

# Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre

Maypole Road, Tiptree, Colchester, CO5 0EW

## Inspection dates

27–28 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
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

- Middle ability students do not make good enough progress in GCSE English.
- Teaching is not consistently good. Activities are too often not made sufficiently relevant and interesting for students or matched to their different abilities. This means that some groups of students, particularly boys, are not making good enough progress,
- Students' skills in reading and writing are not developed across all subjects and they are not given enough chance to undertake research or work independently.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students' achievement is inconsistent over time.
- School leaders and governors do not use information about how students are doing well enough to tackle underachievement.
- Additional adults are not always effective in supporting less-able students to make good progress.
- Too often, marking lacks detail to show students how to improve their work. Students are not given regular opportunities to respond to teachers' written feedback.

### The school has the following strengths

- Teaching in science and mathematics is consistently good and students make good progress in these subjects.
- The school provides good opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The most-able students make good progress and are achieving well.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving and much is now good.
- Students attend regularly and are punctual to lessons.
- Students' behaviour is good. They say they feel happy and safe at school. They are polite and treat their teachers and classmates with respect.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning. They work well with each other and on their own.
- Parents say that school leaders listen to them and support them.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 lessons, some of which were jointly observed with a senior leader. Inspectors also observed senior leaders reporting back to teachers on the quality of teaching and students' achievement in lessons. Inspectors also conducted learning walks to look at the effectiveness of additional adults in a range of lessons and students' behaviour around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, a group of less experienced teachers, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Governing Body, four groups of students and a representative from the local authority.
- 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 151 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also took account of responses to an inspection questionnaire from 40 staff.

## Inspection team

Neil Stanley, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Gutmann	Additional Inspector
Sandra Teacher	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector
Jackie Jackson-Smith	Additional Inspector

# Full report

## Information about this school

- Thurstable School is a larger than average-sized secondary school.
- Thurstable School converted to become an academy school on 1 August 2011. When its predecessor school, which had the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds.
- 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 and those in local authority care.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- A very small number of students attend courses at other providers, including Colchester College, alongside their GCSE courses.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is good or outstanding by making sure that:
  - activities and resources are matched to students' interests and learning needs, so that different groups of students, particularly boys, are stimulated in lessons and helped to make the progress they should
  - marking consistently shows students how to improve their work and teachers give them regular opportunities to respond to their written feedback.
  - additional adults provide effective support that helps students to make rapid progress.
- Raise achievement by ensuring that students' literacy skills are developed across all subjects by giving students:
  - opportunities to read widely and often
  - activities that promote independent study and research
  - regular extended writing practice.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by making sure that school leaders, subject leaders and governors use information on the progress of individuals and groups of students to quickly identify underachievement and take steps to make improvements.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- The progress of different groups of students and their attainment across different subjects is uneven. Students join the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average. In 2012, those achieving five or more good GCSE grades A\* to C was in line with the national average. However, this figure fell in 2013.
- The proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A\* to C in English language fell in 2013. The proportion of students meeting and exceeding expected progress was below average. This was because students did not do as well in the final examination questions.
- Boys do not achieve as well as girls. Although the gap in their attainment began to close in 2013, boys still do not make enough progress from their starting points.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is uneven. Although GCE A-level results improved in 2013, students following work-related qualifications do not achieve as well as they should. Students who started the 16–19 study programmes in September 2013 are making expected progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make inconsistent progress across the school. This is because the extra support they are given does not always help them to catch up with their classmates. Their attainment is typically one GCSE grade lower than other students in the school.
- Students supported by the pupil premium typically make expected progress and the gaps between these pupils and their classmates are beginning to close, particularly at Key Stage 3. Their attainment is equivalent to half a GCSE grade lower than other students in the school.
- Students supported through Year 7 'catch-up' premium make expected progress in literacy and numeracy, and the gaps in attainment between these students and others in the school are closing. School data show that students in Years 7 to 9 are making much more rapid progress than in previous years.
- The most-able students make good progress. They benefit from a range of additional activities to challenge them. In recent years, the numbers of students gaining the highest grades at GCSE has improved.
- Students make good progress in mathematics and science. This is because teaching is consistently good and activities are better matched to students' abilities. The proportion of students making expected progress in these subjects is above the national average.
- The school has rarely entered students early for GCSE qualifications and, this year, early entry is not being used.
- The very small number of students who attend work-related courses at Colchester College and other providers make good progress. This is because they are following subjects that interest and stimulate them.

