

Freman College

Bowling Green Lane, Buntingford, Hertfordshire SG9 9BT

Inspection dates 12–13 November 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Strong leadership by the headteacher and her senior team has led to marked improvements since the last inspection. Outcomes have improved and in some cases these are outstanding.
- Highly effective governance is making a significant contribution to improving standards of education across the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- Middle leaders are skilled at tracking progress and intervene swiftly if students are at risk of underachievement. This leads to rapid progress for these students.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary. They respect their staff and their peers. This makes for a mature and harmonious learning environment.
- Students feel safe and well cared for; they develop greater self-belief as a result.
- Teachers plan lessons that are well matched to the needs of their students, enabling them to make good and, in some cases stronger progress.
- Students with disabilities and those who have special educational needs enjoy college life and make rapid progress. This is because their needs are very well provided for.
- Disadvantaged students make substantial progress due to the skilful academic and pastoral support that they receive.
- Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is strong. Students are tolerant, reflective and acutely aware of their responsibilities as young citizens.
- The information, advice and guidance provided are strengths. As a result, very high numbers of students move on to the next appropriate stage of education, employment or training.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The progress made by some sixth-form students is not as strong as it could be, given their high starting points.
- Some teachers do not make use of effective questioning to enable students to make the higher levels of progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
 - ensuring that existing outstanding practice is more consistently shared and developed among teachers
 - developing strategies to make the most of students' enthusiasm for learning, deepen their knowledge and understanding, and help them to make even stronger progress.

- Improve outcomes in the sixth form by:
 - developing teaching strategies that challenge students and extend their thinking so that they achieve the highest levels of progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The highly respected headteacher, ably supported by her senior leaders, has created a distinctive ethos in which each member of the college community is valued and has the opportunity to flourish. Students and adults understand and support this ethos. Together they have created a harmonious and focused learning environment which has led to significant improvements in achievement since the previous inspection.
- Leaders, including governors, have high ambitions for the college. They are restless to improve and have overseen significant developments in the quality of education since the last inspection. Their planning is informed by a good understanding of what needs to be done to build further on these improvements. This skilful approach has had a sustained impact across the curriculum.
- College leaders provide varied and highly effective training opportunities for staff. This training is based upon careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of leadership and teaching. Staff are fulsome in their appreciation of the opportunities afforded to them. The impact of this training is seen in the increasing confidence and high levels of motivation of staff across the college, as well as the improvement in the quality of teaching.
- Middle leaders are effective and work with enthusiasm to improve outcomes for their students. For example, these leaders have made the most of well-planned training to develop their skills in tracking the progress of students in their subject areas. They are using this information to plan and implement effective actions, which have led to more rapid progress for students, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- College leaders review the curriculum regularly to make sure that it has breadth and balance, and builds on the prior learning that has taken place. It is amended to meet the needs and interests of students and ensures equality of opportunity for all students. The comprehensive enrichment programme affords students opportunities such as cultural visits at home and abroad. As a consequence, the curriculum engages students and prepares them effectively for the next appropriate stage of their education.
- Students benefit from highly effective information, advice and guidance. A rich variety of activities, such as university visits, visiting speakers and interviews, equips students with the skills and knowledge to make informed choices about their futures. Very high proportions of students continue in education, employment or training at the end of both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is carefully woven into the curriculum across the college. 'Question time' sessions, featuring adults from a range of faiths and professions, deepen students' knowledge and understanding, while assemblies encourage reflection. Subjects such as art, history and geography promote the exploration of cultural diversity. Skilfully planned 'immersion' days (days dedicated to one subject or topic) provide students with opportunities to investigate themes such as health, resilience and life skills sensitively and maturely.
- Equal care is taken in providing opportunities for students to explore British values. For example, democracy was a central feature of the college's recent personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) day. The impact of this provision is evident in the high levels of tolerance, respect and understanding demonstrated by students.
- Leaders ensure that the college's pupil premium funding has a significant impact on the achievement of disadvantaged students. The funding is skilfully used to overcome potential barriers to learning for these students. The programme includes after-school sessions, support for families and additional resources. This has led to rapid increases in attainment and progress for these students.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because the strategies that are having such a positive impact on achievement in Key Stage 4 have not improved outcomes to the same extent in the sizeable sixth form, in particular in securing the strongest progress at A level.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is very effective in its work. Led by an experienced and determined Chair of the Governing Body, it lays out a clear strategic direction and provides strong support and challenge to the college's senior leaders. Governors add to their knowledge of the college through visits, discussions with staff and presentations by subject leaders.
 - Governors are provided with detailed information about the work of the college. They analyse this with care, using local and national information to assure themselves of the strengths and weaknesses in academic performance. Evidence seen on inspection indicates that governors ask pertinent questions of the information that is presented to them.

