

Southend YMCA Community School

The Ticket House, 110 East Street, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 6LH

Inspection dates 2–3 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher, ably supported by governors, has established a clear vision of excellence for the school. She effectively leads with unrelenting determination to improve students' achievement and well-being and increase their life chances.
- The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher and a staff team who share her high expectations and work together very well to manage students' needs and create an environment in which they feel able to succeed.
- The school has recently moved into new, purpose-built facilities. These surroundings endorse the expectation that students will overcome their difficulties and succeed. Students treat their environment with pride and care.
- Teachers and learning support assistants are skilled at supporting students to manage their behaviour, deal with their anxieties and focus on the intended learning in lessons.
- Teachers take care to plan lessons and activities that interest and engage students; as a result, they increasingly contribute thoughts and ideas and overcome their reluctance to learn.
- Almost all students make good and sometimes outstanding progress during the short time they are at the school. They achieve better grades in English, mathematics and information technology GCSEs than they were predicted to when they arrived because the school places a high value on them attaining these qualifications.
- Students behave well in school; they say the school has helped them to feel safe and to believe they can achieve. They have good opportunities to understand the risks they face and how to manage them. They develop respect and tolerance for both their peers and the adults who work with them.
- Staff go to great lengths to ensure students attend school, feel valued and receive the care and attention they need from a wide range of services.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders' strategic planning and monitoring do not set precise enough targets to measure the rapid improvement drive. This is because the responsibilities of all staff, now that the school is established, are not clear enough.
- Governors do not monitor the impact of some actions rigorously enough.
- In some lessons, teachers do not intervene and challenge students who are making good progress at a high enough level.
- Students do not always take enough care with the presentation of their work or their spelling.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in nine lessons jointly with the headteacher. In these lessons, she looked at students' work and talked to them about their learning and about their time at the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the Chair and Vice-chair of the Governing Body, the learning mentor, the local authority attendance officer, a parent, the officer responsible for the Firebreak programme, the human relations officer for the YMCA parent charity and the breakfast club supervisor.
- Careful attention was given to the provision for looked-after children; this included a meeting with the lead practitioner from the children's home caring for students at the school.
- The inspector met with a group of Year 11 students and observed staff briefings on both mornings of the inspection; she joined a meeting with social care staff at the school. She observed behaviour during breaks and lunchtimes and as students moved between lessons.
- The inspector scrutinised school improvement planning and evaluation, records of the monitoring of teaching and a number of school policies. She analysed assessment information, attendance records, logs of behaviour and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- The inspector took account of the 10 Ofsted questionnaires returned by staff. There were no parental views recorded on the online questionnaire, Parent View, so she took account of those the school had sought.

