

# Monk's Walk School

Knightsfield, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7NL

**Inspection dates** 3–4 June 2014

|                                |                      |                          |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected |          |
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Good</b>              | <b>2</b> |
| 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.

- Achievement is high and students make good progress, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs. Rates of progress are accelerating, especially for pupil premium students.
- The great majority of teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, high expectations and plan lessons well.
- Behaviour is good, both in lessons and when students are moving around the school.
- Safety is good. The school takes good care of students and they know how to stay safe, including when online.
- The headteacher has a relentless focus on excellence. This has brought about rapid improvements in teaching and rates of progress for students.
- Governors are knowledgeable and effectively challenge the school. This has contributed to its increasing success.
- The social, moral, spiritual and cultural provision is good. Students participate in many activities which contribute to their personal development.
- The sixth form is good. Students achieve well at A level and many go on to university.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teachers do not make consistent use of information about what students know and can do to provide work at the right level.
- Some teachers do not consistently provide or follow up written advice which helps students to improve their work.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons, of which five were jointly observed with school leaders, and observed students' behaviour around the school.
- Inspectors looked at students' work and case studies. They noted the frequency and quality of marking.
- Meetings were held with four groups of pupils, nine governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, senior and middle managers.
- Inspectors took account of the 114 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), two letters from parents and 61 staff questionnaire responses.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, the school's own data on students' current progress, monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

|                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| John Mallone, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| David Gutmann                | Additional Inspector |
| Judith Long                  | Additional Inspector |
| Thomas Campbell              | Additional Inspector |
| Russell Ayling               | Additional Inspector |

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Monk's Walk School is a larger than average-sized secondary school.
- Monk's Walk School converted to become an academy on 1 September 2012. When its predecessor school, also called Monk's Walk School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- Most students are White British. The number of students from a minority ethnic background is small and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs and are supported through school action is below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority and for those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- There are a very few students in Years 10 and 11 who attend Hertfordshire Regional College, Ware for part of their education.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
  - making more consistent use of information about students' abilities to provide work that is neither too hard nor too easy
  - being more consistent in providing written advice to help students improve their work and checking that they follow that advice.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- There is a higher proportion of more-able students than found nationally. They achieve well in their GCSEs, with 70% gaining five GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics in 2013. This is well above the national average.
- Students make good progress in almost all subject areas. Progress in mathematics was less good, but has now improved and is expected to be in line with other subjects for students taking their GCSEs in 2014. Progress for students in younger year groups is improving more rapidly, especially for those students in receipt of the pupil premium.
- Sixth form students do well in their A levels and make progress in line with other schools nationally at both A and AS level. For current sixth form students, progress is more rapid because of changes in the way some subjects are taught and improved guidance around subject choices.
- The most-able students achieve well at GCSE with high proportions gaining A\* or A grades in a number of subjects. The policy of entering students early for their mathematics examination meant that fewer students achieved the top grades than would be expected. Students are no longer entered early for this examination.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with similar students nationally. Those students in the current Year 11 are making similar progress to their classmates in English and mathematics. School action plus students make better progress still because of the well-focused support they receive from teaching assistants.
- There is a gap between the achievement of those students who receive the pupil premium and others. In 2013, on average they were a grade and a quarter behind their classmates in English and nearly two grades behind in mathematics. The progress of these students currently in the school is accelerating, so that by next year it is expected that the gap will be about half a grade in both subjects.
- The small numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those learning English as an additional language achieve at least as well as their classmates.
- The very few students who receive part of their education at Hertfordshire Regional College, Ware are closely monitored by the school and achieve well.
- The Year 7 'catch-up' funding for those who enter the school with achievement in English and mathematics below expectations is well used. Most students make good progress, reducing the gap between them and their classmates by the end of the year.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Inspection evidence and monitoring records maintained by the school indicate that almost all teaching is outstanding or good. Teachers have high expectations and students are clear that they are in school to learn.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan lessons well so that students are engaged and make good progress. They make good use of targeted questioning. For example, in one

Year 7 physical education lesson, individual students were asked questions directed at their particular strengths and weaknesses in rounders skills. As a result, they were better able to understand what they needed to improve and made rapid progress.

- Most teachers use the information they have about students' abilities to set work that challenges them. For example, in one high ability Year 10 English lesson, students were expected to use precise language to make fine distinctions in meaning when discussing and writing about Lady Macbeth's character. This led to a deeper understanding of the importance of language choices and a higher quality of writing. A few teachers do not always plan for the differing levels of ability in their classes and this slows the rate of students' progress.
- Teachers have strong relationships with students and are enthusiastic about their subjects. This stimulates students' interest, makes lessons enjoyable and leads to rapid progress.
- Teachers regularly set 'prep' so that students arrive at lessons knowing what to expect and are better able to extend and consolidate learning. Marking is regular and tells students how to improve their work. In the best examples, students respond to teachers' suggestions and make improvements which are further commented on by teachers. This ensures that students make rapid progress. Some teachers do not regularly give advice on how to improve or make sure that students follow their advice.
- The deployment of teaching assistants is good. They use their detailed knowledge of the groups they work with to ask questions which help students deepen their knowledge and understanding. As a result, students who receive this support make rapid progress.
- Teachers carefully track the progress of pupil premium students and those who are disabled or have special educational needs. As a result, these groups of students are making good progress.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and improving as the result of development work with an educational charity.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Attitudes to learning are good: students arrive at lessons with the right equipment and are ready and eager to learn. They show respect towards teachers and towards one another when working together. This leads to rapid progress in most lessons. Occasionally, when teaching is less engaging, there is a small amount of low level disruption. Teachers deal with this effectively, re-shaping their lessons so that students remain on task.
- Outside lessons, students are polite and respectful to one another and to adults. They move calmly around the building and arrive at lessons on time.
- Students show respect for the building and the wider environment: there is no graffiti, wall displays are well looked after and there is very little litter. There is a strong learning ethos around the school. Staff and students are united in a desire to learn and make progress.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students feel safe at school and know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are

