

The Spires College

Westlands Lane, Torquay, Devon TQ1 3PE

Inspection dates

19–20 April 2017

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 principal is ambitious for all pupils and determined to see them succeed. Her relentless focus on raising the quality of teaching has improved the school substantially. As a result, pupils' achievement is rising rapidly.
- Pupils' progress in 2016 was in line with the national average. Pupils' progress has improved and is now above average across a range of subjects.
- The proportion of pupils attaining grade C or better in both English and mathematics GCSE rose in 2015 and again in 2016 so that it was close to the national average. Current pupils' attainment continues this strong upward trend.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and consequently they are able to develop pupils' understanding well in their specialist areas.
- Teachers are adept at assessing pupils' understanding and base future learning on an accurate picture of pupils' needs. In a small number of cases, however, assessment is not used as effectively and teaching is not well targeted.
- Sixth form students develop strong employability skills. Virtually all students secure places in education, employment or training when they leave.
- Pupils show pride in their school. They wear their uniform smartly.
- This is an inclusive school. Relationships between teachers and pupils are characterised by care and commitment. Consequently, pupils of all backgrounds feel welcomed and respected.
- At most times, pupils' behaviour is good, they enjoy lessons and strive to succeed. On occasion, when teaching does not capture pupils' interest, some pupils become inattentive and give up.
- Governors have an accurate view of the school's performance. They work effectively with leaders to ensure the school continues to improve.
- Senior leaders have dealt with previous weaknesses in teaching. They understand teachers' development needs well and provide high-quality training. Teaching has improved most rapidly in mathematics and humanities.
- Middle leaders are taking more responsibility for developing teaching in their areas. Improvements have not been as fast in languages and science as in other areas; therefore, pupils' progress has not risen as sharply in these subjects.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by:
 - helping teachers to replicate the best assessment practices in the school and so match learning closely to the needs of pupils
 - ensuring that teaching consistently motivates pupils and holds their attention.
- Improve the quality of middle leadership to be consistently strong across all subjects, leading to faster progress in languages and science.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by developing their resilience so they keep trying and do not give up easily when faced with difficult tasks.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal is relentless in her pursuit of raised standards. She communicates her vision clearly to everyone in the school community so that no one is in any doubt about her expectations. Her astute leadership has led to marked improvements in pupils' academic achievement and their personal development.
- Most senior leaders have been appointed since the previous inspection. They have clear roles and fulfil them energetically, reflecting the principal's drive for improvement. Leaders' work to raise the quality of teaching has had a clear impact and is resulting in much-improved progress for all groups of pupils.
- The senior leaders' monitoring and self-evaluation programme is rigorous and well established throughout the school. Consequently, senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and develop ambitious plans for further improvement. These plans are implemented in most, but not all, subject areas.
- Teaching is improving because senior leaders set high expectations and model good practice. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching closely and, through an effective performance management process, identify specific development targets for all staff. This process is applied consistently and so less effective teaching is challenged robustly and historic weaknesses have been tackled.
- Middle leaders' morale is generally high because senior leaders hold them to account, but also encourage their contribution to development planning. For example, fixed-term secondments to the senior leadership team allow middle leaders to gain wider experience. Middle leaders have achieved notable improvements in pupils' progress in mathematics and humanities; however, they have had less impact in science and languages.
- Teachers are regularly involved in professional development activities both within and outside the school. For example, 'Friday focus' briefings allow teachers to quickly share innovative teaching approaches. These activities often draw on the latest research and have produced a growing sense of collaboration which is contributing to teachers' increasing motivation.
- Senior leaders have modified the curriculum to provide a better balance between academic and vocational subjects. This has raised the aspirations of pupils. Year-on-year, more pupils are studying, and successfully attaining, the academic subjects which make up the English Baccalaureate. The key stage 3 curriculum gives pupils a good grounding in the key skills they need to succeed. Senior leaders are passionate about the place of artistic and creative subjects in the curriculum; they ensure that pupils are given a broad experience as they move up through the school. A wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including many sports clubs, enriches the curriculum well.
- Pupils are provided with many opportunities to think carefully about what it means to be British through the personal, social and health education programme. Hence, they have a good understanding of the law, democratic processes and the need to respect different cultures and religions.

