

# Towers School and Sixth Form Centre

Faversham Road, Ashford, Kent, TN24 9AL

**Inspection dates** 24–25 September 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           |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Actions to improve teaching have not yet had sufficient time to raise the achievement of all groups of students consistently well. These actions have not yet had a consistent impact across subjects.
- Less able students and some disabled students and those with special educational needs do not achieve as well as they should. This is because not all teachers routinely use information on students' progress to plan learning activities with the right amount of challenge.
- Some teachers do not ask probing enough questions and feedback to students does not always make it clear how they can improve work.
- Not all teachers consistently apply the school's literacy policy, so some students do not improve their writing as fast as they should.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Achievement in academic courses over time has not been strong enough.

### The school has the following strengths

- The inspirational leadership of the new Principal has successfully embedded a culture of striving for 'excellence in everything'. As a result, the school is improving rapidly.
- Leadership and management are good. School leaders, including governors, have taken carefully planned and decisive actions to improve the school. As a result, staff morale is high. Capacity to improve further is strong.
- Students' behaviour is good. They feel safe, are welcoming and courteous to visitors and take pride in their appearance, their work and their school.
- Staff have worked successfully with students and their families to improve attendance. This is now above national expectations. Students enjoy coming to school.
- Achievement in English is good. Standards have risen as a result of improved teaching and attainment is now in line with the national average. Achievement in mathematics is improving quickly.
- The school provides a wealth of opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, in classrooms and through a wide range of enrichment activities.

### Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons of which nine were joint observations with senior and middle leaders.
- In addition, the inspection team made many short visits to classrooms with senior leaders to focus on particular aspects of the school’s work. These visits focused on the learning and progress of students in lower ability groups and in the sixth form. Inspectors also visited two registration groups during tutor time.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders and members of the attendance and student welfare teams. Inspectors also met with governors and representatives from the local authority.
- Four groups of students talked to inspectors about their views of the school. Inspectors also talked informally to students at the start of the school day, at lesson changeover and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors took account of 23 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 39 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised students’ work and their attainment and progress information. The inspection team also considered a range of other documentation including governing body minutes, school self-evaluation records and development plans and records of safeguarding, attendance and behaviour.

### Inspection team

|                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| Janet Hallett   | Lead Inspector       |
| Richard Butler  | Additional Inspector |
| Josephine Dibb  | Additional Inspector |
| Colin Mackinlay | Additional Inspector |
| Janet Morrison  | Additional Inspector |

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Towers School and Sixth Form Centre is a larger than average sized non-selective school, in a county where one in four students attend selective schools. In this area of Kent the proportion of students who attend selective schools is slightly higher.
- The proportions of White British and minority ethnic students are in line with national averages.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is average. This is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after. There are few children who are looked after.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs on the school roll supported at school action is above average. The proportion of these students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- In 2013/14, about 40 students were eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding which is for students who did not achieve the expected levels in reading and mathematics at the end of primary school.
- The school has its own on-site facility for students who are at risk of exclusion, known as the Hopewell Centre and the Renaissance Centre. A few students attend additional off-site training at Goldwyn Special School.
- The school has a flourishing local partnership with a grammar school and another high school in Ashford and shares good practice and ideas to improve teaching.
- The Principal took up his post in January 2014.

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

- Improve the impact of teaching and to raise achievement by ensuring:
  - all students have the opportunity to answer and ask probing questions which deepen their understanding
  - all teachers implement the school's assessment policy so that students are clear about what they need to do to improve their work
  - all students understand how to respond to teachers' written comments and are given time to do this
  - all teachers have the opportunity to benefit from the strongest practice in the school and within the learning partnership.
- Raise achievement for all groups of students, including the less able and disabled students and those with special educational needs and sixth form students, by ensuring:
  - all teachers always use information available to them about students' prior achievement and progress to set the highest expectations for what students can achieve
  - all teachers plan activities that are set at the right level so that students learn better.
- Improve students' literacy skills and so raise their achievement by ensuring:
  - all teachers understand how to develop students' writing skills in all subjects
  - all teachers consistently apply the school's literacy policy.
- Ensuring that systems for checking information on students' progress are used effectively to raise achievement. .