using social media and mobile phones.

- Bullying is rare and is dealt with quickly and effectively. Racist and homophobic name-calling is uncommon. Students understand what bullying is and who to turn to if it occurs.
- Those who are less well behaved are managed well. The number of exclusions is very low compared to national figures. There have been no permanent exclusions.
- Attendance was in line with similar schools nationally in 2013 but has improved this year, especially for pupil premium students.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The headteacher is a strong and determined leader who communicates high expectations to staff and students alike. She has been single-minded in her determination to improve the school further. She has a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas it needs to develop and, with the leadership team, has drawn up robust and effective plans to bring about progress. As a result, the school has improved rapidly from a strong base.
- Senior and subject leaders are also strongly focused on bringing about faster rates of progress for students. The system for tracking and monitoring how well students are doing is rigorous. As a result, teachers are able to put in place effective support for those who are falling behind and further accelerate the progress of those who are doing well.
- Subject leaders effectively communicate whole school priorities and ensure school policies are implemented. They know about the quality of teaching in their areas and closely monitor the progress of all students to ensure that they progress. They implement effective support programmes for any who are falling behind.
- There is an effective programme for aspiring subject leaders and senior leaders. This increases the efficiency with which teachers carry out their duties and helps them to take on extra responsibility.
- The overwhelming majority of parents are very happy with the way their children are taught and cared for by the school. Students enjoy coming to school and appreciate the work that teachers do for them. They take full advantage of the many extra-curricular activities that the school provides.
- The performance management of teachers is robust and effective. Teachers who need support have carefully designed programmes provided. This leads to improvements in classroom practice. Those who do not meet the school's challenging standards have pay rises withheld.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced, with appropriate time devoted to core academic subjects and opportunities to study creative and practical subjects. The sixth form focuses on academic subjects. Students who wish to pursue more vocational courses are directed to appropriate local providers. As a result of the excellent guidance they receive, all leavers are either in employment, education or training.
- The school's work to raise standards of literacy is outstanding. Initiatives to address literacy in all subjects have contributed to the high achievement in English. The promotion of reading is very strong, with very large numbers of students reading regularly and vacancies for student assistant librarian posts greatly over-subscribed. The librarian runs a great many activities,

including the shadowing of book prizes, which have helped increase reading for pleasure. Younger weak readers are paired with older students. As a result, they make faster progress and become more confident to tackle reading in their school subjects.

- Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is addressed both in lessons and beyond. Students have strong moral awareness and a keen appreciation of human rights. For example, in a Year 10 religious education lesson, students were asked to consider the Church of England's attitude to homosexuality and how that had changed over time. Students discussed the issue with a clear sense of balance, being able to consider and respect points of view which disagreed with their own.
- Many students participate in the large number of sporting and cultural activities which take place outside lesson time. The school works hard to ensure that these are open to all, for example, by purchasing musical instruments for pupil premium students.
- The school promotes equal opportunities and there is no evidence of any discrimination.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet current regulatory requirements.
- The school has worked with a local special school to help improve teaching and leadership. The school also supports the teaching of mathematics in Year 11 of a local school. These initiatives have resulted in improvements in those schools as well as developing the expertise of staff at Monk's Walk.
- The school is effective at working with parents and has introduced new approaches to help them support their children's school work.
- School leaders show a strong capacity to improve. Recent training has led to improvements in teaching and increased rates of progress, especially for pupil premium students. Behaviour management work has led to a reduction in incidents of low level disruption and exclusions, and an improvement in attendance, especially for pupil premium students.
- The school improvement partner (SIP) has provided useful support with mathematics, marking and the sixth form.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are very effective. They know about the quality of teaching and where it needs to improve. They oversee the performance management process including that of the headteacher. They effectively manage and monitor the budget and are keenly aware of the ways in which the pupil premium money is spent and the impact that this has. Through their good understanding of data and first-hand knowledge of the school's work, they consistently challenge the school over rates of progress for all students and share the headteacher's pursuit of excellence.

## 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

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 138632        |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Hertfordshire |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 442662        |

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.

|   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                         | Secondary                    |
| <b>School category</b>                        | Academy converter            |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                    | 11–18                        |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                       | Mixed                        |
| <b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>     | Mixed                        |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>    | 1248                         |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b> | 192                          |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                  | The governing body           |
| <b>Chair</b>                                  | Liz Eksteen                  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                            | Kate Smith                   |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>     | Not previously inspected     |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                       | 01707 322846                 |
| <b>Fax number</b>                             | 01707 375080                 |
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