

King Edward VI Church of England Voluntary Controlled Upper School

Grove Road, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3BH

Inspection dates 3–4 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good progress. Standards in a wide range of GCSE subjects are above average. In English and mathematics, they rose in 2013 after a dip in 2012.
- In the sixth form, standards in most subjects and courses are high and students make outstanding progress.
- Teachers have high expectations and lessons capture students' interest and enthusiasm.
- Students show exemplary attitudes to their learning and strive to do their best. Behaviour during lessons and around the school is excellent, and students feel safe in school.
- Students' learning benefits greatly from their high levels of participation in an exceptional range of additional activities and educational visits.
- The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding.
- The sixth form is outstanding. The study programme is taught exceptionally well.
- The headteacher, other leaders and the governing body work effectively to improve students' progress and raise standards. They also ensure that the good quality of teaching is sustained.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In some lessons teachers do not set work in line with students' ability levels or the stage they have reached in their learning.
- Some teachers do not use marking and discussion effectively to show students how to make their work even better.
- In some lessons teachers do not ask questions well enough to draw on what students already know, or to extend their knowledge and understanding.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed parts of 51 lessons, and were accompanied by the headteacher or another member of the senior leadership team during 34 of the observations.
- Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher and other senior leaders, teachers who hold additional responsibilities, students and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors looked at the work in students' books.
- The inspectors took into account the school's information about students' attainment and progress, its evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses and the resulting plans for improvement. The inspectors also looked at a range of documents and policies concerning school management and keeping students safe.
- The inspector considered the 299 responses to Ofsted's online survey (Parent View) for the current year, and emails received from some parents stating their views about the school's work. They also considered the responses to a school survey of staff well-being.

Inspection team

Godfrey Bancroft, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Shan Oswald	Additional Inspector
Angela Podmore	Additional Inspector
Piers Ranger	Additional Inspector
Michael Stanton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language are low.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action, at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs are all below average.
- The proportion of students entitled to benefit from additional government funding through the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average, being half of that found in the majority of secondary schools.
- A small number of students are taught away from the school site at the West Suffolk College or at a nearby pupil referral unit.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards for students' attainment and progress.
- Students currently join the school at the start of Year 9. The school is part of plans to reorganise education in the area, which are currently out for public consultation. If they go ahead it is anticipated that the school will expand to cater for the full 11–18 age group from 2016.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teachers consistently set work that is at the right level of difficulty for the level students have reached, and that prepares them effectively for the next stage of their learning.
- Make sure that marking always helps students to gain a better understanding of what they need to do to make their work even better, and they show they have taken the advice on board through later work.
- Make greater use of questioning in lessons to challenge students' thinking, extend their understanding and build on their existing knowledge.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress from joining the school at the start of Year 9. Their attainment on entry has been broadly average, although in recent years a rising proportion of students join with attainment that is below the level expected for their age.
- Standards in 2013 GCSE examinations were above average in English and mathematics, and in a range of other subjects such as home economics, geography, history, modern foreign languages, physical education and science. Students make good progress in all these subjects.
- In 2012 standards had dipped to average in English and students' progress slowed. This was caused by changes in staffing and difficulties in recruiting teachers. Prompt and decisive action by school leaders brought about a recovery in 2013, and progress rose again.
- The improvement of progress and standards is continuing. Students in the current Year 11 are making good progress in English and mathematics and are on course to attain above-average standards. The work seen during lessons and in students' books shows that this pattern is being sustained by the students currently in Years 9 and 10. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C passes, including English and mathematics, is on course to be above average in 2014. The school does not use early entry for students in GCSE examinations.
- A substantial number of students stay on and join the sixth form. They make excellent progress. Attainment in A-level and AS-level examinations is high. There is a well-established year-on-year pattern of standards that in most subjects exceed those found in the majority of sixth forms.
- The majority of sixth form students go on to further education or university. A significant number go on to follow courses at some of the country's most highly regarded universities. The school also prepares students well for the world of work, for example by providing work-related learning opportunities and good guidance and support in writing job applications.
- Students who have a disability or other special educational need make good progress. Their learning needs are identified at an early stage and they are supported well by teachers and teaching assistants. More-able students, including those recognised as gifted and talented, also do well. They invariably thrive and are helped to make the best of their talents, be they academic, artistic, dramatic, musical or sporting.
- The 2013 GCSE results show that students who were supported by the pupil premium were about a grade behind others in English and mathematics. The gap is closing steadily for students currently in the school. They are making progress that is as good as their fellow students and in some cases better.
- Students acquire the basic skills of literacy, including reading, numeracy and information and communication technology well. There have good opportunities to use these skills across a wide range of subjects. The way in which many students do this is testament to their excellent application to learning.
- Students are offered an appropriate range of work-related courses. Those who spend all or part of the time at the local college of further education or the pupil referral unit make good progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Lessons are stimulating, and invariably capture students' enthusiasm for learning and sustain their interest. Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Examples of outstanding teaching were also seen in a range of subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4, including dance, drama, English, music, science and physical education.
- Teachers and teaching assistants take great care to meet the needs of students who have a disability or a special educational need. Staff are also very aware of the learning needs of any student who might potentially be disadvantaged by their circumstances, and use strategies that permit these students to learn and progress as well as possible.
- Teachers do an excellent job in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result students are very aware and sensitive to the needs of those less fortunate than themselves, and those who come from different backgrounds and hold beliefs that are different to their own.
- Teachers promote the basic skills of literacy and numeracy well, and provide good opportunities for students to apply these skills during lessons. This includes the promotion of communication skills, including speaking and listening. However, a small number of teachers do not take this further by asking searching questions to challenge students' thinking and to draw on their existing knowledge and understanding.
- Students' attainment and progress are assessed accurately and frequently. This enables teachers to respond promptly if any student might be at risk of underachieving, and effective individual support is provided by teachers and teaching assistants. Resources such as the library and computers are used well, and staff are available to provide support at lunchtime and after school to help any student who has fallen behind to catch up. Students are very appreciative of the support they receive.
- The majority of students are fully aware of the grades they are expected to attain, and what they need to do to ensure this happens. There are many examples of excellent marking that provides students with clear guidance. However, a small number of teachers do not give students enough information about how to improve their work, or take the opportunity to involve students in discussing how they might make their work even better.
- In the majority of lessons, work is carefully tailored to students' needs and to the stage they have reached. However, in a small number of instances students of differing abilities are all expected to do work at the same level of difficulty. When this occurs some students find the work too easy or too hard, and their progress is not as rapid and sustained as it should be.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Throughout the school students' attitudes to learning are exemplary. Students are consistently enthusiastic and committed learners who are ambitious to do their best. They are eager to join in discussions and thoughtful and reflective in the way they present their ideas.
- Students are well motivated. Even the youngest in Year 9 quickly acquire the ability to apply their skills across the full range of subjects, and show they can sustain their commitment to work without having to rely on direct adult supervision.
- Behaviour is managed consistently well by teachers and teaching assistants, and behaviour