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The leadership and management of the Principal and senior team are good. Since taking up his post in January 2014, the Principal has galvanised staff and students with his vision of excellence for the school.
- This has been a time of great change and positive outcomes have been realised through the determination and expertise of the Principal, senior team and governors. The impact is clear to see in students' behaviour, attitudes to learning and improving achievement. However, leadership and management are not yet outstanding because leaders have not secured consistently good or better teaching over time. As a result, recent actions to improve teaching and raise achievement have not yet had time to have an impact across all subjects and for all groups of students.
- Middle leaders are a dynamic force for change in the school. They are very clear about their role in driving up standards and provide good role models for staff and students. They feel energised and empowered by the responsibility. One long serving middle leader described how he had never felt as positive about the school as he had in recent months.
- The development of teaching is effectively led. A new teaching and learning handbook has been developed and teaching is evaluated through lessons observations, learning walks, book scrutiny and student voice. Systems are relatively new but teachers find the range of training opportunities helpful. It is planned to link this to a new system for setting targets for teachers. Support from a local grammar school in improving teaching has been valuable. This partnership also supports newly qualified teachers and others in training.
- The school is developing its system well for analysing and tracking information on students' progress. Senior and middle leaders are increasingly confident and expert in using this information to evaluate teaching and achievement. However, not all staff are equally skilled and do not always make full use of the information to plan their teaching. As a result, some activities are not set at the right level of challenge for students.
- The range of subjects on offer to different year groups is undergoing great change as the school develops its academic and work-related pathways system. School leaders are committed to developing a range of courses which prepare students successfully for the next stage of their education and for life in modern Britain. Changes made so far support this.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effectively promoted through a range of activities and events. The new school day gives a high priority to enrichment activities which are in the process of being developed. Saturday school has been in place since January and is very well supported by students and parents.
- The school is increasingly popular in the local area and the roll is rising steadily.
- Students are given clear and unbiased guidance and careers information and they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives in education and employment.
- The school maintains a strong relationship with the local authority, which provides support with evaluating teaching.
- Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Since January 2014, governors have brought a rigorous forensic analysis and scrutiny to finance, staffing, accommodation and facilities. Together with the Principal, they have taken decisive action, where required, to tackle staff underperformance and ensure an improved environment for students' learning and welfare. The school is financially secure.
  - Governors evaluate students' progress information. However, they agree they need to be more focused on challenging students' underperformance and the quality of teaching. They know that this is a priority. Governors accurately judge the improvements in students' achievement and recognise that there needs to be a broader focus across all subjects. Governors' links to faculties are strengthening.
  - Governors review target-setting and pay arrangements for teachers and understand the link to salary progression.
  - They have a strategic overview of the use of additional government funding and monitor its impact.
  - All governors have had training on safeguarding and the governing body ensures that the school meets statutory requirements for safeguarding.

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

- The behaviour of students is good. They are polite and respectful to each other and adults and friendly and welcoming to visitors.
- Many improvements have been made to the school grounds and the classrooms so that the site is fit for purpose. Students feel an increasing sense of ownership of their school and they move around in a calm, orderly manner with a real sense of purpose. There is no litter or graffiti.
- Behaviour in classrooms is good and relationships between students and teachers are strong and teachers set clear expectations. Students understand the behaviour systems and what is expected of them. Where teaching requires improvement, students struggle to stay engaged in their learning. However, inspectors saw almost no disruption in classrooms. Behaviour is not yet outstanding because students do not yet consistently demonstrate a thirst for and love of learning.
- Students are unanimous in their view that behaviour is good. Students in Years 8 to 13 described how much it has improved.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe and parents agree. Students have information lessons in assemblies and know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and mobile phones.
- Students report that there is little bullying and on the few occasions when it does happen, they are confident about what to do and that it would be dealt with. Students understand that racist and homophobic bullying is unacceptable in modern Britain.
- Students' attendance has improved as a result of good leadership and diligent work by the attendance officer and other members of the welfare team. Attendance is now well above national expectations in the main school. The school recognises that the attendance of students supported by additional government funding and disabled students and those who have special educational needs, although improved, needs further focus.
- Improving the welfare and behaviour of students is a priority and new systems and expectations for behaviour have been introduced across the school. Welfare managers and their teams are working successfully to reduce exclusions, which are falling. Excluded students, who attend on- and off-site training, are carefully monitored so that they are successfully re-integrated into mainstream classrooms.

**The quality of teaching requires improvement**

- Teaching requires improvement because there is too much variation in the quality of teaching and so not all students make the progress that they should.
- Teachers do not consistently use information about their students' prior achievement to plan learning activities which enable them to learn well and make good progress. As a result, activities are not set at the right level so that lower ability groups find the work too difficult and higher ability groups find it too easy.
- The quality of marking and feedback to students is a priority for the school. Students understand and like the system of different colour pens and space and time to respond to teachers' comments. However, its practice is inconsistent across the school. Students are not always required to respond and teachers' comments are sometimes too general so they do not help improve students' learning.
- Teachers do not always set high enough expectations of what students can achieve. The purpose of learning activities is not always made clear to students. Teachers do not routinely consider students' prior knowledge in order to plan and adjust activities, so the pace of learning slows.
- Questioning is variable: where teaching is good, teachers ask questions that enable students to give extended answers, require others to listen and deepen understanding. Where teaching is weaker, questions are unstructured and learning is superficial and progress slow.
- Students enjoy writing and teachers encourage students to write for themselves whenever they can. However, some teachers do not always give students enough guidance on how to structure their writing and so their progress slows. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are not always checked.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effectively promoted through teaching. For example, in a Year 10 geography session, students were given time to reflect on what it must be like to live and work near an active volcano. This enabled them to identify with people from a different culture and develop their understanding of empathy so preparing them for life in modern-day Britain.

