacher@gilberd.com

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