

Meridian School

Garden Walk, Royston, SG8 7JH

Inspection dates 28–29 January 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Good leadership at all levels, including by the governing body, has driven the school forward since the previous inspection. Consequently, teaching and achievement have improved and are now good.
- Governors hold the headteacher and senior leaders to account effectively. They make a strong contribution to ensuring that the school is a community in which all can succeed.
- Students behave in a polite and mature manner. They have good attitudes to learning and want to succeed. Students and adults enjoy positive relationships so all members of the school community are valued and respected.
- Students say that they are safe and know how to stay safe in different situations. Their parents agree.
- Teaching is good and improving because leaders ensure that staff are well-trained and plan activities that enable all groups of students to achieve well.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students. They encourage them to work hard and aim high.
- Achievement has improved considerably since the last inspection. All groups of students make good and sometimes rapid progress from their starting points. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is now above average.
- The curriculum and the many enrichment activities that are offered to students make a strong contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form is good. Leaders have made a concerted effort to improve the quality of teaching, which is now good. As a result, students are making good progress.
- Students leave the school well prepared for the next stage of their lives and ready to be responsible citizens in Great Britain.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Just occasionally, teaching activities are not interesting enough to ensure all students are quiet and attentive and ready to make the maximum amount of progress.
- In a few cases, students do not follow their teachers' instructions to carry out additional tasks to improve their work. This slows their progress.
- Not all subject leaders have led improvements in teaching and achievement as fast and as effectively as others.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 28 lessons. Some of these observations were shared with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors spoke to students during lessons and looked closely at the work in their books.
- Inspectors met three groups of students, and spoke informally to other students in lessons and during breaks and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and with the Chair and nine other members of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school. They examined several documents concerning students' achievement and progress, development plans and information about teachers' performance. They also looked at records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Minutes of governing body meetings were considered.
- Inspectors considered the 105 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors considered the 38 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Anne Gregory	Additional Inspector
Angela Podmore	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Meridian, an upper school academy whose students join in Year 9, is much smaller than an average-sized secondary school.
- Most students come from White British backgrounds.
- The pupil premium (additional government funding which supports students known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) provides support for about one in every seven of the students. This is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is about one in seven. This proportion is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Since the start of the current term a very small number of students experiencing behavioural and emotional difficulties has begun to attend alternative provision at North Herts Education Support Centre, Hitchin, which is the local authority's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).
- The school belongs to the Royston Schools Academy Trust, a partnership with two local feeder middle schools.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a large turnover of staff. The new leader of the sixth form took up her post in June 2013. The new leader for science took up her post in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and students' achievement further by:
 - making sure that students always respond to the improvement tasks that have been designed by their teachers to improve their work
 - ensuring teachers have opportunities to learn from outstanding practice in other schools, so that they understand how to set activities that engage their students' interest at all times, maintain their usual high levels of behaviour and help them make consistently rapid progress.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all subject leaders, particularly in science, French and the humanities, receive the training they need so that they can improve teaching and achievement at a faster rate.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders, including governors, have successfully addressed the improvement points outlined in the previous inspection report. Leaders have established a culture of ambition for students and staff alike. Teachers are equally determined to improve their own effectiveness. Students have very positive attitudes, behave well and aspire to achieve. All get on well together in this harmonious community where discrimination is not tolerated.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is thorough. They are aware of the improvements that are still needed in teaching and in the leadership of a few subjects. The resulting action plans are helping to drive forward improvements in all aspects of the school's work.
- New tracking systems have been introduced to check on the progress of every student. The information is used systematically to identify any students not meeting their targets and to provide them with additional support. In this way the school ensures equality of opportunity for all students to succeed.
- Leaders, including in the sixth form, manage the performance of teachers well. They regularly observe teaching and check students' books to determine how well their teachers are helping them to learn. They hold teachers to account for the progress that their students make and ensure that they have access to good quality training. Any staff experiencing difficulties are given additional support to help them improve their practice. There is a strong tradition of sharing best practice in the school but teachers do not have opportunities to learn from outstanding practice in other schools.
- Senior tutors make a strong contribution to ensuring the well-being and positive behaviour of pupils. As a result, attendance is rising, students arrive punctually to school and to lessons and incidents of poor behaviour have markedly declined.
- Most subject leaders make systematic checks on the quality of teaching and students' progress in their areas of responsibility. As a result, students are now making good and sometimes rapid progress, and reach above national average standards at the end of Year 11 in most subjects. In a few cases, subject leaders have not been as effective in securing the rapid improvements in teaching needed to raise standards to above those found nationally.
