

Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre

Maypole Road, Tiptree, Colchester CO5 0EW

Inspection dates	19–20 April 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and governors have established a clear vision around the motto 'achieve more, belong more, be more'. The school has attained increasingly high standards in many areas.
- The headteacher, supported well by the deputy headteacher and senior team, has been successful in improving the quality of teaching and middle leadership.
- Teaching is good. Most teachers have strong subject knowledge, use questions skilfully and make thorough use of assessment to plan effectively.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability make very good progress in most areas because they are taught effectively.
- Leaders and staff provide excellent pastoral care which goes above and beyond. Consequently, personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The curriculum is created to meet the specific needs of each pupil. It supports very well the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form is good. Learners are achieving well from their starting points. They are supported by all staff through good-quality teaching, welfare and careers guidance. As a result, they are moving on to appropriate next stages in their education or employment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teaching does not help the most-able pupils to achieve top grades.
- Despite good support by the school, a small number of pupils are too reliant on staff to know how to behave.
- Not enough learners in the sixth form use their personal study time effectively.
- Governors do not question sixth-form information as thoroughly as they do in other areas of the school's performance.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching sufficiently challenges the most-able pupils to achieve the very best grades, especially in geography and modern foreign languages.
- Improve the self-discipline of some pupils so that they show maturity and resilience when not under the direction of adults.
- Continue to improve the achievement in the sixth form through:
 - ensuring that sixth-form learners make better use of their personal study time
 - greater governor challenge over all aspects of the provision.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has demonstrated an unrelenting passion for creating a 'no excuses' culture where all pupils, no matter what their background, can achieve. Staff and pupils understand and appreciate the work of leaders to improve the life-chances of pupils.
- Leaders and governors actively seek 'critical friends' in the form of the local authority and other high-performing schools, to look at the school's work and provide ideas for improvement. The local authority's standards and excellence secondary commissioner has worked with leaders and given them direct challenge on teaching and results. Leaders have used this advice effectively to continue to review their provision and improve achievement.
- Leaders and governors skilfully invest time and money, which is creating strong leadership for the future. Next-stage professional development is available for staff who are successful in their roles, such as those who are aspirant senior leaders. The senior team overcome recruitment issues in subjects through strategic work with the local training partnership and through developing their own future teachers. As a consequence, the vast majority of staff are incredibly positive and proud to be working at Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre. They say that expectations are high but that they are supported to do the best job that they can.
- The monitoring of teaching is effective. Leaders and governors review lots of information about pupils' current achievement and have developed a performance management system which allows them to take account of this. Staff are very clear on the range of targets that they must meet if they are to get salary increases. Training is well matched to the needs identified in the performance management process. Good teachers are given opportunities to share their ideas with colleagues on a regular basis. As a result, teaching is effective and constantly improving.
- Most middle leaders are effective. They focus on pupil achievement, monitor teaching and act quickly to support those pupils who are struggling or not making enough effort. Leaders have worked hard to recruit and train high-quality middle leadership and this is significantly improving pupil outcomes in many areas, including English, mathematics and science.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding, and the other additional income received by the school, is used very effectively. Pupils have access to provision such as one-to-one reading services, mentors, counsellors, guidance teams and alternative providers who help them to be successful. The school also uses this money for a music instrument 'loaning' and free tuition scheme, trips and visits, basic school equipment and sometimes uniform. This funding is being used well to make sure that disadvantaged pupils get the same chances as their classmates.
- Leaders have created a curriculum that gives pupils a strong balance of subjects. Pupils have full access to any subject in the curriculum, whatever their ability. Information, advice and guidance for pupils are very specific and help them to prepare for an appropriate next stage in their education, training or employment. The carefully organised alternative provision, accessed by a small number of pupils, is highly relevant to their individual needs and ambitions for the future. Pupils participate in a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and are enthusiastic about these.
- Pupils are ready for life in modern Britain. They speak confidently about the guidance they receive to be active citizens in society, for example in their citizenship and religious education lessons and through assemblies. Pupils engage with external speakers and drama productions on a range of themes, as well as undertaking charity and community work. They are taught to develop 'cooperative' relationships and staff model these behaviours for them throughout the school day. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are central to the school's strategic work and have a clear understanding of what goes on. They visit frequently to seek out answers to the questions they raise in meetings.
 - The governing body receives regular and detailed information about pupils' achievement and challenge senior leaders, particularly around key stage 4 outcomes and use of the pupil premium money. Governors do not show as much thoroughness in their evaluation of key stage 5 information, especially in assessing how far it meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes.
 - They have a wide range of expertise which they use well to hold school leaders to account. They are particularly strong in their work on finances and key stage 4 outcomes. The governor with specific

responsibility for safeguarding ensures that statutory requirements are met and that staff are trained in line with these requirements.

