

St Helena School

Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3LE

Inspection dates 18–19 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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' achievement is good across a range of subjects, including mathematics. In English it is outstanding. Standards are rising rapidly and students now attain results close to the national average.
- Good teaching is typified by well-planned lessons and activities structured that aid students' systematically learning.
- Outstanding teaching is characterised by high expectations resulting in enthusiastic, vibrant learning.
- Behaviour and safety of students is good. Students demonstrate mature, sensible attitudes to learning. They support each other in their work, enjoy school and attend well.
- Additional classes, visits, clubs and sporting activities all help to improve outcomes for students and aid in their enjoyment of school life.
- Senior leaders have taken effective, decisive action to improve teaching which has resulted in improved standards. They have created a culture of high expectations for students.
- Leaders have established good systems to regularly review students' progress as well as their well-being. This enables leaders to take appropriate action for students at risk of falling behind.
- Governors are active, well-informed partners in driving forward improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done to communicate and engage effectively with parents.
- Support staff have not had the same investment in their training as teachers in improving their skills and performance.
- Opportunities are missed to involve students in school improvement.
- Teachers do not consistently plan questions that will challenge students, particular the more able.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 29 lessons, including tutor time. Four of these observations were conducted jointly with a member of the school's senior leadership team.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, inspectors took account of: the 46 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View), the 94 responses to the Ofsted's staff questionnaire, and the school's own parental survey.
- Inspectors analysed examination results for the school since it opened as an academy. They scrutinised the school's current assessment data, minutes of meetings, school policies, safeguarding documentation, records relating to behaviour and safety, and the school's self-evaluation summary. Inspectors undertook a book scrutiny to consider students' achievement over time in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, teachers, students from Years 7 to 10, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the North East Essex Education Partnership.
- At the time of the inspection, Year 11 had left the school, and for part of the inspection Year 10 students were undertaking examinations.

Inspection team

Asyia Kazmi, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Daniell

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Webstar

Additional Inspector

John Ubsdell

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Helena School is an average-sized secondary school with a slightly higher proportion of girls than boys. It converted to become an academy in March 2012. There have been significant changes in staffing in the last few years.
- St Helena School is part of the North East Essex Education partnership, a formal collaboration of seven academies in the area. The school benefits from and provides support to other schools in the partnership.
- The majority of students are from White British heritage. About 15% of students are from a range of different minority ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium is above the national average. Pupil premium is additional government funding for students eligible for free school meals, looked after children or children from service families.
- The proportion of disabled students or those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- There are more students joining or leaving the school outside the usual admission dates than found nationally.
- Eight students study vocational courses at Colchester Institute.
- The school meets the current government's current floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maintain the focus on improving teaching and learning, and raise achievement further by:
 - increasing the challenge in lessons for all students, particularly those of higher ability, by providing greater opportunities for students to think and challenge themselves
 - developing students' thirst for knowledge
 - ensure that staff are consistent in applying the school's behaviour policy.
- Ensure that all stakeholders are actively involved in supporting the school's improvement journey by:
 - increasing the engagement of parents
 - involving students in improving the school's work
 - ensuring that support staff are supported to improve.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Standards have risen rapidly so by the time students leave Year 11 their attainment in GCSE is close to the national average. In 2013, following an 11 percentage point increase, 56% of students attained five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics. Given students' significantly below average starting point, this represents good progress.
- Good use is made of additional funding. Formal reading programmes for all Years 7 and 8 students, combined with regular reading in tutor time and a strong emphasis in promoting literacy in other subjects, all help to support rapidly rising standards in English. Students' progress in this subject is outstanding.
- Students' achievement in mathematics is good and they make rapid progress in lessons because teachers are confident and skilled in teaching challenging topics. Standards in science, supported by new courses and some very effective teaching, are also rising.
- Teachers' high expectations translate into strong achievement, with students demonstrating accurate use of subject specific vocabulary, good understanding and excitement about the subject they are studying.
- Gaps between different groups are rapidly closing. This reflects the school's emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity. The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs was significantly above the national average for this group last year and remains good this year. This is because the school adapted the curriculum to offer courses that enabled this group to succeed. Students from minority ethnic heritages also make good progress.
- Students who join the school later than Year 7 attain lower standards than those who have been in the school longer. This is because they have not benefited from the school's additional support for long enough.
- The gap in the standards attained by students supported by pupil premium funding and those who are not is narrowing rapidly. For the current Year 11, 58% of students are expected to achieve five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics. Of the students supported by pupil premium, 41% are expected to achieve the same standard. This is above the national average for this group and represents good progress because they joined the school with standards lower than their peers. In other year groups, this gap is smaller still because of the school's additional work in supporting this group.
- The achievement of higher attaining students is also increasing. Specific intervention such as 'A*ll Stars' group and university visits have inspired more-able students to consider higher education, sometimes being the first in their families to do so. One student said the school 'is making it more possible' for them achieve.
- The current Year 11 were entered early for English and mathematics and comparisons with last year show increased achievement. The school will stop early-entry next year; it will be replaced with an innovative, formal mock examination to be undertaken by all seven partnership academies.
- Students who receive education outside the school are well supported, with positive impact on their behaviour and achievement. They obtain results in line with the national average.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students experience good and sometimes outstanding teaching. Staff have created a purposeful, productive environment for learning. Relationship between students and teachers are good and sometimes outstanding. Students understand what is expected of them and come prepared to learn.
- Teachers are skilled in crafting a lesson together, using a range of resources and activities to systematically build up students' understanding and skills. Students' mature attitudes mean that they make good use of opportunities for them to work on their own and with each other.
- In a mathematics lesson, one student spontaneously used a mini-whiteboard to explain to a group of other students how to calculate a problem involving standard index form. In a science lesson, a group of boys persevered together with an experiment to understand forces, even though they found the topic difficult. In another lesson, students worked individually, referring to their books to answer questions.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and pitch lessons at the right level. There are good examples of teachers asking 'hard' questions of students who persevere in solving these problems, presenting their solutions, albeit hesitatingly.
- Teachers plan collaboratively and common threads in lessons can be seen across different classes. This helps students to work together outside of lessons and maintains high expectations.
- There is a high level of consistency in how teachers are marking, often giving clear instructions to students on how to improve their work. Many students respond to teachers' comments, correcting their work or tackling more challenging questions. Students value this approach.
- Teaching in small intervention groups with students who have special educational needs is characterised by high expectations, patience in dealing with challenging behaviour, and skilfully keeping students on task. This enables them to make good, steady, progress.
- The half hour mixed-year tutor sessions are used constructively to teach, among other things, literacy and numeracy with the vast majority of students engaging in the activities set.
- Teachers are missing opportunities to ask questions that will enable students, particularly those of higher ability, to stretch their thinking. Sometimes students are passive learners and do not demonstrate the thirst for knowledge seen in the best lessons in the school; this slows their progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Across the school, students behave politely and courteously. They move around the building calmly and sensibly, and interact well with each other and with teachers. The school is tidy, classrooms are neat, and exercise books show that students have a pride in their learning and respond to comments that teachers make.
- Many students and staff say that behaviour has improved in recent years. Attendance is rising and is above average. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last few years, and