- The school uses the additional pupil premium funding well to provide the few disadvantaged students with additional teaching and experiences, such as overseas trips. The recent work to boost reading skills for disadvantaged students and those whose literacy skills on entry to Year 9 are low is narrowing attainment gaps and raising overall standards in literacy.
- The curriculum is well planned and offers students a good balance of academic and work-related courses suited to their individual interests and capabilities. Students have access to many enrichment opportunities, encompassing sport, culture, performing arts and foreign trips. Careful planning ensures students are given a good understanding of British values, such as democracy, tolerance and respect. This ensures that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Good quality careers advice and guidance prepare students well for the next stage of their lives. The vast majority continue with education, employment or training.
- The school works well with its partner middle schools to ensure that students experience a smooth and successful transition into the school.
- Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. Staff are well trained and know what to do should any concerns arise. Leaders have put in place secure arrangements to check the progress of those who are educated off site and ensure they are safe and attend regularly.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is good. Governors have acted on the findings of the review which followed the previous inspection. They have undertaken additional training, including on the use of student performance data, safeguarding and how to challenge school leaders. This has had a very positive impact on their effectiveness.
- Governors are actively involved in the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. They frequently check on progress towards improvement targets and scrutinize student progress data. They are well aware of how well students are achieving.
- From the headteacher's reports and their discussions with senior leaders, they know about the quality of teaching and how teachers are being helped to improve. They ensure teachers are held to account for their performance through the appraisal systems. Governors only agree pay increments for teachers whose performance is consistently good or better.
- Governors take a very active interest in the work of the school. Many are frequent visitors and offer their expertise, such as in helping students with their reading, running mentoring sessions for students and giving careers guidance and advice.
- Governors support and challenge senior leaders effectively and have contributed well to the recent improvements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They arrive punctually to school and promptly to lessons. They are enthusiastic, eager to learn and ambitious to achieve well. They follow their teachers' instructions quickly and work well, both when working by themselves and in groups. These positive attitudes help them make good progress in their learning.
- On the rare occasion, when activities set are not as engaging and stimulating as they could be, a very small number of students call out and disturb others. This is why behaviour is not outstanding.
- Students are polite and well mannered. They display respect to other students and to adults. Visitors are made to feel welcome. Students speak of their school with pride, they dress smartly and there is little litter to be seen.
- The school works well with parents and external agencies to support any students having behavioural difficulties. Those very few who need additional longer term support benefit from the arrangements the school has established with the off-site provision. Staff working in this facility help students to modify their behaviours so that they can become successful learners.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students and their parents agree that the school ensures their safety well. Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in different situations, such as when using social media.
- Students are well aware of different forms of bullying. They say that bullying is rare and this is confirmed by the school's records. They value the fact that on the odd occasion when it does occur, school leaders do not simply punish the perpetrators but educate them to understand the error of their ways and how to develop tolerance and understanding of all people.
- Since the previous inspection, attendance has risen and is now close to the national average for secondary schools. Fixed term exclusions are low and, for a number of years now, there have been no permanent exclusions.
- Secure arrangements are in place to ensure that the few students using alternative provision are safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved markedly since the previous inspection. It is ensuring that all groups of students make at least expected progress and that many students do better. The teaching of reading, literacy and mathematics is at least good and is often outstanding.
- Teachers and students enjoy strong working relationships. Expectations for behaviour are high and teachers inspire their students to achieve well, both in the main school and in the sixth form. As a result, most students work diligently at all times and many told inspectors that they are striving to surpass their target grades.
- The school focussed sharply last year on ensuring teachers raised their expectations of what students, especially the most able, can achieve. Consequently, teachers now consistently set appropriately challenging work, both in class and for home learning. More students are reaching the higher grades and fulfilling their potential. As a result, the proportion of Year 11 students attaining A* and A grades rose significantly last year.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together. They carefully use the information that they have to plan effective teaching that meets the needs of disabled students and those who have special educational needs. As a result, these students make good progress from their starting points.
- The teaching of mathematics is consistently strong. For the past three years, overall attainment at the end of Year 11 has been well-above average.
- The teaching of literacy has improved markedly since the time of the previous inspection. As a result, attainment in English at the end of Year 11 has improved from being broadly average to being well-above average in 2014.
- The quality of teaching in other subjects is variable. In the large majority of subjects, teaching has ensured that students make good or better progress. In some aspects of science, humanities and languages however, progress has been slower than in other subjects. Inspection evidence, including scrutiny of student's work and the school's tracking data, confirm that teaching in these subjects is now improving, following action taken by leaders, resulting in students making faster progress.
- Most teachers provide students with good quality feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In line with the school's marking policy, they set a follow-up activity for the students so that they can learn from their mistakes, improve their work or attempt something more challenging. In a few cases students do not respond as required and this slows their learning.

