

# Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre

Maypole Road, Tiptree, Colchester, CO5 0EW

## Inspection dates

15–16 October 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not all students make good enough progress in all year groups across a range of subjects.
- The proportion of students, in particular those of middle ability and some disadvantaged students, making expected progress and more than expected progress in English and mathematics is below average. However, this is now rising because of more effective tracking of progress and better teaching at Key Stage 4.
- The proportion of students who gained good GCSE grades in both English and mathematics in 2014 was below national levels.
- Teaching is not yet good enough across all subjects and particularly in Key Stage 3. Consequently, some students do not make the progress they are capable of.
- Not all teachers check and correct the accuracy of students' writing.

### The school has the following strengths

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported and make expected progress.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. The school is a safe place for students to learn.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- The senior leadership team and governors acted decisively following the previous inspection to strengthen the way the performance of teachers is managed which has led to more good teaching in the school.
- The number of students achieving good GCSE grades in subjects such as humanities, modern foreign languages and science is increasing.
- The sixth form is good. It provides a range of courses which allow students who do not achieve high enough grades at GCSE to successfully study both academic and work-related subjects.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed senior leaders giving feedback to teachers on the quality of their teaching and the progress that students made in lessons. A tour of classes was also conducted with the headteacher examining the behaviour of students in lessons.
- Inspectors looked closely at a wide range of students' books, especially in English, mathematics, science and humanities
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and subject leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, groups of students and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including those relating to safeguarding, student progress, and the behaviour of students. They also examined the way the school manages teachers' performance and pay and its self-evaluation and improvement plan.
- Inspectors took account of 193 responses to the online survey, Parent View and 47 responses to the staff survey.

## Inspection team

Lesley Daniel, Lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Guy Shears	Additional Inspector
Alan Radford	Additional Inspector
Desmond Dunne	Additional Inspector

*Lesley Daniel is appointed as an Additional Inspector, under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule 12 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006'*

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Thurstable School is a larger than average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- About one sixth of students at the school are supported by the pupil premium. Pupil premium is extra funding provided by the government for some groups of students including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- The school has a small minority of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action, a statement of special educational needs or a new education, health and care plan.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A small number of students attend work-related courses at Colchester Institute.

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

- Improve teaching to good in order to raise overall achievement by:
  - ensuring that all teachers give students clear and precise advice on how to improve their work quickly
  - providing students with time in lessons to respond to this advice so that the impact on progress is maximised
  - making sure that all teachers plan for the progress of all groups of students in particular those of middle ability and disadvantaged students
  - ensuring that all teachers expect and help students to spell and write correctly and actively teach them to do so in their subjects
  - making sure that all teachers have the same expectations and understanding of what good progress is.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and governing body have provided clear and effective leadership that has raised the aspirations of both staff and students. The school is improving rapidly as demonstrated by the improving quality of teaching and learning. As a consequence, improvements in the progress and achievement of students can be seen. The staff survey during the inspection clearly shows good support for the senior leadership team.
- Senior leaders and governors have established an inclusive and supportive culture which promotes equality of opportunity for all students and encourages them to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Positive relationships between staff and students are at the heart of the school's ethos.
- Provision in the sixth form is good with effective guidance for students and good teaching leading to improved outcomes for students in 2014. Senior leaders monitor the progress of students closely and provide timely intervention to help students adjust to the demands of A level courses.
- Senior leaders and governors have acted decisively to improve the quality of teaching. A robust system for the management of teachers links pay awards to performance. Difficult decisions have been made when standards have not been high enough and some teachers have left the school. The school's monitoring data and work in students' books, especially at Key Stage 4, indicate that these changes have led to improved learning for students.
- Leadership of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is effective. New subject leaders in English and mathematics were appointed in September 2014 and are working together to closely monitor the progress of students at Key Stage 4 who may be vulnerable to underachieving in one or both of their subject areas. Improvements in the use of data to track progress has been used to identify these students and strategies are in place to support them.
- New appointments have led to a rise in GCSE results in some subjects, for example in psychology, and an enthusiasm among students for subjects such as music. However, a scrutiny of Key Stage 3 books showed that a student's rate of progress can still depend too much on which teacher they have. Subject leaders are addressing this and teaching is improving, but some inconsistencies still remain.
- New whole school policies have improved the quality of marking and assessment across the school. Teachers regularly record how well students are doing. Detailed scrutiny of students' books demonstrated the good impact this is having on progress in key subjects such as English, mathematics and science. Some teachers are not yet using marking as effectively at Key Stage 3.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well monitored and extra guidance and support are put in place where needed. A new system where teachers and learning support assistants plan together to ensure the progress of these students has resulted in highly effective support by these assistants in lessons.
- The curriculum meets the needs of students well. The headteacher firmly believes that students of all abilities should have access to both academic and work-related pathways at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and the school offers a breadth of subjects to meet the individual needs of students. Students speak highly of the quality of careers advice offered by staff when choosing subjects to study at Key Stage 4 and also in Year 11 when deciding on post-16 education.
- The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular sporting opportunities for students with inspectors seeing high quality coaching of both netball and football after school. Students spoke enthusiastically of 'loads of clubs' not only in sport but also music, chess and cheer-leading for example.
- The school's programme of citizenship lessons, assemblies and GCSE religious education ensures that