Inspection team

Prue Rayner, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Southend YMCA Community School is an alternative provision free school which provides secondary education for students in Key Stage 4 who, by reason of illness, disability, social, emotional or mental health issues, require alternative educational arrangements to ensure they receive an education which meets their needs.
- Sponsored by the Southend YMCA charity organisation, the school opened in September 2013 in temporary accommodation. Staff and students moved into the new purpose-built school in April 2015. There was no predecessor school; it replaces part-time additional provision for students, at risk of exclusion from school, to meet growing local need. There are currently 35 students on roll; the school is working towards being able to meet its capacity of 50 students.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average. This is additional government funding provided for children who are looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- One student has an education, health and care plan. The school does not identify any other students as having special educational needs.
- The vast majority of students are of White British heritage.
- Places at the school are commissioned by Essex County Council, Southend Borough Council and local secondary schools. Most students arrive at the start of Year 11; however, some start in Year 10. The school meets local needs flexibly and this enables students who need to, to start at any time during the year.
- The school has just started a breakfast club for students. Extra provision is made in after-school activities and during the holidays.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and further raise students' attainment by ensuring staff:
 - provide appropriate feedback to students in lessons so they understand how well they are doing and move on quickly in their learning
 - plan challenging extension activities so that most-able students make rapid progress
 - set high standards for the presentation of students' work and encourage them to meet these
 - correct poor spelling and errors in grammar and punctuation with students as they are working.
- Further the leadership and management of the school by:
 - strengthening strategic planning so that targets for improvement are clear and all staff with leadership roles have clearly defined responsibilities and are accountable for improvements in the areas they lead
 - ensuring governors rigorously question and monitor the impact of actions taken to improve teaching and the use of specific resources, for example the pupil premium, to improve achievement.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- As a result of the headteacher's vibrant, determined and uncompromising leadership, students thrive at the school and are supported well to make significant progress in their academic learning and in their personal and social development. Well assisted by the deputy headteacher and a diligent staff team, she has created a school with a culture dedicated to improving the life chances of its students.
- Leaders have ensured that the resources made available to the school have been used carefully to develop previous schemes in place to provide short-term alternative provision for students at risk of exclusion. This means that these students can now receive their full-time entitlement to education in provision that both nurtures their well-being and challenges them to succeed academically.
- The headteacher has made her high expectations of the quality of teaching and learning and of the support given to students absolutely clear. With the deputy headteacher, she monitors teaching and provides specific feedback to all staff on what they need to do to improve the impact of their work. Outcomes from monitoring and from the analysis of students' needs inform well-planned training. There is however, no summary of the quality of teaching against which governors can monitor improvement. Responsibilities for leading on aspects of improvement are not distributed widely enough to others with leadership roles.
- Leaders' improvement plans have been appropriate to drive the start-up of the school and to ensure the move to the new building, which is already enhancing learning opportunities. Self-evaluation is accurate and actions are taken very rapidly where aspects of provision do not meet the high standards set for all. Because the cycle of review and development is still at an early stage, longer term strategic plans do not identify specifically enough what intended successes are and how improvement towards them will be measured.
- Subjects students study are thoughtfully planned to give them equality of opportunity by achieving the best qualifications possible in the short time they are at the school. Priority is given to English language, English literature, mathematics and information and communication technology at GCSE level. Students are also offered the opportunity to achieve vocational qualifications essential to them being able to meet the challenges of successfully moving on to further education and living independently.
- These subjects are further enhanced by well-planned spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and the study of wider issues such as key historical events. These encourage students to explore and challenge their own values and beliefs and tackle discrimination. They explained to the inspector how much the school is supporting them to become more tolerant and respectful of the views of one other. A wide range of visits enhances their understanding of British values and culture and prepares them well for life in modern Britain. These include art galleries and museums, restaurants, the Royal Courts of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- Students receive detailed guidance and support for planning their future education and careers. Without exception, they explained how their predicted grades have improved significantly since starting at the school and what they are pursuing as future education and careers options. Staff support students well to understand the options open to them, to make applications and to attend interviews. The success rate of students who left the school in 2014 in remaining in their chosen courses was very high.
- Leaders monitor students' achievement, attendance and behaviour in detail; targets for improving students' personal development and their academic achievement are set. Rapid action is taken to address any aspect of a student's performance that falls below expectations. Staff engage with wider agencies very effectively to ensure the right support is in place to help students to attend school, behave well and make progress in their learning. A good example of this is the positive relationships established with staff at the local care home to help looked after children receive their entitlement to education as well as support to access further education and employment opportunities.
- Potential risks students face are understood well. A high priority is placed on ensuring all staff are trained to identify students at risk from harm and to respond appropriately. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and

leaders are relentless in their drive to engage wider services in their work to prioritise students' needs so they are protected and cared for.

