

Cheshunt School

College Road, Cheshunt, Waltham Cross, EN8 9LY

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
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

- Achievement requires improvement because the progress students make in mathematics, although improving, is not fast enough.
- The effectiveness of the sixth form, and the study programme for students aged 16 to 19, require improvement because not enough students are yet attaining higher grades in Year 11 to 13 examinations.
- The quality of teaching is not consistent across the school because some teachers do not challenge students at the right level, especially boys and the most able.
- Agreed approaches to teaching and the promotion of learning are not applied with consistent effectiveness by all staff.
- Attitudes to learning require improvement because they are too variable. High expectations of students and learning are not fully embedded across the school. The presentation of written work is often scruffy.
- Some teachers do not mark work regularly enough or provide sufficient guidance as to how students can improve.
- Leadership requires improvement because not all heads of faculty, including for the sixth form, are effective in supporting senior leaders in checking on the school's work and ensuring consistently good teaching and learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The students themselves are confident that the school is improving. They respond well to good teaching and cooperate well in a wide range of imaginative activities.
- Rates of progress are increasing and attainment rising steadily; in 2013 the school celebrated its best ever GCSE results.
- Students feel safe in school; they confirm that bullying is extremely rare.
- Good leadership by the headteacher and other senior leaders has brought about steady and secure improvement since the last inspection. Governors and senior leaders are accelerating the improvement of teaching and students' achievement.
- Senior leaders and the governing body know what the school has to do to improve further.
- What is taught offers students a good range of academic and vocational courses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons taught by 33 different teachers; 11 of these lessons were seen jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team. In addition, teaching assistants were seen working with various groups of students.
- Inspectors visited form time, an assembly, and an ‘attendance clinic’ for students whose attendance had fallen below 93%. Inspectors undertook ‘learning walks’ around the school, and observed students’ behaviour at break and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with three groups of students selected at random by the lead inspector. In addition, opportunities were taken in lessons to discuss progress with students, and to talk informally with them outside lessons.
- Inspectors observed how groups of students with disabilities and special educational needs were supported, and listened to the reading of students in Key Stage 3.
- Students’ work was routinely scrutinised in lessons, and sampled on a ‘learning walk’ which involved 13 lessons.
- Throughout the inspection, inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including: development plans and their evaluations; governing body documents; policies; information provided for families by the school; safeguarding records; and curriculum materials. Inspectors scrutinised evidence of the ways in which the school checks on teaching and students’ progress.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, heads of faculty, class teachers, the special educational needs coordinator, and members of the governing body. A meeting was held with the school’s local authority adviser.
- Inspectors took into consideration the 33 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, and representations from individual parents. The 64 responses to the questionnaire for school staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Miller	Additional Inspector
David Davies	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- When Cheshunt School was last inspected by Ofsted, in May 2012, the school was removed from special measures and it was judged to be satisfactory.
- It is a smaller-than-average secondary school, with a technology specialism. The roll is contracting rapidly.
- The large majority of students come from White British backgrounds; a few come from mixed heritage backgrounds. A very few students come from a variety of other minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Most students speak English as their first language. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is below average, but rising.
- The proportion of the students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for particular groups, including those known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students or those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus, or who have a statement of special educational needs, is above average.
- Most students receiving additional support experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and/or speech, language and communication needs. A number of students have multiple learning difficulties. Other students experience specific learning difficulty, and a few are identified with a range of other special needs.
- From the start of the 2012-13 academic year, the school withdrew from the local consortium of sixth form schools and established an independent sixth form. However, a few sixth form students still attend courses at Goff's School and St Mary's C of E High School Cheshunt for a minority of their study time; a few students on the roll of these schools attend some lessons at Cheshunt School.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the momentum for improving teaching and students' achievement is accelerated by:
 - extending consistently across all subjects the good practice in marking, so that students identify clearly what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring teachers are more accurate in setting work which is matched specifically to students' different abilities and individual needs, especially for boys
 - challenging the most able students, including those in the sixth form, through increasingly demanding learning activities, in order to enable more students to attain higher grades
 - ensuring that all teachers refuse to accept work that is shoddily presented.
- Raise students' attainment in mathematics and improve their progress by:
 - ensuring the best practice in the teaching of mathematics is extended across the school
 - developing students' skills in numeracy, including basic calculation skills.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring all heads of faculty develop fully the skills to support senior leaders in checking

