

The Commonweal School

The Mall, Old Town, Swindon, SN1 4JE

Inspection dates 26–27 February 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 and reach above average attainment in many subjects. Following a dip in 2013, achievement has improved and students currently in Year 11 are securely on track to reach well above average attainment in GCSE examinations. Progress has speeded up considerably in English.
- Teaching is good across the school. Teachers' positive and supporting relationships with students and carefully planned lessons help students to achieve well.
- Students in the specially resourced provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well taught, cared for exceptionally well and make good progress in relation to their diverse needs.
- The school is taking successful action to reduce the gaps in performance between those who may be more disadvantaged than other students.
- The opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the school are strong. Music and the performing arts are particularly well developed.
- Students behave well and feel safe. They have a good understanding of the school's high expectations of behaviour and say that only a small minority fail to meet them at times.
- The headteacher, leaders and governors are highly ambitious for the school. They are bold, innovative and successful in bringing about improvements to teaching and achievement.
- Leaders have succeeded in creating a school where students achieve well academically and develop into sensitive, mature and responsible young people.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. Teachers sometimes give work that is too easy or too hard; they do not use questions effectively enough to encourage students to think deeply and marking does not always help students to improve their work.
- Students are not always encouraged to develop their writing and comprehension skills across all subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 37 lessons across all year groups in the school, including 10 that were observed jointly with senior staff.
- The inspectors listened to students read and visited classrooms with senior staff to look at how well disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are learning. They also visited lessons with senior staff to look at students' progress in mathematics, English, science and a range of other subjects.
- Discussions were held with senior and subject leaders, other members of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors and various groups of students.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at its checks on the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Planning documents, safeguarding procedures, external evaluations of the school's work and examples of students' work from a wide range of classes were also examined.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for inspectors to be able to note, but parents', students' and staff responses to the school's own recent surveys and written comments made by parents were considered.

Inspection team

Michael Merchant, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Joseph Skivington	Additional Inspector
Lesley Voaden	Additional Inspector
Patricia Goodhead	Additional Inspector
Cliff Mainey	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Commonweal School converted to become an academy school in September 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was previously inspected by Ofsted in June 2011, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The very large majority of students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students that are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding from the government for groups of students including looked-after children, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those with a parent in the armed services) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average, as is the proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school has specially resourced provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, which is managed by the governing body. There are currently 66 students in the unit, whose needs include: moderate and severe learning difficulty; physical disability; speech, language and communication needs; and autistic spectrum disorder.
- A small number of students spend time studying work-related courses at Swindon College.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality teaching so that even more is outstanding in order that students make even more rapid progress across all subjects by:
 - improving the consistency of marking so students have a clear understanding of how to develop their work and are able to demonstrate to their teachers that they have understood and acted on the advice given
 - making sure that all teachers fully stretch students of the highest ability and support those of lowest ability, so that work is at the right level of difficulty in order for them to achieve well
 - ensuring that all teachers effectively use questions in lessons which encourage students to think carefully about their work and to articulate full answers
 - developing students' writing and comprehension skills more fully across all subjects so that they can more confidently write at length about the topics they are studying.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with attainment that is broadly average. Attainment at GCSE is above average, and rising. The school confidently and realistically predicts that nearly three quarters of students in Year 11 will attain five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics in 2014.
- In lessons observed during the inspection, students' achievement across all subjects, including English, was nearly always good, and in some cases, outstanding.
- The progress of students who left Year 11 in 2013 was not consistently strong for all subjects, including English, where some students did not make as much progress as they should have.
- The reasons for this dip have been identified and quickly addressed so that both attainment and progress have improved sharply. Detailed information presented by the school provided firm evidence to show that all groups of students in English are now making good progress across all year groups.
- School data show that in English, a very large majority of students in Year 11 are on track to gain grades A*-C in GCSE English in 2014 and the proportion of students making and exceeding at least good progress in English is higher than the national figure.
- The school ensures that the highest attaining students achieve their potential in English and mathematics. The students in the large top sets are all expected to achieve an A or A* grade and are taught by teachers with expert subject knowledge, who provide a very high level of challenge. Students eligible for additional pupil premium funding in these groups are well known and supported by their teachers, enabling them to achieve as well as their classmates.
- Significant numbers of students complete GCSE English and mathematics early. They follow a well-planned programme that is closely matched to their needs, make good progress and achieve as well as if they had taken the examinations later.
- A small number of students study work-related or vocational courses at a local college of further education. The school keeps close checks on the progress of such students. Most are achieving well and are gaining the skills necessary to gain suitable employment or further training.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Teachers and other adults prepare work for these students which is at just the right level, and the extra help they give to students makes a big difference.
- Students in the special educational needs unit make good and often outstanding progress and achieve well because teachers have a very good understanding of the individual needs of all. They have created stimulating spaces for students to feel safe, develop confidence and so learn well.
- Very well considered and effective reading support for those students who need it starts in Year 7. Effective use is made of funding received through the Year 7 catch-up programme (extra money from the government to support those students who attained below expected levels in English and mathematics in Year 6). Through additional support, such students make good gains in acquiring number, reading and writing skills.
- The school is successful at improving students' literacy skills but some teachers do not always plan assiduously for students to use their writing, reading and speaking skills in all lessons. Consequently, some students still lack confidence in being able to read widely or write at length about the subjects they study.
- Until recently, there was some difference in the rate of progress made by students supported by the pupil premium and others in Year 11. In 2013, such students known to be entitled to free school meals attained, on average, over a grade lower in English and mathematics than did other students.
- School information shows that it now uses its pupil premium funding very effectively to support eligible students. It has provided financial support to enable them to participate in out-of-school activities and courses as well as providing individual help and guidance. This support has