The achievement of pupils is good

- In recent years the standards reached at the end of Year 11 have increased markedly. In 2014, the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, was above the national average. Taking into account all qualifications, overall attainment was well above the national average.
- All groups of student's made good and, in some subjects, outstanding progress from their starting points. Progress however, in science, French, history and geography was slower than in other subjects.
- Inspection evidence confirms the school's view that the work of current students in all year groups, including in the sixth form, is improving rapidly in most subjects and leading to higher attainment.
- In 2014, the most able students made good progress to attain higher standards than similar students nationally. This is because they are set ambitious targets, challenging activities and are inspired to work hard.

- The school's relatively few disadvantaged students make good progress. In 2014, they attained about one GCSE grade lower in both English and mathematics than other students in the school. They gained about three quarters of a GCSE grade lower in both subjects compared to students nationally.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is good. This is because their needs are accurately identified and because teachers and teaching assistants plan well-targeted support to help them learn.
- The school has no longer enters students early for GCSE examinations. This is so that they have the opportunity to study for the full duration of Year 11 to attain their best possible grades.
- As the very few students attending the off-site alternative provision have only been there for a few weeks it is too soon to judge the impact it is having on their achievement.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The new leader of the sixth form has a firm understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. She has taken decisive action this year to raise the quality of teaching and improve students' progress, both of which are now good. The popularity of the sixth form has grown, with the largest ever number transferring into Year 12 this year.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Students are required to be in school all day and to undertake independent study when not in lessons. Especially notable is the outstanding culture of aspiration throughout most sixth form classes. Students, especially those in Year 12, readily aim for the highest grades. They work diligently and read around their subjects so that they have the best possible chance of securing them. Many are on track to succeed.
- Teaching has improved this year. All teachers have strong subject knowledge which they use well to impart good levels of knowledge and understanding. Checking on students' progress is frequent and results in additional help for those students not on track to meet their targets. Every student now meets regularly with a personal mentor who helps them to review their progress and holds them to account for improving their work.
- Students' overall achievement in 2013 and 2014 was broadly average. Inspection evidence shows that across all subjects students are now making good progress and are on track to attain higher than average standards in 2015. This is because the quality of teaching is getting stronger and students are working very hard to meet their ambitions to achieve well.
- Students value the good impartial careers advice that they receive. This includes one-to-one meetings with the headteacher or a governor with careers expertise to help them make the right choices at both post-16 and post-18. As a result of the additional work experience opportunities, careers fairs, bespoke assemblies and tutorials they receive, students' employability skills are well developed by the time they leave school.
- The curriculum offers students a good choice of both academic and work related options. Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities, such as participation in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. They welcome the many opportunities for voluntary work within the school, such as helping with the annual theatrical production, as well as in wider community through sports activities in other local schools and charitable fundraising.

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	137656
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	454773

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	474
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gary Glover
Headteacher	Mike Firth
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2013
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