- Senior leaders give pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development a high priority. They have demonstrated this by appointing a member of staff with specific responsibility for this area. This has ensured it is well coordinated and seen by all staff as a key part of the school's work.
- Leaders at all levels have successfully used additional funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who start in Year 7 with low levels of attainment. Teachers are increasingly skilled at using strategies to support those pupils at risk of making slower progress. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making much greater progress than previous cohorts.
- A new special educational needs coordinator has recently been appointed. She has sustained the previous strong leadership of this area of the school's work and ensured that extra funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to be used effectively. Consequently, these pupils, including those who access the specialist provision for hearing impairment, make at least as good progress as other pupils in the school, and often better.
- Parents are satisfied with the standard of education the school provides. Senior leaders have increased opportunities for parents to engage with the school through, among other strategies, developing the use of social media. Senior leaders acknowledge that parents could have a greater voice in shaping the future of this rapidly improving school. However, the vast majority of parents would already recommend this school to other parents.

Governance of the school

- The chair of the governing body and all the governors are new to their roles since the previous inspection. They are passionate about their work, highly skilled and committed to the community the school serves. They know the school well and have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, they base their improvement strategy on sound understanding and challenge senior leaders effectively.
- Governors hold senior leaders to account closely for the performance of the school and challenge them over pupils' progress. For example, in the past, disadvantaged pupils did not make good progress. Governors ensured that the use of pupil premium funding was targeted more effectively and, subsequently, disadvantaged pupils' progress improved.
- Governors check that performance management arrangements for staff, including the principal, are effective. They ensure that suitable training, including safeguarding training, is provided so the skills of all staff are continually extended. This has been a key factor in improving the quality of teaching.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors have received safeguarding training and are fully aware of their responsibilities. Leaders and governors have established a vigilant culture where all staff see it as their primary role to keep pupils safe. Staff are clear about the procedures to follow should they have concerns about a pupil. Their training, regularly

updated, gives them a good awareness of the signs to look out for; for example, indications of extremist ideology.

- Pupils say that the school helps them to stay safe and that they feel safe. Prominent wall displays promote an appropriate understanding of various risks. School staff have developed constructive relationships with parents to keep pupils safe. Surveys of parents' views confirm that they believe their children are safe.
- Safeguarding policies are regularly reviewed and kept up to date. Checks on staff appointments fulfil statutory requirements. The school's record-keeping on all aspects of safeguarding is detailed and comprehensive. The school has strong links with other agencies, such as the local authority. Effective action to protect pupils is taken quickly when necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- There have been considerable improvements in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. Higher expectations of what pupils can achieve have become part of everyday life at the school.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and generally plan learning activities that challenge pupils well. For example, Year 9 pupils in mathematics were encouraged to develop arguments for and against contentious statements on the theme of probability. This activity, typical of many, generated lively debate which deepened pupils' understanding of the topic.
- Most teachers have a clear view of their pupils' understanding because they successfully gather and use accurate assessment information. However, in some subjects, for example science and languages, assessment information is not used as effectively. Consequently, some teaching in these areas is not matched closely to pupils' prior understanding and does not enable pupils to learn as rapidly.
- New procedures for providing feedback ensure that pupils are given consistent advice and know how to improve their work.
- Teachers set regular homework tasks which are appropriate for pupils' needs and help pupils to consolidate their learning at home. Most pupils and their parents agree that homework is used well to promote learning.
- The majority of parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire believe that their children are well taught. Many parents commented that the school provides a nurturing environment for pupils. However, some voiced concerns about the frequent use of supply teachers to cover for staff absence.
- Teachers are highly committed to the principle of inclusion that senior leaders consistently communicate to the whole school community. Hence, teaching gives opportunities for all pupils to thrive no matter what their background or current circumstances may be.
- Pupils receive consistent help with their literacy skills in different subject areas because teachers understand and follow a clear whole-school strategy. Senior leaders recognise, however, that there is less effective coordination of the teaching of numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered; for example, they readily hold doors open for each other and for adults. Leaders have established clear boundaries and so have been successful in creating a culture of respect and aspiration.
- Assemblies and tutorials are well planned and purposeful. Pupils are asked to reflect on the wider issues in society through a tutorial programme which prepares them well to take their place as responsible citizens when they leave the school.
- Key messages ensure that pupils understand the potential risks to their health and welfare. For example, the safe use of social media and the internet are consistently reinforced through the curriculum. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from those who have extremist views. The school is vigilant for signs of radicalisation.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying including online bullying. They say that bullying is not common and they have confidence in staff to deal with it effectively when it does happen. The majority of parents agree.
- Pupils value the extra help that members of staff provide. They know that there is always someone on hand to support their physical or emotional well-being. Consequently, pupils' attitudes to school and to themselves are increasingly positive.
- A cohesive programme of careers education prepares all pupils well for the next stage of their education, employment or training. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects are particularly prominent through, for example, the Tomorrow's Engineers Energy Scheme.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are proud to wear their uniform and this reflects the high standards that the school expects.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school is generally calm and courteous. Good relationships between pupils and staff have resulted in a positive atmosphere throughout the school.
- In the large majority of lessons pupils conduct themselves well. They listen carefully to each other and their teachers, and learn new ideas confidently. A small number of pupils are not as self-assured. When these pupils find work difficult their attention can wander and work remains unfinished.
- Pupils' motivation has risen as the result of improved teaching. Pupils who find good conduct more difficult are supported well by the learning intervention centre and this has resulted in fewer incidents of poor behaviour. The rate of exclusions, which was previously high, has declined sharply.
- Attendance rates are rising quickly as a result of a consistent and rigorous approach by all staff and are now close to the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance in particular has improved as a consequence of the well-targeted intervention the school