- Parents' responses to questionnaires show that they are highly appreciative of the difference the school is making to their children's progress and behaviour. Leaders and staff make significant efforts to involve students' parents. For example, the headteacher visits parents who do not attend their children's consultations to ensure they understand how well they are doing.
- The headteacher makes good use of leaders in other schools to provide advice and support on her approaches to improvement and to confirm the work of the school, for example the accuracy of assessment. She makes careful decisions about the use of extra resources to improve students' achievement, for example the use of the pupil premium funding to pay for the Firebreak course which is planned in partnership with the Fire Service to teach students vital life skills.
- The school's breakfast club has just been established. In consultation with students a menu has been decided and costs agreed. Although in its infancy, it is already benefiting a number of students by ensuring they have a good start to the day.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have been instrumental in establishing the school. They are committed to achieving the vision of improving students' academic achievements and enhancing their life chances. They have the appropriate skills to manage finances, analyse the work of the school and to ensure the available resources are used well.
 - Governors' links with the main YMCA charity bring a further range of resources and expertise to support the school to meet statutory requirements, such as safeguarding and staffing advice, and to provide specialist help for students and their families.
 - Governors visit the school regularly; they understand students' overall achievements and through regular monthly meetings monitor the key elements of the school's work. They know that teachers' performance is evaluated and that staff do not receive additional pay unless students achieve well. Because they do not undertake rigorously planned monitoring against more detailed targets they do not have sufficient information to determine how successful specific aspects of the school's work are. For example, they do not know the particular aspects of teaching leaders are working to improve and although they know how the pupil premium funding is spent they do not know the detail of the difference it is making to students' achievements.
 - Governors' work and involvement is changing as the school becomes established: new appointments which include an experienced headteacher and a parent have just been made to enhance their understanding of the school's work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students behave well in lessons. They listen carefully and work hard. All students spoken to during the inspection said they are treated with respect and that teachers trust them. As a result, they develop confidence in themselves as learners, share ideas openly and make increasingly good progress. The hard work seen in lessons is not always reflected in the way they present their work or in the sometimes careless approach they have to writing and spelling.
- Careful thought has been put into providing high quality facilities that reflect the extent to which students are valued and cared for. Colourful murals represent famous personalities who have overcome difficulty and discrimination to achieve success raise the students' aspirations. Students say they are proud of their school and it is evident that they value their surroundings and treat their school environment with care.
- Students move around school and between lessons calmly. Most are punctual to lessons and those who did arrive late apologised politely and explained the reason. This shows the regard they develop for the adults they work with. They are given the opportunity to leave school independently at lunch times and manage this carefully, almost always arriving back to lessons on time. A significant number of students choose to remain in school sharing their break with other students and staff.

- Attendance is monitored meticulously. The headteacher has set targets for attendance for students that match those of students in mainstream schools. The local authority attendance officer works closely with school staff to follow up absence on a daily basis. Visits are made to students' homes when there are concerns, often by the headteacher and attendance officer together. As a result, attendance is improving and students recognise the importance of making a commitment to attend full time.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are very well supported through a range of provisions made by the school. These include mentoring and counselling where necessary and through being held to account for any behaviour that does not meet expectations. Students say this support is making a significant difference to how they feel about themselves. This improved self-esteem means that they can see a positive future for themselves and are motivated to achieve it.
- Students talked with understanding about different forms of bullying including racism and homophobia. The students spoken to expressed the sense of relief they feel because they are valued, listened to and treated with respect at this school. As one student said, 'People outside think we are a troubled school because of where we have come from. We're not; at heart we are one big family. Without Annette (the headteacher) I wouldn't be who I am today'.
- The learning opportunities provided for students help them understand the risks they are exposed to, how to manage them and how to seek help where necessary. Staff have excellent links with other agencies through which they provide more focused support when students are in vulnerable situations they cannot manage themselves. During the inspection, important information about the risks of child sexual exploitation were shared with staff so that they can identify those at risk and support students to protect themselves.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The headteacher, supported by governors, is carefully building a staff team who can manage the needs of students and also challenge them academically. Teachers plan lessons that interest students and meet their learning needs. 'Starter' activities provide immediate challenge to capture students' engagement and focus them in their learning.
- Teachers and learning support assistants work effectively together to keep students on task and to help them develop resilience and perseverance in their learning. Skilled assistants offer just the right amount of support to encourage students to be independent and to take responsibility for the outcomes of their work. Through this good planning, students learn to accept praise and criticism. In a media studies lesson, Year 11 students gave and received critical feedback on their work. One student whose work was graded 4 out of 10 by his peers accepted this criticism with good humour saying 'It's better to be honest and to know I have to improve – fair play!'
- Students who have been unsuccessful in the past make increased progress because teachers use accurate assessment information to identify gaps in their learning and plan tasks to fill these and to enable students to use their skills in practical ways. For example, in a Year 10 mathematics lesson, students calculated the area of a range of mathematical shapes, then used these skills to work out how much wallpaper they would need to decorate a room. Later they extended these skills to calculate the amount of compost needed to fill raised beds in the garden.
- Because of the low level of reading skills, students are encouraged to read in every lesson. In most of the lessons seen students read relevant texts with confidence, working hard with their teachers to understand new and unfamiliar vocabulary, which helped them make greater sense of their learning.
- Much of the students' progress is achieved because of the trust they have in the adults they work with. Where they face difficulties and start to disengage, skilled intervention brings them back on task and helps them to refocus their attention. In some lessons, teachers do not challenge the most-able students who are working quickly and who could achieve more.
- As the year progresses and students build confidence in their learning, teachers do not give enough

