

Brentwood County High School

Shenfield Common, Brentwood, CM14 4JF

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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' progress has accelerated over the last two years and was ahead of the nationally expected rates of progress for English and mathematics in 2013.
- Standards have risen since the previous inspection. Attainment of five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics was above average in 2013.
- There has been a rapid improvement in the quality of teaching and most is now at least good and some is outstanding. This transformation has led to the rapid improvement in students' progress across the school.
- The behaviour of students around the school and in lessons is good. They have a positive attitude to learning and in most lessons show enthusiasm and a desire to do well. They respond well to their teachers.
- The school provides a safe learning environment for the students.
- There is strong leadership from the headteacher and his team. Their drive for improvement has brought about a rapid improvement in students' achievement, behaviour and in teaching.
- The effective governing body knows the school well. Governors work hard to bring about improvement and hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The sixth form requires improvement. Too few students gain higher grades at AS and A level because they are not taught to use the study skills essential to enable them to make better progress.
- Punctuality to school has improved but some students are still late.
- Not all teachers provide detailed guidance in marking to enable students to improve their work for themselves, or expect enough of the most-able students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 47 lessons. Eight of these were shared observations with members of the school’s leadership team.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school, attended an assembly and looked at a range of documentation, including: the school’s view of its own performance, development plan, policies and information about students’ performance, attendance, behaviour, the quality of teaching, safeguarding information and the minutes of governing body meetings.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body, staff, senior and other leaders and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the questionnaire returns from 78 members of staff.
- Inspectors took into the account of 204 responses by parents to the online, Parent View, questionnaire.

Inspection team

Caroline Parady, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Sally Lane	Additional Inspector
John Mason	Additional Inspector
David Webster	Additional Inspector
Susan Cox	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Brentwood County High School is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are of White British heritage, with about 13% from other heritages.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for certain groups, including those known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Thirty-four students in Key Stage 4 attend alternative education for either a full or half day each week at Motorvations, Havering College, BEP, Chelmsford College and Action Learning to support their achievement in a range of work-related studies.
- The school is part of the Brentwood Sixth form Consortium.
- The school operates an inclusion centre where work is supervised of students who might otherwise be excluded from school or from a single lesson.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- There has been a change of headteacher and members of the senior leadership team since the previous inspection. The current headteacher has been in post for 16 months and most other senior leaders, including the inclusion leader, for the same length of time or less.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and achievement to be consistently outstanding by ensuring that all teachers:
 - mark students' work more regularly and give them clear guidance on what they need to do to improve it.
 - aim for even higher standards from the most-able students.
- Raise achievement in the sixth form by:
 - giving students more opportunities in lessons to develop the necessary research and study skills to achieve the higher grades
 - always making work challenging enough for students of higher ability.
- Improve the punctuality of those students who continue to be late to school in the morning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start Year 7 with skills and knowledge that are slightly above average for their age. The proportion of students in Year 11 gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has been slightly above the national average for the last two years. However, in 2013 due to a relentless focus on improving teaching, the proportion of students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, improved markedly to be considerably above average.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of students making the nationally expected rate of progress in English and mathematics. Most students irrespective of their ethnic heritages are currently making consistently good progress.
- The school has improved its monitoring of the progress of individuals, so that those who are not making expected progress or who have gaps in their learning are identified early and given extra help with their learning. This is having a positive impact on the progress of students in all year groups, and the school's progress data show that more students are making good progress in English and mathematics than in previous years.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported with their learning in class, leading to an improvement in their achievement. The appointment of the new inclusion leader is having a positive impact on the achievement of these students and many more of them are making good progress.
- The school effectively uses the additional funding it receives to support the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium. These students told inspectors that they valued this extra help. The gap between the attainment of these students and their peers increased in 2013, but current data from the school shows that this gap is rapidly closing. The current gap between the attainment of Year 11 eligible students and others in English is currently three quarters of a GCSE grade and, in mathematics, it is two thirds of a grade – and continues to close. The gap is also closing rapidly for students in other year groups.
- Year 7 students who are eligible for extra support through the catch-up funding to support literacy and mathematics are making good progress. For example, the school provides opportunities for students to read for pleasure as part of their tutorial programme, which is having a positive impact on their progress.
- A small group of students have been entered for GCSE mathematics early. The school uses this option for the most able or for those students who need to build up their confidence and motivate them for the summer examination.
- The achievement of students who are attending work-related programmes off-site is good. The experience that they gain keeps them motivated. Their attendance has improved since starting these programmes and the experience is having a positive impact on their work in the subjects they take at school.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Attainment of students at AS and A level was below average in many subjects in 2013. The most-able students do not consistently make good progress. Those students supported by the pupil premium funding are making less progress than others. Many students are not confident to apply the study skills expected of those following advanced courses. For example, they do not make use of a range of books when