- They are clear on how performance management works and ask pertinent questions when reviewing the salary recommendations. They challenge the outcomes of these pay awards after a thorough analysis of the evidence.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are trained on the most up-to-date areas of statutory duties. Pupils access a wealth of curriculum, pastoral and online guidance that ensures that they know how to keep themselves safe. The work of the deputy headteacher, who acts as the designated safeguarding lead, is thorough and precise. He works closely with relevant external agencies to ensure that the most-vulnerable pupils receive effective and timely support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is typically good.
- Teachers use their thorough knowledge of the subjects they teach and the curriculum to plan lessons which meet the needs of most pupils and ensure that time is used well. One example was in an English lesson, where the teacher used her understanding of typical examination mistakes to tackle pupils' misconceptions about a Shakespearian text. The class engaged with this rapidly and were able to move on to the next task promptly.
- Teachers use questions well. They do not accept the first answer that they get and will continue to ask more questions to make pupils develop their answers. This was seen in a Year 7 history lesson where the teacher used pupils' own queries to bounce questions around the whole class, which explored the topic in more depth. This resulted in all pupils being able to write at length and with detail and enthusiasm.
- Teachers use a range of assessment techniques to feed back to pupils so that they can improve. Most pupils engage with this verbal and written feedback and can discuss how it has helped them. This was strong in many areas, but especially in English, history and science.
- Teachers set homework using an online system which provides good communication to parents about what their children should be studying at home. Pupils and parents are generally positive about the homework provided. However, a significant minority of parents would like to see an improved quality and quantity provided by some teachers.
- Learning support assistants work closely with teachers to ensure that the needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability are met. Staff consistently use a 'passport' in lessons to communicate about strategies that support the pupil. This means that pupils with particular needs get the right additional help, and can learn well.
- Reading is given a priority in the curriculum and this is improving pupils' ability to understand more of what they are reading. They have access to good-quality reading material and where necessary are prompted by teachers to challenge themselves in their choices of book. Teachers indicate on their classroom doors the books that they are reading. This encourages pupils to engage with staff about literature and words. However, while the most-able pupils say they read material provided by teachers, not enough read outside of school, either for enjoyment or around their subjects.
- Teaching does not always meet the needs of the most able. Although school information indicates an improvement in the outcomes for these pupils, there is still some teaching that does challenge them enough or misses opportunities to ensure that they can achieve the highest grades of A and A*.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are happy, courteous and friendly. They are very keen to help and thoroughly enjoy the many chances to be responsible for something in the school. One example is the school council, who are a democratically elected, highly articulate, eager group. They actively champion the rights of the pupils and are clear about the things that they have changed for the better. They are positive about the direct contact that they have with the headteacher and the opportunities he gives them to voice their opinions.
- Pupils are active citizens in their support of the community. They are involved in a large number of charity and community events, including fundraising for Save the Children, Great Ormond Street, Cancer

Research UK, St Helena Hospice and many others. Many pupils participate in community events with the guidance and support of the school, which helps build their confidence to talk and work with people of different backgrounds and beliefs.