students are exposed to a wide variety of both national and international issues and are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well catered for.

- The school has used the good support offered by the local authority effectively and also sought advice from other professionals in order to address the issues raised at the last inspection. This has included a review of English provision within the school which has already resulted in a better experience for students.

#### ■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is effective. Following an external review recommended at the last inspection, the knowledge and effectiveness of the governing body has improved rapidly, especially about the quality of teaching. As a result, it provided robust support for the senior leadership team as they worked to improve the achievement of students at the school.
- Governors have been fully involved in the journey the school has been on since the previous inspection, for example in putting in place a new pay review system that clearly takes into account the effectiveness of teaching over time on the progress of students.
- They know how well different groups of students are doing and hold the headteacher to account for their progress.
- Governors have reviewed the way the school spent the pupil premium funding last year and asked challenging questions about the impact this has had on students' achievement.
- The governing body carries out its statutory obligations to keep children safe and ensure equality for all.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

#### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students' attitudes to learning are positive and they generally arrive at lessons keen to learn.
- Students conduct themselves well around the school showing respect for their environment, adults and each other. They speak highly of their teachers and appreciate the work they do for them.
- The elected members of the school council are proud of the fact that they have successfully introduced changes at the school such as a noodle bar at lunch time and students were fully involved in the design of the electronic learning centre, a valuable resource used by many subject areas.
- The school manages students whose behaviour is challenging well, rarely having to temporarily exclude them from school or arrange alternative provision for them elsewhere.
- Attendance has improved and is in line with the national average for secondary schools.
- Occasionally, off task behaviour in lessons is not dealt with effectively by individual teachers and so learning is interrupted.

#### Safety

- The school's work to keep students secure and safe is good. The attendance and progress of the few students who attend alternative education at Colchester College are closely monitored by school staff ensuring that these students achieve well.
- Students are aware of the risks they may encounter in everyday life such as those associated with social media and use of the internet. One Year 7 student explained that in information technology all students designed a web page about how to stay safe on the internet.
- Students talk confidently about the different types of bullying they might encounter, including homophobic and cyber bullying and are clear on what they would do if faced with such issues. They are aware of the

importance of tolerance towards groups of people who are different to them and showed understanding of the dangers of extremism in the world today.

- Students say that bullying in school is rare and that when it does occur it is quickly and effectively dealt with by staff. This is supported by the school's records of such incidents.

### **The quality of teaching**

### **requires improvement**

- Teaching requires improvement because the impact it has on students' progress varies across Key Stage 3 and, in some subjects, students are not always challenged to think for themselves or to deepen their understanding. Most teaching seen in the sixth form was good or better with students actively engaged in their learning.
- When comparing work in students' books from last year to this term, it is clear that the regularity and quality of written feedback to students has improved since the last inspection because subject leaders now look at teachers' marking regularly to identify where improvements need to be made. However, some comments from teachers are still not helping students because they lack clear instruction about what to do to progress.
- Where students have responded to teacher feedback, there is evidence of clear and rapid progress, but sometimes teachers allow students to move on to the next piece of work without showing that they have fully understood the lessons from previous topics.
- At Key Stage 3 there is some variation in the way similar pieces of work are graded within subjects and also in the amount and quality of work seen. In science for example, some students had very few notes in their books in comparison to other students in the same year group. Teacher assessment of students' work in the sixth form and in Key Stage 4 is generally accurate.
- Teachers do not plan specifically to meet the needs of middle ability students. The range of ability within this band is not catered for well enough and so their progress is slower than students of higher ability or those eligible for extra support.
- There is a common focus across the school on teaching literacy, reading and mathematics. A focus on improving the accuracy of students' written work is seen in displays around the school, a common marking policy and in the use of literacy stickers in students' books. In mathematics, music and science, for example, teachers expect students to use and spell key subject words correctly. Too often though, books show that students continue to make the same mistakes in their writing, such as the misuse of capital letters or incorrect punctuation, without this being challenged by teachers.
- Support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs within lessons is good with learning support assistants working in partnership with teachers to plan activities that suit the needs of students and track their progress through the school's learning passports. In a Year 10 lower ability mathematics lesson, students were excited and motivated to learn more quickly by the use of quizzes on tablet devices which were used by staff to check effectively students' understanding.
- Inspectors also saw higher ability students engaged by stimulating teaching leading to good progress. In a Year 9 English lesson, students were given a scenario where they had to convince the teacher to give them a hundred pounds using the persuasive techniques that they had been studying. This was followed up with a lively discussion on why some of their ideas would work better than others reinforcing their understanding in a memorable way.