**The achievement of pupils****requires improvement**

- Students' achievement requires improvement. It is not yet good because rates of progress are not consistent across subjects. Students in lower ability groups, including some disabled students and those with special educational needs, do not make as much progress as they should in lessons because teaching requires improvement.
- Achievement in GCSE English and mathematics is now rising because senior leaders have rightly focused their attention on these subjects as a priority. In 2014, GCSE attainment in English was in line with the national average for the first time. Overall progress in English is also now in line with national figures, which represents good achievement from starting points which are below average. Students' progress in mathematics is close to the national average and attainment is rising but more slowly than in English.
- Achievement in other subjects at GCSE has not shown the same improvement. Although results in textiles, physical education and art represent good achievement. Some other subjects are improving quickly. Achievement at level 2 work-related courses is particularly strong in music, construction and business.
- In the year groups currently in the school, tracking information shows that rates of progress are inconsistent across different subjects and in different year groups. The achievement of lower ability students also shows this pattern. This is because inconsistencies still remain in teaching.
- The achievement of disadvantaged students eligible for support through additional government funding is rising and in 2014, the attainment gaps closed for students taking GCSE. In English, the gap has closed to two thirds of a GCSE grade, and for mathematics it has closed to within half a GCSE grade. In English the gap with national figures is two thirds of a GCSE grade and in mathematics the gap with national figures is one GCSE grade. This is as a result of improving teaching in English and mathematics and improved student attendance.
- The progress of White British students is improving and students from minority ethnic groups achieve well.
- The 2014 results show that overall disabled students and those with special educational needs made better progress. However, for students currently in the school, where these students are in lower ability groups, their progress is limited because of inconsistencies in teaching.
- Students attending off-site training make progress in line with their cohort.
- The most able students generally achieve well because teaching is usually good in these classes. Students do not yet make the same rates of progress as nationally but the proportions are increasing.
- The school has begun to instil a culture of reading across the school and students' reading is improving. Students like the accelerated reading scheme and are growing in confidence. However, not all students gain the benefit from regular reading if they do not have their books with them.
- Students are encouraged to write in their own words as much as possible, but many students would benefit from more specific teaching of writing. Leaders recognise this as a priority.

**The sixth form provision requires improvement**

- The sixth form requires improvement. Leadership and management are in transition. The Principal has rigorously addressed concerns and is in the process of building capacity to take the sixth form forward. During this period of change, analysis of students' progress information is not well supported.
- Achievement requires improvement because students do not achieve as well as they should on academic courses. Achievement on AS-level courses is improving slowly but achievement at A-level remains low. Achievement on work-related courses is stronger.
- The impact of teaching on students' learning is variable because in too many lessons the level of challenge for students is too low.
- The sixth form is inclusive and offers a diverse range of both academic and work-related courses. The Principal has rationalised the subject offer to make the most of the learning partnership with other local sixth forms, in order to avoid duplication of subjects. The sixth form offers high quality industry standard provision in catering and hair and beauty, where students gain qualifications in a workplace setting.
- A few students remain until Year 14 and complete their GCSE studies before moving on to level 3 courses with clear progression routes. Students retaking GCSE English and mathematics are well supported and motivated to succeed.
- Students are confident that their academic and welfare needs are being met. Information, advice and guidance are good and they value the opportunities for work experience. They enjoy the leadership roles that the sixth form offers.
- Achievement is inconsistent across the range of courses because the impact of teaching is too variable. Achievement is improving slowly in AS- and A-level courses, from a low base. Achievement in work-related courses is stronger, and continues to improve.

## 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> | 136583 |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Kent   |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 442486 |

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>                        | Academy converter       |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                    | 11–19                   |
| <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>    | 1206                    |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b> | 320                     |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                  | The governing body      |
| <b>Chair</b>                                  | Rob Weaver              |
| <b>Principal</b>                              | Richard Billings        |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>     | 26–27 September 2012    |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                       | 01233 634171            |
| <b>Fax number</b>                             | 01233 628326            |
| <b>Email address</b>                          | info@towers.kent.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