researching, they often accept information and opinions without asking questions that will further their knowledge, and their note-making skills are also weak.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding, ensuring that students' overall progress is good. Consequently, students achieve well and their attainment has improved considerably.
- In English and mathematics, teaching is good with some outstanding work, resulting in a much improved profile of attainment at the higher GCSE grades in these subjects. Assessment data are used well to identify any students who are falling behind. They are then given the right amount of support to enable them to catch up.
- Teachers' expectations of what students should achieve in lessons are usually high. Clear planning of learning supports the demanding academic expectations teachers have of students. However, in some subjects, teachers do not have high enough expectations of the most-able and fail to provide them with work that will allow them to achieve the top grades at GCSE.
- Good teaching ensures that most students are fully engaged in class and want to learn. Very occasionally, where activities are not stimulating or too easy, some students can lose interest and waste time by talking.
- In most lessons, questioning is penetrating and extends students' learning. Teachers use a range of methods to seek feedback from students and use this to modify the learning if necessary to match students' levels of understanding. Students are regularly set work which challenges them to think for themselves. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, students had been brought on successfully to solve problems taken from higher level GCSE mathematics papers without close direction from the teacher.
- Students say they learn best when they can work with others, combining their efforts to tackle a task set. For example, inspectors saw students in most year groups working well together solving mathematical problems. During this activity they were using mathematical terms correctly, checking one another's calculations and helping each other to take their learning forward.
- Teachers deploy teaching assistants well. These additional staff give students helpful individual support when appropriate. They do not monopolise students' attention or direct their work excessively but give them scope to move learning forward for themselves wherever possible. As a result, disabled students and those who have special educational needs are now making better progress.
- Teachers prepare suitable homework that enables students to consolidate and extend their learning. Students told inspectors that homework is set regularly and is always related to the lesson or is in preparation for an activity linked to their next topic.
- Teachers' comments in marking help students to understand the level at which they are working. However, written comments are not always pointed enough to direct students to improve their work in order to reach the higher grades. The majority of students take pride in their work and books are well presented.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement as it varies too much across subjects. In some

subjects, teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are not high enough. Students of higher ability are not always challenged enough and settle for a standard below what it could be. Students are not given enough opportunity to develop and use the research skills which are generally to be expected of them at this level. They often lack the opportunity to discuss their learning and learn from each other. The better teaching gave students detailed guidance on how to improve their work and, as a result, these students made good progress. Such good practice is not evident in all subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They generally have a positive attitude towards their learning. Students commented on the improvement in behaviour in lessons.
- The majority of students wear their uniform correctly, arrive to lessons fully equipped for learning and show respect towards staff.
- The school provides a calm learning environment and students are welcoming to visitors. Low-level disruption in lessons is uncommon.
- Pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes is good. They are given the opportunity to go wherever they like in the school building and they respect this privilege. The school is supervised during this time and inspectors observed good relationships between students and staff.
- There have been no students excluded from school within the past year and this reflects the success of the inclusion centre, which provides support for those students who are at risk of being excluded from school. Students agreed that behaviour has improved in general, especially in the last year, and the majority of parents who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire, considered behaviour to be good.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say the school is a safe place to be. They report that incidents of bullying have reduced considerably and if any bullying does occur there are plenty of people in the school to talk to and resolve the issue. Students are aware of the different forms of bullying, including cyber and homophobic bullying and how to keep safe when using the internet.
- The school's records on bullying show that it has declined rapidly and is now rare. The majority of parents agree that bullying is dealt with well and that their children are well looked after in the school.
- The behaviour of students who attend work-related courses is good, both in school and during their placement. The attendance of these students has also improved since they started these courses.
- Attendance in previous years has been below the national average. The school has taken effective action to improve attendance, which is currently above average. The school had a higher-than-average proportion of students who were persistently absent from school in the last year but the effective work of the attendance team has led to a reduction in persistent absences.
- Students are given a variety of opportunities to take on leadership roles within the school, which include sixth form students sitting on the governing body. Students of all ages participate in a

wide range of after-school activities. They are involved in developing the school's values – a set of phrases and words which describe how students, staff, parents and the community should act in order to fulfil the school's vision for its students to become mature and responsible citizens. These values are a key feature of every lesson.

- The school has taken action to reduce the number of students who arrive late. However, these initiatives have not been totally effective and some students have not yet been persuaded of the benefit of arriving to school on time to avoid missing out on their educational entitlement.
- The culture within the sixth form has changed so that students have, currently, a more positive attitude towards their learning. They follow the dress code, are punctual to lessons and arrive with the correct equipment. Attendance is good and the number of students who stay on to complete their courses is above average. Students respect one another, support younger students and act responsibly around the school. However, some students do not take enough responsibility to advance their learning outside of lessons, and their attitudes to learning in lessons is not consistently good.

