

Plume School

Fambridge Road, Maldon, CM9 6AB

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

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 English and mathematics. The use of additional funding to improve reading and support weaker readers in Year 7 has been particularly successful.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs and those supported by the pupil premium are well taught and make good progress.
- Teaching is usually good with some that is outstanding. Lesson activities are planned carefully and taught well to challenge students and engage their interest.
- Students' behaviour is good. Relationships are positive and students come to lessons ready to learn. Students feel very safe at school and attendance has significantly improved.
- The sixth form is good. It is well managed and teaching is strong, enabling students to make good progress on their subjects and courses.
- Students' social, moral, spiritual and moral development is very well supported.
- The academy's engagement with the local community is particularly impressive.
- The academy is led and managed well. Senior leaders have implemented effective strategies to improve teaching and achievement, and middle leaders perform their roles with confidence and enthusiasm.
- Governors know the academy well. They monitor its work carefully, and both support the academy and challenge it to make continuous improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' numeracy skills, including those of less able students, are not as well developed as their skills in literacy.
- The marking and assessment of students' work are not consistently good across the academy.
- The quality of support provided by additional adults employed to support learning is uneven.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 48 lessons, of which 10 were joint observations with senior staff. Two 'learning walks' were conducted, focusing on social, moral, spiritual and cultural opportunities and the support for disabled students and those with special educational needs. Inspectors also observed seven registration sessions, one assembly and two school clubs. They also observed the start of the day, lunch and break time and the breakfast club.
- Meetings took place with staff, students and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors looked at a range of academy documentation including analyses of students' achievement, the quality of teaching and the performance management of staff. Other documentation scrutinised concerned safeguarding, child protection, risk assessment, attendance and exclusions, self-evaluation, development planning and minutes of the governing body.
- Inspectors listened to students read and scrutinised their work in lessons.
- The previous specialism, performing arts, is no longer offered.
- Inspectors analysed 175 response to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 67 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Michael Merva, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Paul Bartlett	Additional Inspector
Cheryl Jackson	Additional Inspector
Brenda Watson	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Plume School converted to become an academy school in January 2012. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The academy is a larger-than-average secondary school with a sixth form.
- Students are overwhelmingly White British. The proportions of students who speak English as an additional language and the proportion of students from ethnic minorities are both well below the national average.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium is below average. This includes students known to be eligible for free school meals and a very small number of students looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs at school action is broadly average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy provides a breakfast club and a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs. These include sports, music and subject support.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching is consistently good or better and none requires improvement by:
 - making sure work consistently challenges students of all abilities and fully engages their interest and willingness to learn.
 - implementing the new assessment policy across the academy, and insisting that teachers mark to a consistently high standard so that all students are made aware of their progress and know how to improve their work.
- Raise achievement by:
 - improving students' numeracy skills so that these are as strong as their skills in literacy
 - ensuring that additional adults work consistently and effectively to support vulnerable and less-able students' progress in all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the academy with standards which are below those seen nationally. Since becoming an academy, progress has steadily improved with results in English currently above the national average and results in mathematics broadly in line. Standards at the end of Year 11 for students gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades are currently in line with the national average. Data held by the academy indicate that attainment in Year 9 is above average.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is improving and is now good. Better leadership and management of this aspect of the school's work have been introduced and exciting initiatives are being implemented. This includes the appointment of additional managers to raise achievement. Evidence from case studies indicates that students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are sensitively supported and make good progress.
- Achievement is also improving for more-able students. Subjects such as mathematics have been carefully targeted using, for example, additional sessions during form period time, and more-able students have responded well.
- The academy teaches literacy well. It has prioritised support for new students and has employed Year 7 catch-up funding effectively through, for example, the purchase of a specialised literacy programme to develop students' reading skills. Consequently, students are now much more confident readers.
- The academy is aware that the development of some students' numeracy skills is not as secure as in literacy, and has identified tackling this as a priority.
- The academy has rightly identified improving both the achievement and attendance of students supported by the pupil premium support as priorities, and has worked successfully on both. Strategies implemented include one-to-one tuition, the appointment of a home attendance officer and increased staffing to support reading. As a result, progress has steadily improved. Students eligible for the pupil premium are currently just one third of a GCSE grade behind their peers in English and half a GCSE grade in mathematics.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. From below-average starting points, students make progress which is close to or often above expectations at A level and in work-related subjects. This is the result of effective management, good teaching and careful tracking of students' progress.
- Students were previously entered early for GSCE in mathematics but this practice has been discontinued.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good. Some is outstanding, particularly in English and in the sixth form. However, a small minority of teaching still requires improvement.
- Good and better teaching is characterised by carefully planned, well-taught learning activities which engage students fully. In a Year 10 science lesson on calculating the speed of waves, for example, exciting and well-presented teaching made sure students were fully involved at all

points of the lesson and made good progress. Resources are carefully chosen and designed. Consequently, students make good progress in these lessons.