- Pupils are highly supportive of each other. Cooperative learning is a regular feature of lessons. This was seen in a Year 7 English lesson in the school's e-learning centre where pupils supported one another in their computer skills to research Greek mythological figures in innovative ways. Equally, new pupils also say they feel very welcomed and supported by their classmates and adults. As a result, pupils who join the school later in the year settle quickly and learn well.
- The school also offers pupils the opportunity to develop skills in after-school provision. Pupils are enthused about the vast array of high-quality clubs, trips, visits, school performances and the links to Colchester United Football Club. Pupils appreciate the instrument loaning scheme and additional after-school free music lessons in the flute, oboe, trumpet, violin and more. Pupils say that this is a valuable opportunity to develop an ability to play an instrument that they may not otherwise have access to.
- Most parents, pupils and staff believe that the support provided by the school in both the personal and academic lives of its pupils is beyond compare: 'They never give up on anyone.' Pupils speak very highly about the work of the school to provide welfare support, especially the work of the 'learning relationship co-ordinators', who, in the school's own words, help with 'the complex job of growing up'. The work of this team of people at key stage 3 and 4 is very successful in supporting pupils to make sense of a range of issues through well-managed and highly personalised care.
- Pupils develop a thorough understanding of the varying opportunities available to them and, alongside their parents, make informed choices about their next steps. This is because information, advice and guidance are carefully adapted for each pupil. It takes into account their academic potential, personalities, aspirations and emotional resilience. Pupils commented on the work-related learning and alternative education co-ordinator constantly throughout the inspection, especially in her persistence in making sure that no pupil gets left behind in their choices about their future.
- The provision for teaching pupils about keeping safe is very effective, and pupils agree that they feel safe at Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre. Although a small minority of parents expressed a concern about bullying, pupils say that bullying is rare and when it does occur, it is dealt with effectively by staff.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most pupils conduct themselves well and show self-discipline. They move around the corridors calmly, with occasional cramming where space is more limited. Inspectors saw examples of older pupils reminding younger ones about the staircase systems in a calm and authoritative manner.
- Pupils respect the learning environment. Displays are extensive, well maintained and highly attractive. Litter is rare and graffiti non-existent.
- Most lessons are calm and purposeful. Although a small minority of parents and pupils identify concerns about behaviour in lessons, most said that behaviour is good, and that where poor behaviour occurs, it is dealt with swiftly.
- Most pupils take responsibility for their conduct. While some pupils do not enter the school with an understanding of how to behave appropriately, the school's consistent use of their cooperative model of behaviour helps develop pupils' ability to make the right choices. This is through an understanding of why good behaviour and effort is important.
- There are still a small core of pupils who respond to staff requests promptly but do not show the same levels of effort and conduct when they are not under the direct instruction of adults.
- Pupils value their education and attend well because they enjoy school. Attendance is good and persistent absence has reduced for disadvantaged pupils. This was supported by the attendance in lessons over the two days on the inspection.
- Permanent exclusion is extremely rare and fixed-term exclusions are low. The school uses internal systems to deal with most poor behaviour so that these pupils can work with staff on finding ways to improve their future behaviour. Records show that the number of pupils being placed into this system is reducing. Older pupils say that behaviour has improved since they started at the school and that the staff reaction to any poor behaviour is rapid and effective.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- In 2015, the overall achievement of pupils across subjects was better than the national average. Most pupils achieved well in subjects such as English, mathematics and science. This is because the curriculum is well planned to build on prior learning and teaching is effectively meeting the needs of pupils.
- Overall achievement for the least able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs or disability is strong. From their different starting points, these pupils make better progress than other pupils in the school, and nationally.
- Overall attainment is high. Pupils enter the school with broadly average prior attainment in English and mathematics. The proportion who achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was much better than the national average.
- Achievement for the most able, and for all pupils in languages and humanities, is below national averages. Current school information indicates an improvement in these areas and that the additional support that they have put in place is making a difference. However, not enough teaching is challenging the most able, especially in geography and areas of modern foreign languages, to achieve the best grades.
- Achievement in a range of vocational, artistic, physical and technical subjects is also higher than national averages. Attainment in key stage 4 was higher than average in health and social care, food technology, resistant materials, textiles, information technology, media studies, dance and sports studies.
- The provision for pupils who attend part-time alternative education is good. Pupils' achievement and welfare is monitored closely and leaders are skilled in finding good courses to match pupils' interests. As a result, pupils access courses that are highly relevant to them and achieve qualifications and training that are very pertinent to their career aspirations.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Owing to high-quality impartial advice, a wealth of support and mentoring services and a wide range of guidance, pupils are clear on the range of choices and make ones that are highly appropriate. Almost all pupils go on to appropriate next stages in employment, apprenticeships or education, and the school's own sixth form ensures that those who may be vulnerable can have a study programme matched to their interest and need.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The sixth form is well led. The school ensures that pupils have a full access to study programmes that are relevant to their needs. Leaders regularly reflect on their provision and adapt it to ensure that courses are relevant and challenging. For example, their partnership with other schools to access courses at Essex University is widening the subject choices available to learners. The curriculum gives level 2 learners access to try the harder level 3 qualifications. The targets set are aspirational, which demands very high expectations about what should be achieved.
- Teaching is typically good in the sixth form. Most staff use assessment information, examination requirements and knowledge of their learners to create activities which make them work hard. In one Year 13 BTEC lesson, highly specific feedback enabled learners to move through the work confidently. In another lesson, Year 13 Physics, a routine use of homework and past examination papers was helping them to understand different types of question.
- Learners are achieving better grades in GCSE resits for English and mathematics. Lessons are well attended and the quality of teaching is good. This is resulting in improving grades. There are a few learners who are studying post-16 courses who need to resit other GCSE subjects, such as science, so that they can get the job of their choice. Leaders give them this chance by providing timetabled lessons and support.
- Personal development and welfare is strong in the sixth form. Learners receive advice that is impartial and very relevant to them. It allows them to get into the appropriate next stages in training, education or employment. Learners were glowing in their praise for the work of the sixth-form team and the work-related learning coordinator to help them make the right choices for their future.
- Learners, many who come from other schools, are happy and well looked after in the sixth form. They are enthusiastic about what teachers do to help them improve their grades. They feel that facilities, including the sports facilities, the silent study room and access to computers, are useful. Learners are clear that the