The leadership and management are good

- Since his appointment in September 2012, the headteacher has brought about much needed improvement. He has undertaken a major staff restructuring and has worked closely with staff and governors to undertake a rigorous evaluation of the school. As a result, the school has a realistic view of its strengths and weaknesses.
- The headteacher has made several key appointments to his leadership team and, together, they have brought about rapid improvements in behaviour and teaching, which are reflected in the improved attitudes and achievement of students. For example, a key appointment is that of the inclusion leader, who has reviewed and improved the work-related, alternative provision for students – ensuring their safety off-site and the quality of education they receive. The support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs and who require additional support with their reading has much improved; consequently, this better leadership has been key to improving the achievement of these students.
- Senior leaders have the confidence of staff and parents. Most users think that the school is well led and managed. Most parents would recommend this school to others.
- The school provides a curriculum which is broad and balanced across a range of subjects and other learning opportunities. Students say it gives them the opportunity to learn what interests them as well as what is essential to their future. Alternative-education provision has been revised and students following these courses have a wider range of work-related qualifications to help prepare them for the next stage in their education or training. Students have the opportunity to take part in a wide range of sports and other activities – for example, rugby league, national competitions, faculty representatives and 'SMSC champions'.
- Good provision is made for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is well promoted within the school through the values that it actively promotes. The tutor system links students of mixed ages together and is successful as older students support the younger ones. The school's values are a feature of every lesson as students are provided with opportunities to reflect upon aspects of these values. Staff throughout the school model high professional standards.

- Students receive helpful advice from careers advisers and school staff that enables them to make informed decisions about their next stage in education or training. All students who leave the school go on to further education or training.
 - Subject leaders are effective leaders of learning. They know the strengths and weaknesses within their subject and have clear policies to address the weaknesses. They support their staff in improving teaching as well as holding them to account for their performance. Subject leaders know they are fully accountable to senior leaders for the teaching and achievement in their subjects. Subject leaders are ably supported by the school's coaching system in order for them to develop their leadership skills.
 - The management of teachers' performance is rigorous and senior leaders have tackled any underperformance directly. Leaders monitor teaching closely, accurately judging its quality. Professional development opportunities are linked to improving learning and any weaknesses in individuals' skills.
 - Leadership of the sixth form requires improvement. Students are not achieving well enough to raise their attainment which, in many subjects, is below average. Expectations of what students can achieve have not been high enough in the past and data on their performance have not been used effectively to identify when students should be supported with their learning. The leadership team are now ensuring that data is used effectively to identify when students need support.
 - The school offers sixth form students a wide range of A-level and AS-level courses with some Level 3 vocational courses to enable the majority of the students to go on to higher education. Students following A-level and AS-level courses have the opportunity of studying for the Pre-U course, qualification which provides them with the skills and knowledge required to study at university. Currently, many students are not being equipped well enough with the study skills necessary for them to achieve well at university. The sixth form does not currently make provision for students who may wish to follow Level 2 courses. However, this is changing for the coming year, as it is planned to offer Level 2 vocational courses to students entering the sixth form in September 2014.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The governors know the school well and have high ambitions for the students' achievement and personal development. They have undertaken a restructure of governance since the previous inspection, and taken action to improve the leadership of the school. The effectiveness of their actions can be seen in the rapid improvements already made. They undertake regular training, which gives them a better understanding of the work of the school, especially in relation to the data on students' progress and attainment.
 - Governors scrutinise the school's own data, the Ofsted Data Dashboard and the other more detailed data supplied by Ofsted so they can challenge the headteacher regarding the achievement of students and quality of teaching. For example, they have insisted that initial judgements made by senior leaders regarding the quality of teaching are validated by external bodies who are Ofsted trained. They scrutinise all pay-progression data and have worked with the headteacher to refuse increases in pay if staff have not met their targets related to students' achievement. They apply a rigorous process to the management of the headteacher's performance.
 - Governors are rigorous in their oversight of the school's budget. They oversee the use of the pupil premium, making them aware of how it is used and the impact it is having on improving the achievement of eligible students. They plan carefully for the future financial viability of the school. Governors are diligent in ensuring that all safeguarding policies and practice are up to

date and meet requirements so that students and staff work in a safe environment.

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	115375
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	425326

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
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	1332
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosemary Lovatt
Headteacher	Stephen Drew
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2011
Telephone number	01277 238900
Fax number	01277 200853
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