

Rainham Mark Grammar School

Pump Lane, Gillingham, Kent, ME8 7AJ

Inspection dates 4–5 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Since the school became an academy in 2011, students' achievement and the quality of teaching have improved rapidly. As a result, both are now outstanding.
- Students make excellent progress from their starting points because teachers have very high expectations of them. Teachers use their exceptionally good subject knowledge to stimulate students' interest and to inspire them to learn.
- Students have extremely positive attitudes to learning, and their behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. They have highly cordial relationships with one another and with adults in the school. Students' communication and social skills are extremely good. They develop into mature and sensible young people who are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Students feel completely safe in school. They have no concerns about bullying because they say it is extremely rare and is dealt with very effectively by staff.
- The school's rich and diverse curriculum enhances the school's highly successful promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students thoroughly enjoy their sixth form experience. Their attainment is high because of the exceptionally good teaching and support they receive. Sixth form students provide extremely good role models for younger students and respond very positively to the many opportunities they have to take on responsibility within and outside of the school.
- The headteacher and leaders at all levels are strongly committed to continually improving the quality of teaching and to ensuring that all groups of students achieve as well as they can. They manage the staff's performance very effectively and give teachers excellent opportunities to develop their practice. Leaders' improvement of the school's systems for monitoring students' progress has contributed strongly to raising standards.
- Governors have a detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of the school's performance. Their willingness both to challenge and to support school leaders has played a significant part in its rapid and continuing development.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching in 32 lessons, visiting several of them together with the headteacher or other senior leaders. They also made shorter visits to a number of other lessons and other activities, including an assembly. Inspectors looked at students' written work, as well as records of the school's own lesson observations.
- The inspectors held discussions with groups of students and individual students, the chair, vice chair and five other members of the governing body, and members of staff. They also spoke to two parents by telephone.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents. These included the school's information on students' attainment and progress, as well as data on attendance and exclusions. Inspectors also examined safeguarding procedures and looked at the school's checks on how well it is doing, documents relating to the management of staff performance, and planning documents.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, the inspectors took account of 112 responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View), as well as the school's own most recent survey of parents' views. Inspectors also considered 76 questionnaires completed by members of the teaching and support staff.

Inspection team

Robin Gaff, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Roger Fenwick

Additional Inspector

Janet Hallett

Additional Inspector

Jane Ladner

Additional Inspector

Annette Rhodes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are of White British heritage. A below-average proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of students who are learning English as an additional language is below average.
- About one in 10 students is eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional funding provided for children who are looked after and those known to be eligible for free school meals. This proportion is well below the national average.
- Just under one in 50 students is supported through school action. This is well below the national average. The proportion of students, about one in 20, who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school works together with The Howard School to provide a number of sixth form courses. Currently no sixth form students from this school attend courses at other institutions.
- The headteacher is a local leader of education and provides support to two local primary schools and one special school.
- Rainham Mark Grammar School converted to become an academy school on 1 July 2011. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all staff use the school's systems for monitoring students' progress as effectively as possible by analysing students' performance in greater depth, to help raise attainment still further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students join the school with above-average levels of attainment. They make extremely good progress throughout the school and in many different subjects, and the standards students reached at GCSE in both 2012 and 2013 were well above national averages. The proportions of students who met or exceeded nationally expected levels of progress in English and mathematics were high in comparison to those found in other schools.
- The school's own reliable data, and the GCSE grades which many current Year 11 students have already gained, indicate that standards are continuing to rise. They also indicate that these students have made even more rapid progress than their predecessors.
- About half of all Year 11 students take GCSE mathematics early. This does not prevent them from achieving their potential, and the proportion of students who gain the highest grades is well above the national average.
- Students who join the school with the highest levels of attainment achieve exceptionally well. Both their attainment and their progress are well above average. This is because teachers have extremely high expectations of them and give them work which is suitably challenging.
- In 2013, the attainment at GCSE in both English and mathematics of those students who were eligible for additional funding was similar to that of other students in the school. The grades they gained, however, were higher in both subjects than those achieved by the equivalent group in 2012. Students in 2013 also made much faster progress than the comparable group in the previous year. In both 2012 and 2013, the achievement of students who qualified for the extra funding was well above that of similar students in other schools nationally. This shows the school's success in narrowing considerably gaps between their attainment and that of other students. It also confirms that it is making very good use of the additional funding it receives.
- The attainment of disabled students and those with special educational needs is well above that of similar students in other schools. They make similar progress to that of other students in their own school because teachers understand their needs and adapt activities to match them. They also receive high quality individual support from teaching assistants.
- Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those for whom English is an additional language, also achieve extremely well in comparison with those in other schools nationally.
- The high achievement of different groups of students, and of boys as well as girls, indicates the school's successful commitment to promoting equality of opportunity.
- Students in the sixth form reach above-average standards at both A and AS levels. The proportion of students who have gained the highest level grades has been well above the national average. Students who have previously been eligible for additional funding achieve extremely well, as do disabled students and those with special educational needs. Leaders have taken very effective action to ensure that students' achievement in subjects where their performance had been relatively weaker, including mathematics, has improved substantially. The qualifications, as well as the high level academic and social skills which students acquire, enable a very large proportion to gain places in higher education.
- The school successfully fosters a love of reading in students, who make extensive use of the well-stocked school library. Their reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills are very well developed because teachers give students many opportunities to practise them in a wide range of subjects, including science and technology.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding because teachers have very high expectations of what all groups of students, including the most able, can achieve. This, together with their detailed knowledge of students' abilities, ensures that they plan activities which build securely on students' prior learning, helping them to make rapid progress.

- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge, coupled with their ability to stimulate and maintain students' interest, enables students to gain a deep and accurate understanding of topics and concepts. Teachers succeed in creating an extremely positive climate for learning.
- For example, in a lesson on Shakespeare's *Othello*, Year 10 students developed an excellent appreciation of the inner turmoil revealed by the principal character's monologues. This was followed by a lively and well-informed debate, in which many students volunteered and discussed thoughtful and extremely perceptive comments.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and very thoroughly. They give students detailed comments which enable them to know what they have done well, and to understand what they need to do to make their work even better. Students' responses to teachers' feedback, for example in correcting or extending their work, show how much they have learned from it.
- Teachers have a strong understanding of what students need to do to succeed in GCSE, AS and A level examinations; for example in a biology lesson, where the teacher ensured that Year 9 students gained an excellent understanding of the importance of using the correct scientific terms, such as toxins and pathogens, when answering examination questions.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, speak very positively about the quality of teaching. and are highly appreciative of teachers' willingness to give them individual help and support. Most of the parents who responded to the Parent View expressed positive views about the quality of teaching and the contribution made by homework to their children's learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Students are extremely keen to learn, and the highly positive attitudes they display in the classroom make a significant contribution to their progress. Classroom relationships are based on mutual respect. Students listen very attentively to teachers' explanations and to each other's contributions in lessons.
- Students take real pride in their work and are prepared to take the initiative, for example in asking teachers to provide additional explanation and clarification if they need these.
- Around the school, students are very considerate and courteous to one another and to adults. They are extremely welcoming and helpful to visitors, and willingly take opportunities to talk articulately, maturely, and positively, about their school experience.
- Students have many opportunities to take on positions of responsibility, for example in leading sporting and language-learning activities for pupils in local primary schools. In their role as mentors in English and mathematics, sixth form students make an important contribution to younger students' learning and development. They also provide excellent role models, in their attitudes and behaviour, for younger students to follow.
- Students from different backgrounds and traditions relate extremely well to one another. There is no sign of any discrimination, and no evidence of any extremist behaviour.
- Students' attendance has been consistently well above average and continues to rise. Students' punctuality in arriving at school and for lessons is excellent.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students report that they feel completely safe in school and comment most favourably on the way that all members of the school community look after one another.
- Students have no concerns about bullying. They know a lot about the different forms it can take, such as homophobic and cyber bullying, and also about how it can be prevented. They report that staff deal with the rare incidences of bullying promptly and highly effectively.
- Students, as well as the overwhelming majority of staff and parents, express extremely positive views about students' behaviour, and the way the school ensures that they are safe.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher, supported very ably by his senior colleagues, has been relentless in his drive to ensure that high quality teaching throughout the school results in outstanding achievement for students. Senior leaders have set increasingly ambitious targets for improvement and ensure that all staff fully understand and make every effort to achieve them.
- Middle leaders are highly knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their areas of responsibility. They make a very positive contribution to ensuring that, for example, newly appointed staff receive the support and guidance they need to be quickly effective in their roles.
- Leaders have put in place rigorous systems for managing the staff's performance, and have established clear links between teachers' pay and students' achievement. They have also introduced an innovative, wide-ranging programme which enables staff to undertake training which is specifically linked to their own needs and to the school's priorities. Leaders also give staff many opportunities to share examples of excellent practice.
- The school has improved the frequency and the accuracy with which it assesses students' progress. This enables staff to identify quickly any students who are at risk of underachieving, and to provide them with the support they need to overcome any barriers they may face. Leaders have recently introduced a new system for recording and sharing information about students' progress. They have not yet, however, succeeded in ensuring that all staff make as good use of this system as they could, by analysing students' performance even more closely.
- The school's curriculum makes an excellent contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students benefit from a very extensive range of courses, which enables them to achieve extremely well and prepares them very successfully for the next stage of their education and for future careers. They also enjoy taking part in an extremely wide variety of after-school and special events. This gives them many opportunities to develop their interests and skills in, for example, music, drama and sport. They also benefit from expert and impartial careers advice. Visits abroad, for example to Spain and Germany, enables them to practise their linguistic skills and to develop a strong appreciation of the cultures of the countries whose languages they study.
- Leaders have made extremely good use of additional funding to ensure that no students are prevented from taking part in any such activity. They have also gone out of their way to consult students and their parents about how the extra money may be used.
- Since becoming an academy, the school no longer has formal links with the local authority. It maintains cordial relations with it, and the headteacher, as a local leader of education, provides beneficial support for several local schools. Through its cooperation with another secondary school, the school has increased the range of courses available to students. School leaders have continued to receive valuable advice from its designated school improvement partner, for example in helping to ensure that their evaluation of the school's performance is accurate.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. A very large majority agree that the school heeds their concerns and provides them with valuable information about their children's progress. They confirm that they would recommend the school to others.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know their school extremely well and are strongly committed to ensuring that it provides the best possible education for all the students who attend it. They challenge school leaders very effectively, and also support them by helping them to achieve their aims. They know, in detail, about the students' performance in comparison to that seen in other schools, and what senior staff have done to minimise variations in the quality of teaching. Governors fully understand and support the ways in which any pay increases are explicitly linked to performance. They ensure that the school fully meets requirements for safeguarding children and young people. Governors monitor the school's income and expenditure very closely. They make sure that the school's finances are on a firm footing, and that any additional funding is spent in ways which will be of most benefit to students.
 - The strong contribution made by the governing body is one of many factors which confirm the school's capacity for further, sustained improvement.

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	136864
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	426641

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
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	1242
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	334
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Jackson
Headteacher	Simon Decker
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01634 364151
Fax number	01634 260209
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