### **The achievement of pupils**

### **requires improvement**

- Achievement requires improvement because by the end of Key Stage 4 not enough students have made expected progress in English and mathematics. However, the proportion who do is growing and gaps are narrowing due to strengthening teaching and good leadership. In 2014, the percentage of students

achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics remains below average.

- In 2014, levels of progress at the end of Key Stage 4 in mathematics for all students in the school declined. However, the proportion of disadvantaged students making expected progress did not and they did slightly better than other disadvantaged students nationally. In English however, a rise in the numbers of all students who made expected progress was not mirrored in the progress of disadvantaged students who also did not do well in comparison to national figures. In 2013 disadvantaged students typically achieved one grade lower than other students in the school but this gap closed in 2014.
- Students join the school with levels of achievement that are broadly average, although middle ability students are in the majority. Higher ability students, disabled students and those who have special educational needs make better progress than middle-ability students.
- The vast majority of higher ability students achieve 5 or more A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics.
- The progress of all groups of students currently at the school is improving. Since September, in GCSE English Language for example, work in books and lesson observations show a clear focus on developing exam skills that have led to rapid improvements in student responses to exam style questions.
- Girls still make better progress than boys. School data suggests that this gap is narrowing and in lessons inspectors saw as much engagement in learning from boys as from girls.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs generally make expected progress. The school provides effective support for these students, for example by providing small group intervention to work on improving reading and writing skills.
- Progress in the sixth form is good. The improved achievement at A level seen in 2013 has been sustained this year. Students in psychology, media and film studies have achieved more A\* and A grades than other students nationally. There has been rapid improvement in achievement on work-related courses with more students gaining distinctions. Gaps in the progress of disadvantaged students are closing because of the school's flexible attitude towards provision.
- In 2014, there was some improvement in the numbers of Year 11 students achieving A\* to C grades in modern foreign languages, psychology, geography, history, media studies and physical education. The achievement of Year 10 students who took their core science exam in 2014 is already better than any previous year group by the end of Key Stage 4. Early entry to examinations is not used in any other subjects.
- The small number of Key Stage 4 students who follow vocational courses through alternative providers successfully complete their courses with most gaining qualifications in skills such as bricklaying and horticulture.

### **The sixth form provision**

**is good**

- Leadership of the sixth form is good. A key feature of the sixth form is the diversity of provision designed to meet individual needs and interests which includes both academic and vocational courses and a mixture of the two for some students. Some students enter the sixth form with lower qualifications than would be expected nationally. The school customises its provision to suit the needs of the students who choose to stay on in any particular year so the numbers of those taking particular subjects at A level or opting for vocational subjects varies greatly. This makes year on year comparisons of progress and retention rates difficult. Students on both academic and vocational courses achieve in line with expectations from, at times, low starting points. The number of BTEC distinctions being gained by students has increased rapidly.
- Effective teaching over time has ensured good progress for all groups of students. In lessons, inspectors

observed students being encouraged to think for themselves or to work through problems in order to deepen their understanding as part of the transition process to A level study. The school's relatively new electronic learning centre has had a significant impact on the progress of students studying vocational subjects as it provides them with the technology to back up theoretical understanding. GCE A level students also benefit from having access to sophisticated media and design software.

- The quality of the guidance and support available to students is a strength of the sixth form. Students leave the sixth form with the qualifications and well developed personal, social and employability skills that prepare them well for the next steps in their education or the world of work.
- The behaviour of students in the sixth form is good. Some support younger students by coaching sport at lunch times and after school, or are part of a peer listening scheme, hearing Key Stage 3 students read and offering emotional support if needed.



## 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>	137241
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	451626

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<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>	1074
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	117
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Steven Cook
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miles Bacon
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 November 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01621 816526
<b>Fax number</b>	01621 815409
<b>Email address</b>	admin@thurstable.essex.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