quality of induction, support, advice, teaching and feedback is very helpful to them individually. Leaders monitor those who are new to the sixth form carefully to make sure that they settle and achieve.

- Learners are well prepared for the next stages in their life. Work experience, community volunteering, enterprise events, charity fundraising and much more gives them access to the real world. This builds their confidence and skills to participate in society. They meet their tutors regularly and the study programmes are created around getting learners ready to be the next generation of adults in modern Britain. In one assembly seen during the inspection, external speakers were invited in to talk about the upcoming referendum. Evidence seen by inspectors indicates that this type of experience is common at the school.
- Learners act as role models in the school. They are involved in an array of school activities which makes them a regular presence around the younger pupils, including support of reading schemes with Year 7, one-to-one mentoring, lunchtime supervision and tutoring GCSE pupils.
- Some learners are not using their own study time in school to expand on the good efforts they make in lessons. Although they make use of the range of study facilities, too many hang around the areas with little purpose, or allow themselves to become sidetracked by other distractions.
- Learners achieve well in the sixth form from their varied starting points. Although historically, vocational courses show stronger outcomes than academic, this gap is closing rapidly. Leaders have established strong line management systems which set high targets and monitor teaching closely. This means that they can quickly identify those who are struggling and help them catch up.
- Governors do not question enough the sixth-form information they have access to. They do not challenge leaders sufficiently about learners' outcomes and progress. As a result, governors are not able to pinpoint precisely what is needed to improve the sixth form as well as they have in other areas of their work.

School details

Unique reference number	137241
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10012434

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1145
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Oldham
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Miles Bacon
Telephone number	01621 816526
Website	www.thurstable.essex.sch.uk
Email address	admin@thurstable.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 October 2014

Information about this school

- Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre is a larger than average-sized secondary school
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average.
- The proportions of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after) is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special education needs or disability is below average.
- A small number of pupils attend work-related courses at a small range of registered providers locally.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 45 lessons, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed senior leaders giving feedback to teachers on the quality of learning in their lessons.
- Members of the inspection team met with governors, the local authority, nominated staff and pupils from each year group.
- Inspectors observed pupils in lessons, in assembly, at break and lunchtime, and when moving around the school between lessons.
- The inspection team considered 175 responses from Parent View, the Ofsted online survey for parents.
- Inspectors took account of 44 staff responses to the online survey.
- The inspection team scrutinised documents which included the school's self-evaluation documents, the school's action planning, minutes of governors' meetings, the headteacher's report to governors, school assessment information, safeguarding records and school policies and procedures.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the school uses, including the website and information sent to and from parents and other stakeholders.

Inspection team

Kim Pigram, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Helen Loughran	Ofsted Inspector
John Wilson	Ofsted Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector

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