has used.

- The number of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen over the last year because of the school's efforts to re-integrate pupils who find it difficult to come to school. Senior leaders acknowledge that, although decreasing rapidly, the rate of persistent absence is still too high.
- Senior leaders keep close checks on pupils who attend off-site provision and ensure that these pupils are well looked after and behave well.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Last year, Year 11 pupils made progress from their starting points which was similar to the progress of all pupils nationally. Due to improvements in the quality of teaching, pupils currently in the school are making better progress than this. In most subject areas they are now making above-average progress.
- In 2016, pupils' progress in English was much stronger than their progress in mathematics. Since then, mathematics teaching has improved significantly and current pupils' progress in mathematics has risen to match their good progress in English.
- The proportion of pupils who attain good qualifications in both English and mathematics has risen year on year for three years. Teaching in key stage 3 is giving pupils a better grounding in the basic skills in both these subjects. Pupils are better placed to succeed in key stage 4 and to overcome the legacy of previous weaker teaching. The pattern of rising attainment is set to continue as a result.
- Pupils' attainment across eight GCSE subjects was comparable to the national average in 2016 even though many pupils started school with lower attainment than is found nationally. Current pupils are now making better progress and more of them are now on track to achieve at the higher grades in their GCSE subjects. This is particularly the case in history and geography.
- Pupils throughout the school are benefiting from teaching which is well planned. In key stage 3, pupils are given clear information about the ideas and skills they are expected to learn. This is helping pupils to make rapid gains in knowledge and understanding.
- The most able pupils' progress, including that of the most able disadvantaged pupils, increased significantly in 2016 compared to the previous year. A small number of pupils join Year 7 each year having been selected according to ability. Pupils' work and assessment information indicate that, as a consequence of greater expectations, these pupils are now being challenged effectively.
- Pupils who enter Year 7 with low levels of literacy and numeracy are well supported, allowing them to develop their skills quickly and catch up with their peers.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. The school's work to support these pupils is well organised and effectively led. Identification of pupils' individual needs is accurate and effective provision is in place to enable pupils to make good progress. A small number of pupils who have a hearing impairment benefit from specialist help; consequently, they too make good progress.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils made less progress than other pupils in the school. In 2016 there were significant differences between their progress in mathematics,

science and humanities and that of other pupils nationally. However, as a consequence of well-targeted intervention and creative use of extra funding, disadvantaged pupils' progress has risen sharply and is now close to the progress made by other pupils nationally.