- standards and improving the quality of marking
 - strengthening arrangements for evaluating learning and progress in the sixth form.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students' attainment on entry to Year 7 varies widely from year to year. Those who sat the 2013 GCSEs began with broadly average attainment, whereas the current Year 11 started with lower standards in Year 7. In summer 2013, Year 11 students had made expected progress to gain average standards overall in GCSE examinations. The school's results at GCSE were its best ever.
- Attainment and progress have improved steadily over recent years, although achievement in mathematics has not improved as fast as that in English. In 2013, the proportion of students making expected progress rose appreciably in English, but remained unchanged in mathematics. The proportion making better than expected progress is below the national average in both subjects.
- In the large majority of lessons seen, students' progress was good overall. This supports the school's data, which show that standards are now rising more rapidly, and beginning to pick up in mathematics. The school has discontinued the practice of early entry of students for GCSE mathematics. This was reduced to one class in 2013, whose results were mixed and too few gained higher grades.
- In 2013, the progress of girls in Year 11 was good, and represented a major advance, but boys did not make such rapid progress, so that the gap in achievement between girls and boys widened. Girls' progress was strongest in vocational subjects.
- Students enter the sixth form with levels of attainment commonly below those normally expected. This reflects the school's positive approach to ensuring equality of opportunity for all its students. However, the school has recently taken steps to tighten entry requirements for A-level courses to try to raise the pass rate and improve the proportion of good grades.
- In 2013, the proportion of sixth form students attaining higher grades was below average, and progress on some courses was below that predicted, contributing to poor retention. Nevertheless, students spoke appreciatively of the guidance available, and most who have sought entry to higher or further education have been successful. Students' achievement on a small number of vocational courses is in line with expectations. Standards in lessons observed during the inspection indicate that progress is improving because of better teaching, and this is strengthening students' confidence and approaches to learning.
- The school supports students for whom it receives the pupil premium through the employment of additional staff to boost literacy and numeracy, and to improve attitudes and behaviour. The additional funding has also provided access to clubs and school trips. These students generally achieve approximately a grade lower in GCSE English and mathematics than their classmates, although the achievement gap is less than that found nationally. Their rate of progress is at least in line with other students at the school.
- The school makes good provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs. Unvalidated data supplied by the school indicate that their progress is rising. Weaker readers in Key Stage 3, and those supported by additional funding for the national Year 7 'catch-up' programme, are well supported by the school and their skills are improving. In recent years, small numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds have made good progress and achieved well.
- In 2013 the progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs in GCSE

examinations improved from the previous year, but was nevertheless below that of similar students nationally. The school attributes the shortfall to weaker attitudes to learning amongst some students identified with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Strategies to rectify this are proving effective.

- School improvement planning is now better-focused on improving the progress of the school's more able students. This is part of its approach to raising the proportion of students gaining higher grades in GCSE and A-Level examinations. Currently, such students perform broadly in line with their peers both in the main school and sixth form.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it does not enable all students to make sufficiently rapid progress, particularly in mathematics and for some boys. There is an infectious enthusiasm amongst the staff for improving teaching, and a significant proportion of teachers are involved in training their colleagues or giving or receiving coaching. Nevertheless, to date there remain detrimental inconsistencies in the quality of lessons.
- The school has developed and shared expectations with all its staff as to how lessons and learning should be structured. However, in some lessons these 'stages' are not followed or applied consistently or effectively enough. Consequently, some students become confused and their progress slows.
- Similarly, the school encourages a dialogue between teacher and student through marking and the student's response. In some instances, this is well used to deepen understanding. In a Year 10 science lesson, for example, students developed and extended successfully their test answers in response to the teacher's clear marking. However, in other cases the marking is not sufficiently precise to stimulate further thought, so that students are reluctant to comply and correct or develop their original work.
- The school encourages students to collaborate, offering mutual help, assessing each other's work and providing challenge. In an outstanding Year 10 drama lesson, students worked very effectively in pairs interpreting examination criteria, and later gave most helpful feedback on other students' performances that provided both support and challenge. In Year 7 and Year 9 physical education lessons, students made highly effective coaches, enabling their classmates to make outstanding progress. However, in other lessons, students were reluctant to work together even when asked to do so.
- In most lessons, good working relationships between teacher and students, a variety of learning activities, often involving practical work, and a brisk pace promoted enthusiastic attitudes to learning. However, in too many classes, including some where there are otherwise high expectations, poor standards of presentation in exercise books are not challenged. This results in more boys than girls showing casual attitudes to their written work.
- Many teachers, including in the sixth form, promote literacy effectively, both through the correction of errors and through the requirement to use specialist terminology correctly. Students are encouraged to explain themselves orally, and are frequently challenged to provide more detail or greater exactitude. However, the numeracy skills of the majority of students are correspondingly weak, and there is an over-reliance on calculators to perform basic arithmetic.
- In most lessons, work is well matched to the abilities of students, with learners usually involved in rating their own preparedness to move on to the next stage. However, in a minority of lessons there is little consideration of students' differing abilities. In some lessons that require

improvement, a number of students who find learning more difficult struggle to cope because their individual needs and abilities are not considered sufficiently. In some lessons in the sixth form, work is not challenging enough to push students towards the higher grades.