during lessons and around the school is outstanding. Students are mature, thoughtful, courteous and well mannered. Very few students are ever excluded for inappropriate behaviour. On the isolated occasions when leaders decide to exclude anyone, students say it is done fairly and they are given excellent support to take up learning again on their return.

- All students who spoke with inspectors expressed their pride in the school and their ambition to do as well as possible. They appreciate the individual guidance and support they receive.
- Students are eager to take on responsibilities and fulfil leadership roles. For example, sixth form students act as highly effective mentors to younger students. Students also greatly appreciate being consulted by leaders about school developments. They feel valued, respected and able to influence the direction of the school. They express their appreciation for the excellent range of additional activities and educational visits on offer.
- Instances of bullying and racism are extremely rare. Students are able to talk with sensitivity and understanding about all forms of bullying. They have a deep understanding of the damage that bullying in its various forms, including cyber-bullying, can do.
- Excellent work by school leaders has led to marked improvements in attendance, to the extent that it is now above average. They are currently focusing effectively on raising the attendance of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, school leaders and the governing body are committed to ensuring that every student can do as well as possible. This includes providing outstanding leadership for the sixth form. They have worked promptly and effectively to reverse a trend of falling standards and progress that required improvement in Key Stage 4. The success with which they have done this is testament to their capacity to sustain improvement in the future.
- The school's own evaluation of its performance is accurate and realistic. Plans for continued improvement are focused precisely on ways of sustaining good progress and maintaining above-average standards. The impact of initiatives to promote continued improvement is checked regularly and evaluated closely by school leaders and the governing body.
- The school is committed to promoting teaching of the best possible quality. There is a consistent focus on improvement through good-quality training. Arrangements for the appraisal of teachers' performance and the application of the national teaching standards are linked closely to the targets for improving pupils' progress. Staff morale is high and teachers and support staff are proud of their school.
- Parents are full of praise for the quality of education provided for their children. Responses to the online Parent View survey show that parents are very pleased with the progress their children are making and the way they are cared for. They also greatly appreciate the wide range of additional activities the school provides. Several parents went to the trouble of contacting inspectors to share their positive thoughts about the school.
- The curriculum and an excellent range of additional activities contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is very successful in a wide range of sports and liaises closely with local clubs and sporting bodies to ensure that students are able to progress as far as they would wish. The debating society has achieved national recognition. The excellent choir and orchestra receive superb support from the school's musician in residence.

Among a stunning range of educational visits are regular trips to Shanghai and Kurdistan. The school also receives students and teachers from Shanghai each year.

- The headteacher and other leaders are playing a valuable role in working closely with the feeder middle schools and others in the Bury St Edmunds district as they face the challenge of school reorganisation in the area. This liaison is helping to smooth the transition for students as they prepare to move from the primary to the secondary phase of their education.
- The local authority has provided good support. It has worked in partnership to help the school identify and respond to the aspects of students' education that have needed improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well informed about all aspects of the school's work. The governors have an excellent grasp of how well the various groups of students are progressing. They do not shy away from asking challenging questions, and keep leaders on their toes. Governors are involved fully in checking on the quality of teaching, and identifying and supporting initiatives for school improvement. They understand fully the importance of improving teachers' performance, and the systems for doing so. They manage finances well. For example, governors are fully aware of how the pupil premium is spent and how it is helping to improve the achievement of potentially disadvantaged students. They make sure the school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet current 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

Unique reference number	124856
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	412844

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1440
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	380
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robin Burnett
Headteacher	Geoff Barton
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2009
Telephone number	01284 761393
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