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

- Teachers usually have an awareness of the different groups of students in their classes. However, too often they do not vary the activities to stimulate students' interest and meet the specific learning needs of some less-able students. As a result, the gaps in attainment between some groups of students, such as boys and disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are not closing quickly enough.
- Support staff do not always provide effective support in class. This is because they do not always have clear information about the needs of individual students they are supporting. Because of this, they do not give them targeted support that meets their learning needs and helps them make consistent progress.
- The quality of teachers' marking varies across the school and across different subjects. Some teachers give their students clear guidance and provide them with the opportunity to respond to comments and make quick improvements. However, inspectors saw too many examples of infrequent marking, targets that were not clear enough and teachers' comments that had not led to improvements in the quality of students' work.
- Students' literacy skills are not always well supported across the school. In some lessons, students are not given sufficient opportunities to develop their ideas through extended writing or use independent research to improve their reading skills.
- Inspectors observed much good teaching in the sixth form. This reflects improvements in the quality of teaching as a result of improved leadership and management in this part of the school. However, the uneven sixth form results in 2012 and 2013 show that teaching in the sixth form over this period of time has not been consistently good.
- Inspectors observed consistently good teaching in mathematics and science. In these lessons, teachers ask questions effectively in class to check individual students' understanding.
- In the best lessons, students are challenged to think for themselves. They respond to this with maturity and work well together to develop ideas. This was evident in a dance lesson where students recorded each other's performances and helped each other to do better. As a result, students were making the good progress they are capable of elsewhere.
- Teachers set regular homework. This helps students to build on what they have learnt in class and make progress as a result.

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

- Through the very positive relationships that the school has built over time, students are helping each other to improve. They listen attentively to their teachers and their classmates and they respect each other's opinions. Students are confident about sharing their answers in class and they give each other encouragement to try again if they are not right.
- Students' behaviour in class is consistently good. They enjoy their lessons and participate with enthusiasm in discussions. In group activities, students work positively with all their classmates, not just their best friends. This aspect shows the trust and respect students have for each other.
- Students' behaviour around the school is consistently good. They move quickly and calmly to

lessons. Despite the school's large site, students are very rarely late to lessons. This reflects their sense of community, positive attitudes to learning and respect for their teachers and classmates.

- Many students participate regularly in the social, creative and sporting opportunities provided by the school. They say they like the range of clubs offered, which include cheerleading and rock climbing. They say they are proud to represent the school in competitions, such as the *Dragons' Den* activity for the Essex schools' Local Democracy Week.
- Students say bullying is very rare in school. They have a very good awareness of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, racism, sex and gender bullying, and other types of harassment. Students say that assemblies on bullying, particularly a presentation on homophobia, have helped them understand the issues. Students say they are confident that teachers would take any bullying seriously, and deal with it effectively.
- Students are keen to take responsibility and they say the headteacher listens to them. For example, the school council has successfully campaigned for improvements to the school uniform and new break-time refreshment facilities.
- The school has a clear and effective approach to encouraging good behaviour, and students say the rules are fair. They say the school's awards system encourages them to work hard and behave well. Older students say behaviour throughout the school has improved significantly in recent years, and examples of misbehaviour are now very rare.
- Students say they feel safe in the school. They know how to keep safe in different situations, including when using the internet. This is as a result of the school's effective work in promoting e-safety.
- Students are keen to talk to visitors to the school. In their discussions with inspectors, they were confident and friendly.
- Behaviour and safety are not yet outstanding because students sometimes lose interest and their concentration wavers when teaching does not engage them.

## The leadership and management

## requires improvement

- Leaders have not had a sustained and consistent impact on achievement in recent years. For example, the dip in GCSE results, especially for middle ability students, in English in 2013 was not anticipated early enough. As a result, effective help to tackle the underperformance was not put in place.
- Senior leaders, subject leaders and school governors do not make full and effective use of the information they have about students' progress to quickly identify individuals and groups of students in danger of underachieving and quickly put in place measures to ensure they catch up. Because of this, some groups, including boys and disabled students and those who have special educational needs are making uneven progress.
- The headteacher has applied a consistent system of values across the school. This has led to improved relationships between teachers and students, and a climate of trust and respect. As a result, students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are consistently good.
- The school has used its specialist sports college status to provide a curriculum that allows

students to participate in a wide range of sporting activities. Students say they are encouraged to pursue sports outside school. This has a positive impact on their health and well-being.

- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students say that they like learning about other cultures in citizenship lessons and religious education. They say that through charity projects, such as raising money to repair an African orphanage and sponsoring a student in Kenya, they are better able to understand the world.
- The performance of staff is well managed. The school has a fair approach to awarding pay rises for staff that is linked appropriately to pupils' achievement. Staff say the headteacher challenges them to do better and new staff say they are well supported.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form has improved with a new senior leader given responsibility for sixth form students' progress. This is why the quality of teaching has improved this year. However, this leadership has not been in place long enough for an impact on achievement to be shown.
- Since becoming an academy, the school has maintained a good relationship with the local authority, and the headteacher plays an active role in the local educational community, supporting other school leaders.
- The school makes sure that students receive appropriate independent advice to help them prepare for their next steps in education, training and employment.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, they do not always ask leaders to explain why there are areas of underachievement, what is being done to address them, and how successful these initiatives are. As a result, they are not holding leaders fully to account for their decisions. This is one reason why achievement is uneven.
  - Governors closely monitor what is being done to reward good teachers and tackle underperformance. They provide good support for school leaders when setting and monitoring budgets.
  - The governing body has worked 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>	137241
<b>Local authority</b>	N/A
<b>Inspection number</b>	429642

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<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>	1140
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	150
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Stephen Cook
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miles Bacon
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	N/A
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