effectively reduced the attainment gap between these students and others across all years, so that it is much smaller than that seen nationally.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching helps students to achieve well in most subjects. Leaders' rigorous checking on the quality of teaching shows that this is typically the case.
- Senior leaders and leaders in charge of subjects make accurate judgments of the quality of teaching based on evaluations of students' progress over time, from scrutiny of their work and from observations of teaching. This enables support for those teachers that need it to be accurately identified and put in place swiftly.
- Teachers usually get the best out of their students, giving them a good variety of tasks that stretch and challenge them and capture their interest. As a result, students work with enthusiasm, enjoyment and a desire to make fast progress.
- A small minority of teachers do not plan tasks that provide a sufficient variety of challenge or support to match the wide range of abilities in their classes. This results in these students occasionally finding the work too easy or too difficult.
- In all subjects across the school, most teachers use questioning skillfully to challenge students to think deeply about their learning. They are relentless in their questioning of students to probe and develop their understanding, encouraging them to explain their reasoning and asking other students to comment or develop the answers further. This is not always the case, however, and in some lessons students are allowed to get away with superficial answers that are poorly explained.
- Teachers in all subjects promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, by providing opportunities for reflection on moral issues and for developing teamwork. Students are frequently encouraged to discuss their learning and to assess each other's work.
- Leaders are establishing very effective assessment practice across the school. Teachers make clear to students what is needed to be done to achieve a high grade and students use examination assessment criteria well to assess their own and each other's work.
- Teachers' marking and feedback to students, although very effective in some classes, lacks consistency across the school. Not all teachers provide clear enough advice for students about how to further improve their work. Teachers do not always make sure that students follow up this advice by applying it and showing their teachers that they have understood.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Around the school there is an atmosphere of calm. Students are polite and courteous, show respect for their teachers and for each other and present themselves smartly, showing pride in their uniform.
- Students are punctual to lessons and arrive in class ready to learn. They are always eager to start a new task or to answer questions.
- Systems to manage inappropriate behaviour are well understood by students and consistently applied by staff. Exclusions are rare.
- Students who are at risk of not doing well, disabled students and those who have special educational needs are very well supported so that they feel secure, and socialise and study confidently with other students.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel completely safe in school and if they have a problem, they know they can talk to a member of staff who will sort it out.
- Students have a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including a detailed understanding of what to do if they experience cyber-bullying or homophobic name-calling. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and that adults support them well.

- Students understand about how to deal with risks they might face and understand issues relating to substance abuse and the dangers associated with using the internet.
- Attendance is broadly average and is rising for all groups of students. The school chases up the absence of any students with a history of poor attendance relentlessly.
- Behaviour is not yet outstanding because in some lessons, students are less than enthusiastic in their learning and a few students, to the intense annoyance of the others, can engage in some silly, inappropriate behaviour. This is often because lesson activities are not demanding enough.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides a strong and uncompromising lead to the school. He is highly visible around the school and leads the way in driving ambition and establishing a shared sense of purpose. He is very well supported by his talented deputy headteacher and highly effective senior leadership team, who share a passion to achieve the very best for all students. This drive for improvement is evident in all aspects of school life.
- The quality of teaching is rigorously monitored by leaders. Timely support and training is provided and firm action taken if teachers have not met high standards. Teachers are closely held to account for the progress made by their students, and salary increases are only awarded if targets are met. The quality of teaching has strongly improved across the school.
- Subject leaders value the support provided by their line managers to enable them to build their leadership capacity. These middle leaders share in the monitoring of teaching and have clear action plans in place to drive improvement.
- Students are given challenging academic targets that have raised their ambitions. Leaders at all levels make good use of information on students' progress to check any slowing down. Checks are followed up swiftly with well-thought-out support that helps students to catch up.
- There is no evidence of any discrimination and the school makes sure that students from all backgrounds have the same chance to succeed through this sophisticated monitoring and strong support.
- The school provides students with an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities and after-school clubs: artistic, musical, theatrical, sporting, social, cultural, science and technology activities and careers fairs, for example, make highly effective use of the theatre and other facilities on the school site, as well as in the community. All activities are very well attended and highly valued by students. Many of these also show the very strong relationships the school has with many businesses and organisations within the local community.
- The range of subjects and courses meets the needs and aspirations of most students and parents well. Almost all students follow GCSE courses only. A very small number of students follow vocational courses off the school site that meet their needs well.
- Leadership is not yet outstanding because leaders have not yet ensured that there is enough outstanding teaching to enable students to make rapid progress across all year groups and subjects.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have played a strong role in helping the school drive forward improvements to students' achievement. They are very well informed about how well the school is doing and have a complete understanding of different types of school information and, as a result, are in a strong position to contribute to school development and improvement planning. They know where the best teaching is in the school and have given total support to the initiatives of school leaders to improve classroom performance. Governors have contributed fully to the discussions on how the pupil premium funding should be spent and have kept a careful check on the impact on the students' progress of the extra support and guidance provided for those eligible. Governors are also very well informed about the systems for managing staff performance and the way that pay rises are decided. They are well trained and meet all their responsibilities very well, including those for ensuring that requirements for safeguarding students are met.

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	137190
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	441125

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	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1125
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jokie Bakker
Headteacher	Keith Defter
Date of previous school inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01793 612727
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