- Pupils are given regular opportunities to read in school. They use these opportunities eagerly and, therefore, a culture of reading is developing strongly. Pupils read confidently and can discuss their favourite authors. The library is well used and large numbers of books are borrowed and enjoyed by pupils.
- The school ensures that the small number of pupils who attend off-site alternative provision are learning appropriately and making good progress from their different starting points.
- Underachievement has meant that in the past pupils have not been well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is no longer the case. As pupils' progress has improved, so have their opportunities. Pupils are now achieving well in relevant qualifications which will enable them to go on and realise their ambitions.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is undergoing a transition period; the curriculum is being refocused on academic programmes and student numbers are growing. The senior leader with responsibility for the sixth form is new to the role. He demonstrates genuine ambition for the students. The raised expectations across the school are now being seen in the sixth form.
- In 2016, students' progress on vocational courses was good. Students' progress on A-level courses, however, was not as strong but was still in line with the national average. Students currently studying A-level programmes are making above-average progress in a number of subjects, with a particular strength in media studies. Boys are now making much better progress than in 2016.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form has improved and is now effective. The move to more academic courses is better meeting the needs of students. They say they are being challenged to work hard across most subjects and their written work confirms this.
- Teaching is innovative and responsive to students' interests and aspirations. For example, in a media studies lesson students were intrigued by speculation about the impact journalists might have on the outcome of the general election. In other areas, however, teaching does not consistently challenge the most able students to excel because work is limited to short responses which do not extend learning sufficiently.
- Leaders monitor students' progress accurately through regular assessments based on exam board criteria. Consequently, any dips in progress are identified quickly. Teachers give their time freely to help students; they are always on hand to assist them and students greatly appreciate their commitment.
- The majority of students who join the sixth form come from the main school. Study programmes are now being better tailored to individual needs, and pupils in the main school receive good advice and guidance. This has contributed to the rising retention rate from Year 12 to Year 13. As one senior leader put it, 'We now have the right

students on the right courses.'

- Students receive good advice about their next steps. The careers education strategy, a strength in the main school, is equally effective in the sixth form. Leaders work closely with a number of organisations, including the Devon Education Business Partnership, to provide work experience and develop students' employability skills. As a result, students are well prepared for a wide range of destinations, including universities, apprenticeships and employment.
- Students' personal development and welfare is strong. The school provides a comprehensive programme of assemblies and tutorials. In response to this, students are confident about using social media and the internet while at the same time taking steps to keep themselves safe. Teachers' vigilance and consistent use of appropriate systems leads to effective safeguarding in the sixth form.
- Students behave well; they are mature and confident. Recent work by senior leaders to raise students' rate of attendance and improve punctuality has been successful. Each year a small number of international students join Year 12. This further enhances students' personal development and expands their horizons.
- Students who join the sixth form without having secured a C grade in GCSE English and/or mathematics receive specialist teaching and the majority make good progress towards improving their grade.

School details

Unique reference number	113526
Local authority	Torbay
Inspection number	10033141

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

Type of school	Other secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	893
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	131
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Hill
Principal	Alex Newton
Telephone number	01803 400660
Website	http://thespirescollege.com
Email address	enquiries@thespirescollege.com
Date of previous inspection	11–12 March 2015

Information about this school

- The governing body has changed substantially since the previous inspection.
- The principal was appointed in September 2014. The senior leadership team has changed significantly since then. Three vice-principals have been appointed.
- The school was renamed The Spires College in September 2015, having been previously known as Westlands School. A new uniform was introduced at that point.
- This school is an average-sized secondary school. It is a bilateral school; a small number of pupils are admitted each year on the basis of selection in addition to a majority comprehensive intake. It has a sixth form and hosts the local authority's

resource base for hearing impaired pupils.

- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- A small number of pupils with emotional or health needs attend off-site provision at the Medical Tuition Service in Torbay, the Burton Academy or South Devon College.
- Some post-16 students attend vocational courses at Paignton Secretarial College, Combe Pafford and E-Hair academy.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils in key stages 3 and 4, and sixth form students.
- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups and scrutinised samples of pupils' written work. Many of these observations and activities were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, safeguarding documents, attendance and behaviour logs, analysis of pupils' progress and the school's review of its own performance.
- Inspectors took account of 140 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, 37 responses to the pupil questionnaire and one letter from a parent. Inspectors took account of 59 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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