- A smaller committee of governors ensures that the college’s performance management policy is followed effectively. They make sure that targets and salary progression are clearly aligned to the outcomes achieved by students.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The college’s safeguarding provision meets statutory requirements. Leaders ensure that records are carefully maintained and training is frequent. Adults in school are well trained. They are clear on how to identify and raise concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching is consistently good and sometimes better. As a consequence, very many students make good or better progress across the curriculum.
- Teachers make effective use of their strong subject knowledge to enrich lessons and sustain the interest of students. For example, this was a feature of each Year 10 English lesson seen during the inspection. In these lessons, teachers drew upon interesting examples from their wider knowledge and enabled students to make good progress in their analysis of unseen poetry.
- Teachers have high expectations of what their students can achieve. They systematically set challenging targets and plan lessons that are well suited to the needs and capabilities of their students. Students are keen to learn and respond well to these high expectations.
- The positive and respectful relationships between students and teachers, as well as among students, are a significant feature in almost all lessons. Attitudes are positive, leading to a strong focus on learning across all subjects and enabling students to make good progress. In the words of one student, ‘The best thing about college is the teachers’.
- Teachers apply the college’s feedback and assessment policy well. They provide opportunities for students to respond to the clear and helpful comments that have been provided. For example, students in a Year 11 art lesson explained with pride and clarity how they had improved their painting skills and their grades by adopting the techniques suggested by their teacher.
- Teaching assistants are highly effective in their work. Drawing upon the skills developed in their training and the information that they receive about each lesson, they challenge students with skilful questioning. As a result, the students whom they support make strong progress. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson the thoughtful and careful prompting by a teaching assistant enabled a student to make stronger progress, much to his obvious delight.
- The setting and completion of homework are carefully tracked. Students are aware that their homework is monitored and explained that this is followed up with rigour. Evidence seen on inspection indicates that this is extending students’ knowledge across a range of subjects.
- The impact of a well-led and managed programme to develop students’ reading and writing skills is evident across the college. This has led to an improvement in the quality of writing and an improvement in attitudes to reading. Not all teachers apply the college’s clear policy on the assessment of literacy. As a result, students can make mistakes that are uncorrected and then repeated.
- Inconsistent use of higher level questioning on the part of teachers can slow students’ progress. In the stronger lessons, such as a Year 12 geography lesson, the teacher’s skilful questioning helped students to quickly gain a good understanding of the topic that they were covering and, in this case, to ‘think like a geographer’. However, examples were seen where teachers did not provide enough time for students’ responses or moved on too quickly to another topic. Consequently, they did not establish whether all students had understood the concept being discussed and this slowed students’ progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The college’s work to promote students’ personal development and welfare is outstanding. Students thrive in an environment where they feel safe, cared for and valued. The overwhelming majority of parents feel that their children are well looked after and this was confirmed by the evidence seen on inspection.
- Students are proud members of the college community and respond well to the high expectations set by leaders and other adults. They enjoy their life at the college and respect the adults whom they work with. Students speak with appreciation about the range of activities that help them to develop healthy lifestyles,

build their confidence and develop their resilience. The impact of these activities can be seen in students' positive attitudes to many aspects of college life.

- Students are able to talk about the skills and knowledge they have had the opportunities to develop to keep themselves safe. For example, students are clear about what precautions to take when using the internet.
- Attendance, including that of different groups of students, has improved since the last inspection and is now higher than the national average. The number of students who are persistently absent has also fallen and is now low.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Behaviour in lessons is typified by good humour, hard work and respectful relationships. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on personal relationships, inspectors observed students listening intently to each other's views and responding in a mature and sensitive way.
- Students are quick to respond to teachers' instructions and waste little time between learning activities. Evidence seen on inspection indicates that disruption to learning is extremely rare. When it does occur, it is met with disapproval by other students and swiftly dealt with by staff.
- Students move purposefully to lessons and arrive on time and ready to learn. They behave with courtesy and respect at break and lunchtimes. They are confident when speaking with their peers and these interactions are often characterised by tolerance and warmth. When meeting visitors, students go out of their way to be helpful and cheerfully explain why they enjoy attending college.
- Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that bullying is a highly unusual occurrence. This was confirmed in discussions with students, almost all of whom could not recall any incidents of bullying. They explained that were bullying to occur, they have faith that it would be dealt with effectively by adults at the college.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Cohorts enter this 14–19 college in Year 9 with attainment that is broadly in line with the national average. They complete Key Stage 4 having attained levels that are significantly higher than expected nationally. However, outcomes are not outstanding as students in the sixth form do not achieve the same impressive rates of progress given their high starting points.
- Since the last inspection, progress has strengthened for almost all groups of students and is significantly above the national average in many cases. Current progress across the curriculum is good or better in almost all subjects and in each year group. Current numbers making expected progress in English and mathematics are higher than the national averages, as they were in the previous two years. Students who are of middle ability make outstanding progress.
- The progress that disadvantaged students make has increased sharply since the last inspection. They have closed the gaps with their peers nationally and in school due to the carefully crafted support that they receive. This accelerated progress is particularly marked in English and mathematics.
- The progress of the more able has strengthened since the previous inspection and is above average. Evidence seen in lessons, work scrutiny and school assessment information indicates that this stronger progress is continuing.
- Students with disabilities and those who have special education needs, including students in the sixth form, are making strong progress from their individual starting points. This is due to the excellent support that is provided for them by teachers and the staff who support them.
- Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They have ambitious plans and very high numbers of students move on to further education, employment or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leaders have ensured that 16–19 study programmes are tailored to meet the needs of students. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, and have taken effective action to strengthen provision.