fixed-term exclusions have fallen. Persistent absenteeism is well below the national average.

- Students who are at risk of exclusion successfully take part in a scheme run by the army to improve their self-discipline. Students value the support offered to them by staff.
- Characterised by a mature approach to learning, students support each other in their studies and work well together. Senior leaders have involved students in drawing up the school's code of conduct. Ex-students, now in Year 12 in local colleges, return to St Helena School to support current students, helping to raise aspirations and improve results.
- The school's system for managing behaviour is well understood by students, although some teachers do not follow this system consistently. There are instances of less than good behaviour. Despite this, even in the few lessons where behaviour needs to improve, good examples were seen of students helping each other.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students confidently report they feel safe. Many say they have not witnessed bullying and others report that, where they have seen it, they are confident that staff will deal with it effectively. They also feel confident about reporting it to the school prefects who say they are listened to by other students.
- The school's own survey of parents' view and responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire show parents have confidence in the school's work in keeping students safe.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers in the school, led very ably by the headteacher, demonstrate high aspirations for their students. They have been successful, in a relatively short time, in bringing about substantial improvement. There is a positive ethos in the school and staff want to keep improving.
- There are good systems for senior leaders to know what is going on in their school. The regular use of assessment information is a particularly strong feature of the school's work. This information is easy to interpret and maintains a strong focus on the students' progress.
- Senior leaders have rightly and successfully prioritised improving the quality of teaching in the school. They do not hesitate in having tough conversations about their expectations, and temper this with well-planned support, including coaching and training, to improve teaching. Support staff report they would welcome similar attention to improve their practice.
- Heads of Year and subject leaders are held to account through half-termly student progress meetings and supported through a range of mechanisms. Senior leaders model their expectations well. For example, the headteacher is currently leading the science department.
- The school uses the North East Essex Education Partnership (NEEEP) very effectively. This has included a coaching programme for teachers and a seconded deputy headteacher to raise achievement in Key Stage 4. The school now has capacity to support others, offering local schools support in languages teaching.
- Students have the opportunity to study a wide range of courses which are well matched to meet their needs. Good support is provided for lower attaining students through extra classes, and extension classes for higher attaining students are raising aspirations. These all contribute to

rising standards and students' enjoyment of school life.

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Senior leaders have audited what the school offers students in this aspect and ensured that it is addressed through a variety of ways, such as the mixed-year tutor time. Students are complimentary about the school's assemblies and are proud of the equality in the student body. Sport is a strength in the school, with success in a range of tournaments.
- During the inspection, a very small number of parents raised concerns directly with inspectors. These were explored in the school. Inspectors are satisfied with the actions the school has taken to address and learn from these concerns. Senior leaders recognise that communication with parents, and their engagement in school life, needs to be strengthened.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are very well-informed about the school. Their ambition and passion for the school is evident. Following a skills audit, they strengthened the governing body, injecting a good mix of educational and financial expertise. Modelling the focus on continuous improvement, governors have secured a coach to further improve their impact.
- Governors gather information about the school at first hand, joining in activities such as work scrutiny, and make use of external information to develop a secure understanding of the school's performance. They are confident in having challenging conversations with senior leaders, rewarding strong performance where appropriate and challenging weaker aspects.
- A good system of accountability is established. Although the offer for students supported by pupil premium funding is discussed at governors' meetings, they have now asked for regular reporting of achievement of these groups at their meetings.
- Governors have ensured that statutory safeguarding requirements 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	137944
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	442089

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	873
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barry Avis
Headteacher	Zoë King
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2013
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