- The school is deploying teaching assistants increasingly to work with small groups rather than provide in-class support. However, where inspectors saw teaching assistants working in classrooms, the assistants knew the students and their learning needs well, and provided effective, discreet support without the need for the teacher's continual direction.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement because, where the work is not well matched to individuals' abilities, or where the expectation that students will complete the work set is not fully established, students' attitudes impede their progress. Some students become apathetic or their concentration wavers, and some talk over classroom discussion.
- Attitudes to learning in the sixth form are improving. Students now feel better supported in their studies, and in particular value teachers' more detailed and helpful guidance on how to improve their work.
- In the large majority of lessons, students approach their learning with commitment and enthusiasm. Where teaching is good, they often display an impressive maturity, managing their own learning and that of their classmates.
- Behaviour in the canteen and the grounds at break and lunch times was orderly, with no instances of aggression or unpleasantness. However, too many students dropped some food packaging as litter on each occasion, which was ignored by others. Students are polite and helpful to visitors, and treat the staff with respect.
- When interviewed, students expressed strong support for the school, but their attitudes to learning require improvement because approaches to work remain inconsistent. Exercise books are often scruffy; some include minor graffiti, and, in many, diagrams and graphs are drawn without a pencil or a ruler. There is too little evidence of challenge to unsatisfactory presentation by some teachers, and it is usually worse in boys' than girls' work.
- The school points to a legacy of some unsatisfactory behaviour, particularly amongst older boys, to which it attributes much of the boys' underachievement in past examinations. Consequently, in September 2013, it introduced new behaviour procedures including a 'Defiance Protocol' which rapidly escalates sanctions for those few who defy staff. This has led to a significant reduction in fixed term exclusions since the previous inspection, including that of disabled students and those with special educational needs, and particularly those with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. There has not been the need for any permanent exclusions over the last three years.
- The school has tackled attendance with determination and imagination, and it has risen steadily. During the last academic year it was average, but it is now rising to above average.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Consequently, students' understanding of and approach to keeping each other safe is effective. They have a good understanding of the different kinds of bullying, and report that instances of bullying are very rare. The school's detailed records confirm this. Parents have overwhelming confidence that their children are looked after well.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because senior leaders have not yet achieved enough consistency in the quality of teaching and students' attitudes to learning. There is too much variation in the effectiveness of heads of faculty in checking on the quality of teaching, including sixth form leadership. Standards in mathematics are just beginning to rise, but the school does not ensure that all mathematics teachers benefit from their colleagues' expertise and have sufficiently high expectations.
- Self-evaluation undertaken by senior leaders is detailed and objective, and tied to appropriate actions for further improvement. The school's records show regular and thorough checks on the quality of teaching, and inspectors concurred with the observation judgments made by senior members of staff during the inspection.
- The headteacher's determined leadership in securing steady improvements in the quality of teaching and in students' achievement has been rewarded with the resounding confidence of the school community. An extensive programme of training is enhancing the skills of senior leaders and heads of faculty in keeping track of monitoring standards and intervening to improve learning. However, a minority of leaders lack some of the knowledge and experience required to be fully effective.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of teaching is now sufficiently rigorous and firmly tied to raising attainment. Targets clearly identify what individuals can contribute to improving students' performance and they are held to account for how they perform. The school is increasingly using performance to inform decisions about salary progression.
- Senior leaders' determination to improve students' attitudes has yielded a steady increase in attendance, and a reduction in exclusions. However, there remains too much variation in attitudes to learning, reflected particularly in the careless presentation of written work.
- The leadership of the sixth form requires improvement, because until recently the checking on teaching and the performance of individual students have not received sufficient attention. As a result, students following a minority of courses have achieved grades below those expected.
- The school has planned students' work programmes imaginatively, with a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Students respond well to making some choices as early as Year 9, and achievement in many optional subjects is good. Appropriate guidance on careers and future pathways is provided for students by an independent local company.
- In many lessons, students learn to appreciate the culture of others, and the moral and social issues underpinning decisions. In a Year 11 lesson on the Suffragettes, for example, students were encouraged to think about how governments should respond to civil disobedience; a Year 12 media studies lesson gave detailed consideration to the ethics of copyright and piracy.
- The local authority has a realistic view of the school and its progress, and supports it effectively. It intends to focus its resources still further onto areas requiring improvement.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body is effective and eager to be more so. It has successfully recruited new members with relevant professional skills, and it is meeting the challenges the school faces with energy and sound judgment. Governors' training is extensive and varied. Senior leaders ensure that the governing body is well informed about the quality of teaching, how students are achieving, including comparisons with national data, and the effectiveness of actions taken to improve.
- Effective arrangements are in place to manage the performance of the headteacher, and governors have supported him in taking robust action to address underperformance. The governors are aware of the expectation that teachers' pay progression is tied to performance, but they are in the early stages of implementing this. A governor has been appointed with responsibility for students in receipt of the pupil premium, and the governing body knows how the additional money is spent. The governing body ensures the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory 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	117596
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	427175

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	607
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Morton
Headteacher	Andy Stainton
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2012
Telephone number	01992 624375
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