- Programmes of study build upon students' previous learning and are appropriate to their interests and future plans. For example, the more-able students are able to access additional qualifications that deepen their understanding and develop their skills of planning, analysis and independent working. This is leading to an increase in the number of more-able students achieving the higher grades at AS and A level.
- Students who join the sixth form without at least a GCSE C grade in English or mathematics are provided with effective support and the majority make good progress towards or attain these grades.
- The college gives students access to a wide range of opportunities for work-related learning which complements their programmes of study, widens their understanding of post-education options and raises their aspirations. Students are encouraged to undertake a period of work experience in a profession that matches their interests or plans. Students speak with enthusiasm about having spent time working with paramedics, in education settings and in the creative arts.
- Information, advice and guidance are very effective. Students have opportunities to visit universities, hear from a wide range of professionals, including former college students, and have interviews with careers advisers. Consequently, almost all students have high aspirations for their future and progress into higher education, employment or training. Retention levels are high.
- Students speak with great maturity and pride about their sixth form and its powerful community ethos. They value the care that is taken to provide them with a broad range of leadership roles. They proudly wear their prefect badges and enjoy the opportunities to work with students from Years 9 to 11. Students are acutely aware of their responsibilities as the oldest students in the college. For example, students spoke warmly about being part of an English mentoring programme, where they help younger students to improve their literacy skills.
- Attendance is high and behaviour exemplary. Students are well cared for in the sixth form. Students told inspectors that they could approach any member of staff if they had a problem. Students appreciate the range of activities that successfully nurtures their personal development and prepares them for life beyond college. These activities include assemblies that focus on themes such as the responsible use of social media, cookery sessions, curriculum vitae writing and mock interviews.
- The most effective teaching encourages students to develop the skills and the confidence to tackle challenging activities that are well matched to their capabilities. For example, in a Year 12 drama lesson, students were able to critique each other's work using the correct technical language and so deepen their understanding of the dramatic techniques of comedy.
- Teaching and learning are not outstanding across the college's 16–19 study programmes because teachers do not always expect enough from their students. This is reflected, for example, in the way that some teachers pose questions and accept the first response without using follow-up questions to assess students' learning or probe and deepen their understanding. The strong progress that students make at Key Stage 4 is subsequently not fully extended in the sixth form.
- Outcomes are improving and are good. From their individual starting points, Year 13 students make progress that is broadly in line with that expected. Year 12 students do much better than this, making significantly better progress than seen nationally. Standards are above average in both academic and vocational qualifications. Evidence from school assessment information, lessons and work scrutiny indicates that this trend of improvement is being maintained. However, outcomes in a minority of subjects, often those with small group sizes, are still below that which could be expected.

School details

Unique reference number	137002
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10005599

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of students	14–19
Gender of students	Mixed
Gender of students in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	899
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Martin
Headteacher	Helen Loughran
Telephone number	01763 271818
Website	www.freman.org.uk
Email address	admin@freman.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 January 2012

Information about this school

- Freman College is slightly smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Students join the college from Year 9.
- The college does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below average. This is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- The majority of students are White British.
- The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The college meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 52 lessons, including 10 joint observations with senior staff.
- Members of the inspection team met with governors, staff and students from each year group.
- Inspectors observed students arriving at college, in lessons, in tutor periods, in assemblies, at break- and lunchtimes, and when moving around the college between lessons.
- The inspection team considered 228 parent responses to Parent View, the online survey for parents provided by Ofsted, together with 77 free text responses from parents.
- Inspectors took account of 121 student responses to the online survey, along with one free text response.
- Inspectors analysed the 40 staff responses to the online survey.
- The inspection team scrutinised documentation which included: the college's self-evaluation and development plans, minutes of governors' meetings, school assessment information, safeguarding records, and college policies and procedures.

Inspection team

John Lucas, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anthony Sharpe	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Copping	Ofsted Inspector
Vivien Corrie-Wing	Ofsted Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Janet Lewis	Ofsted Inspector

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