- The teaching of more-able students is often very good. In English and in the sixth form for example, as well as in other subjects such as music and child development, lessons are effective because teachers' own subject knowledge is so good and they are able to answer students' questions precisely and accurately. They take advantage of students' willingness to learn to develop their understanding of key concepts quickly and to new depths.
- A high proportion of teaching in the sixth form is good or better. Lessons are well planned to ensure good progress, and teachers use feedback from their ongoing assessments well promote good learning. The school has reviewed its study plan for students staying on post-16 and has revised the range of options available to ensure all students enter courses that are appropriate for their level of ability.
- Additional adults employed to support the learning of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and students eligible for the pupil premium, are not always used effectively. At times, they do not work closely enough with teachers to agree the focus of support to be given to individual students. This means the support they offer does not help these students progress as rapidly as they need to.
- Where teaching is less effective, including sometimes in numeracy, the activities provided in lessons do not stimulate or interest students enough to ensure they are fully engaged in learning.
- The marking of students' work varies in quality across the school. While there are examples of strong practice that helps students make rapid improvements to their work, as seen for example in a Year 12 English lesson on poetry, this is not consistently the case in all subjects or year groups. The academy is aware of this and is taking action to rectify it.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour is good. They conduct themselves well during social times, are polite, courteous and enjoy good relationships with each other and with teachers. Their attitudes to learning are very positive. Students come to lessons ready to learn and engage well with the work, particularly when teaching is good or better. The majority of parents and staff agree that behaviour is good throughout the school.
- Behaviour is managed very well by the academy. Its newly revised policy emphasises the importance of teachers using positive rewards for good behaviour and this has worked well. Leaders carefully track and evaluate the impact of this new approach using new software designed to measure good behaviour.
- The academy's work to ensure students are safe and secure is good. Students believe they are well looked after. They are aware of what bullying is and its different forms, and know about e-safety. Students say that bullying is rare and are confident it would be dealt with effectively should it occur. One student said that 'bullying is much better dealt with at Plume than it was in primary school'. Students' knowledge of bullying is enhanced through personal, social and health education, the popular religious education courses, displays and in assembly. In a Year 8 assembly on the dangers of internet use, the police helped explain both potential dangers and how they could be avoided.

- Students enjoy being at school. One disabled student, who felt the academy catered very well for his needs, told inspectors, 'This is a great school.' Another said 'lessons are fun'. Students feel they have good opportunities to express their opinions and take responsibility for their actions by being school 'captains' and serving on the academy council.
- Attendance has been a concern in the past but has now significantly improved. Due to well-defined and well-implemented strategies, including use of pupil premium funding, it is currently above the national average. Exclusions are much improved. There are currently no permanent exclusions and the number of fixed-term exclusions has greatly reduced.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides a strong vision based on making sure that students leave with the skills and confidence necessary to succeed. This vision is shared well by senior and middle leaders and this has resulted in improved achievement. The school is styled as 'Maldon's Community Academy' which emphasises its dedication to full involvement with the local area.
- The management of teachers' performance is robust and related directly to the national teachers' standards. Teaching is reviewed regularly and training provided. All staff targets are centrally maintained on computer. Common targets linked to students' achievement are set and reviewed at appropriate intervals. Academy leaders at all levels are fully involved in this. Middle leaders, such as subject leaders, welcome the opportunities it provides helping them oversee and improve their areas of responsibility and to gain an understanding of the quality of teaching across the academy. Leaders are aware of the small amount of teaching that continues to need improvement and are working effectively to secure this.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Its leaders have high expectations which are supported by precise monitoring of students' achievement and effective target setting for individuals. Provision for the wider range of students now attending has been extended to cater for all interests and needs and its continuing relevance and effectiveness are carefully checked by leaders. This has resulted in sustained good achievement. Students have easy access to independent advice regarding options and careers, and are increasingly well prepared for life once they leave.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for development. As a result interventions and improvement strategies are generally effective. For example, improving attendance was identified as a priority. Very effective strategies were implemented as a result and this has significantly improved. This demonstrates the academy's capacity to improve.
- The curriculum is being developed to take into account national developments, such as the requirement for all students not in employment or training to remain in school. The academy has drawn up a new study plan to ensure provision for all students in appropriate and effective. Student choices at GCSE in Key Stage 4 are now more carefully guided and the value of less successful subjects is being reviewed. A flexible curriculum offering a range of work-related qualifications is being modified to support learning and engagement.
- The academy provides a varied range of opportunities to engage in further learning. Clubs and teams permit students take part in a variety of sporting and musical activities, both inside and outside school. They are also able receive additional support in range of subjects. The use of external organisations and well-defined advice, for example displays, aid students in making informed career choices. The breakfast club is well attended and provides a pleasant and peaceful start to the school day.

- Opportunities for social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are extensive and have a strong community focus. The use of prefects helps students develop a good understanding of right and wrong. Cultural awareness is supported by links with China, Belarus, Gambia and Brent. Students are able to reflect spiritually in assemblies and the popularity of religious education courses allow them to gain knowledge of different religions. Engagement in community events such as the Maldon Mud Race enables them to raise money for local charities.
- The academy employs well-defined strategies to engage parents, including those who live some distance from the school. It makes good use of electronic communication and attractive newsletters to involve and inform parents. Its 'open door' policy is particularly welcomed. Consultation evenings reviewing students' progress, option choices and work experience are well attended.
- The academy retains its links with local authority through the use of its advisory service. Support is provided in, for example, evaluating achievement data and improving the quality of teaching.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are well aware of their responsibilities and perform their work well. They are very clear about the academy's strengths and what it needs to improve. Governors are fully involved in the academy's self-evaluation and their well-defined link roles enable them to monitor its implementation. They provide considerable financial expertise in helping to manage the academy's finances. As a result they well understand the importance of the link between classroom performance and staff pay awards. Governors review policies very effectively. They scrutinise the use of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding and are clear about their impact, especially in improving attendance and literacy. They ensure that safeguarding meets statutory requirements and risk assessments are very thorough. They readily engage in, and make full use of, appropriate training on areas such as safeguarding and the use of achievement data. They are very proud of the academy's community involvement and its positive impact.

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	137790
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	440348

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1815
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	378
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joan Binder
Headteacher	David Stephenson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01621 854681
Fax number	01621 855913
Email address	admin@plume.essex.sch.uk

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