attention to increasing the challenge made to students to present their work with care, or to take care with their spelling and the structure of their writing. This means their work does not reflect the improved standards they are achieving well enough.

- Where necessary, the academy provides outreach provision to students whose experiences have resulted in them being unable to thrive in the classroom. For instance the engagement programme, developed with a local care home, uses teachers' expertise to plan work so that looked after children make progress in their learning. As a result they complete coursework and examinations which otherwise would not have been accessible to them.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start the school with levels of attainment well below those of students of similar age in mainstream schools. The vast majority have limited reading skills, gaps in their mathematical understanding and low levels of confidence in their learning and personal skills. Many students know they were predicted to fail their GCSE exams in their previous schools and speak with pride about the grades they are now on track to achieve.
- Leaders' aspirations are that all students will achieve at least a GCSE grade in English literature, English language, mathematics and information and communication technology, as well as vocational qualifications in personal skills which will help them succeed in future education and employment.
- As a result of the high expectations and the focused teaching they are given, almost all students make good and better progress towards achieving GCSE grades in English, mathematics and information and communication technology.
- The cohort that left the school in 2014 was too small for results to be reported nationally. However, the accumulated value of the qualifications they received was in line with that of alternative providers nationally. Over half of these students achieved GCSE qualifications in one or more subjects. All gained a place for further education or training and are continuing to pursue their studies.
- Teachers establish baseline assessments of students' achievements when they start at the school so they can plan to meet individuals' strengths and address the gaps in their learning quickly. Because teachers plan interesting ways to engage students in their work, they develop good learning habits, realise their studies are enjoyable and want to pursue them. In response to learning about Shakespeare's play, 'Macbeth', a student had commented in their English book 'I was amazed at the play. Shakespeare is a literacy genius. I didn't want to read the play at first but I really got into it'.
- Analysis of students' progress this year shows that in English a good proportion have made expected or better progress, in mathematics almost all students have made the expected progress and over half have made better than expected progress. The gap between disadvantaged students and their peers is not significant; three quarters of these students made outstanding progress in English. All students in this cohort have an application submitted for further education or training and the vast majority have secured a place.
- Because there is an expectation that all students can overcome the barriers to their learning, the school does not identify any students as having special educational needs unless they have an education, health and care plan. The number of these students is too small to report on because it would identify the individuals concerned. In a small number of instances, the most-able students are not challenged sufficiently and students' work does not reflect the same pride they show in their improving achievement.
- Leaders are establishing a wide range of challenging learning opportunities for students, for example, the 'Firebreak' training with the fire service. As a result, most students develop significant confidence in themselves as learners, knowledge of how to manage the challenges they face and a desire to succeed well during their short time at the school. As a student said, 'I don't even think about my behaviour now, I know what I'm doing and it just happens'.

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	139903
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	450180

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Free School - Alternative Provision
Age range of pupils	14–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ron Wright
Headteacher	Annette Turner
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01702 431676
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