

Clacton County High School

Walton Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex CO15 6DZ

Inspection dates

19–20 September 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal has established a culture of high expectations and outstanding leadership. Leaders at all levels are uncompromising in their focus on continuous improvement.
- The trust, senior leaders and governors are highly ambitious to secure the very best outcomes for pupils. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths and what needs to improve.
- Parents and carers, almost universally, are extremely positive about the school and the quality of its work.
- Strong leadership of teaching and learning has ensured that teachers' practice continues to improve. Where further change is needed, leaders' actions are swift and effective.
- Work is under way to address the remaining inconsistencies in teaching across subjects and year groups, notably to ensure that pupils secure a sound understanding of subject-specific language quickly.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils make good progress overall and that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- New strategies are in place to raise literacy standards and to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged to achieve their best.
- Most pupils behave very well. They work hard and are typically tolerant and respectful.
- A minority of pupils do not consistently meet leaders' high expectations or represent the values that are routinely modelled by staff.
- Pupils' attendance has improved because of the relentless focus on its importance by the whole school team.
- Sixth-form students make excellent progress because of high-quality provision and support.
- Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and effective. The safety and welfare of all pupils, including the most vulnerable, are of the highest priority.
- Governors are experienced and effective in holding senior leaders to account and in supporting rapid improvements in the school's performance.
- While pupils excel on work-related courses, they do not do as well in their GCSE examinations. Boys are not as successful as girls in English.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and learning so that:
 - any remaining differences in the performance of different groups, in particular between boys and girls and across subjects, are diminished rapidly
 - the most able pupils are challenged, consistently, to achieve their very best
 - pupils are encouraged to read widely and often to improve their literacy skills
 - teachers are systematic and consistent in reinforcing the language of each subject.
- Build on current work to promote fundamental British values, so that all pupils' attitudes consistently reflect the high expectations that staff promote.

4 and in the sixth form Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal and senior leadership team have ensured that the school has continued to improve since the previous inspection. High expectations are raising standards across many aspects of the provision and so nurturing pupils' aspirations to succeed. Leaders' and governors' relentless pursuit of high-quality outcomes ensures that most pupils make good progress, especially in vocational subjects.
- Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the quality of education that the school provides. As one of them said, 'This is an excellent school where my child is well taught by committed professionals. A great environment to learn in.'
- Leaders and governors are accurate in their evaluation of what is working well and the things that need to improve. Development plans are securely rooted in carefully considered priorities. These are identified quickly, with timely and effective action taken to secure rapid improvement. When necessary, leaders do not hold back from making difficult decisions to make sure that all groups of pupils achieve well.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders' actions have enhanced the quality of teaching. Changes to the school's marking policy mean that pupils now have a much better understanding of how to improve their work and so they are making stronger progress. Pupils' regular attendance and punctuality represents a rising trend. Fewer pupils are persistently absent from school.
- While some are relatively new to their role, leaders at all levels are very clear about their accountability for ensuring that all pupils make at least good progress. The whole-team commitment to continuous improvement is a key strength and symptomatic of the good and improving standard of education that the school provides.
- Middle leaders speak highly of the responsive senior leadership team. In meetings, they told inspectors how much they value the effective support that they receive, both in school and from the shared good practice across the trust. They explained how this helps to raise their confidence in managing their own teams as they work to continue to improve outcomes.
- Thorough and effective procedures are in place for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. The regular programme of lesson observations includes appropriate checks on pupils' work and takes account of teachers' assessments of pupils' progress, together with pupils' and their parents' own views.
- The outcomes of these reviews help leaders to target suitably tailored professional development so that staff are supported to continue to develop their practice. As a result, there is a trend of improving consistency in the quality of teaching and learning that pupils experience across subjects.
- Leaders' overarching aim in curriculum design is for it to serve as a catalyst for raising pupils' aspirations and achievement. All pupils follow BTEC work-related courses over a three-year key stage 4 programme, with variable proportions of pupils taking the different GCSE courses on offer. A relatively low number of pupils opt to study modern

foreign languages.

- The whole-school commitment to a curriculum that maximises achievement has been achieved successfully in BTEC work-related courses. On these pathways, pupils make outstanding progress in Years 9 to 11. However, pupils' progress in core and other GCSE subjects is not as strong.
- Leaders and governors know there is more to do to secure even greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning and to continue to raise standards across the school. They are very clear that, for some pupils, limitations in literacy skills are a barrier to learning. In these instances, pupils sometimes find it difficult to interpret the complex language of different subjects.
- Consequently, further work is under way to ensure that teachers emphasise the use of subject-specific language in lessons. A literacy leader is assigned to support subject teams in securing pupils' understanding. A new initiative aims to encourage pupils, especially boys, to read more widely, but this is at a relatively early stage of implementation.
- Pupils' personal development and the development of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills are of an exceptionally high priority for the whole-school team. These attributes are encouraged through extra-curricular activities, such as sports and drama. Additional studies are designed to enhance pupils' academic achievement and to support their future progression. The promotion of British values is mapped and embedded across subjects. Regular assemblies are specially focused to underpin the important key principles of tolerance and respect. These are also taught in sessions on religious, ethical and lifelong learning, known as 'REAL' days.
- While the school's values are evidenced routinely in lessons and pupils fully understand their importance, on very rare occasions, a few pupils do not consistently reflect leaders' expectations in their attitudes to others. When this happens, swift and decisive action is taken to investigate the circumstances and to tackle the issues. Leaders are absolutely crystal clear in their zero-tolerance approach.
- The views of pupils and parents are valued. Leaders know that they can be a powerful force for change in the school. While the comments most parents shared with inspectors were overwhelmingly positive, this was not universally the case. A minority felt that more could be done to improve communication, more specifically the way in which complaints are handled. Leaders are working hard to address these concerns.
- The school has strong links with other schools locally and within the Sigma Trust group of schools. Work with local primary schools ensures a smooth transition for new pupils when they arrive in Year 7.

Governance of the school

- The local governing body, well-supported by trustees, is rigorous in holding the principal and senior leaders to account for pupils' progress and for the performance of all staff. Working closely together, governors and trustees share the same vision for the continuous improvement of the quality of education that the school provides.
- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined through the trust's scheme of delegation. Lines of accountability are well established. Efficient communications are suitably

promoted through the dual roles that some governors hold as trustees.

- Designated governors are linked to key aspects of the school's development plan. They know the school well and so can support leaders effectively in securing the realisation of the school's aims, 'Higher expectations, raising aspirations'.
- Regular checks and review processes are typically successful in sustaining a cycle of continuous improvement. Where action is needed to raise standards further, governors remain focused on the difference that any interventions are making and on securing value for money. For example, in reducing any differences between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally and checking that pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress.
- Governors are not complacent. In line with the trust's expectations, they conduct an annual audit of their own skills to check that they have sufficient expertise and to identify any further training needed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is a high priority for all staff. Safeguarding systems and practices meet statutory requirements and are kept up to date. Pupils told inspectors that their teachers know them well and that they know who they can go to if they have a problem. Consequently, they feel safe in the school.
- Staff understand what they need to do to protect the high proportion of vulnerable pupils in their care. Concerns about pupils' welfare are recorded promptly and followed up assiduously. Additional support from external agencies is sought quickly when required.
- Through routine checks, governors play their part in ensuring that safeguarding sustains its high priority over time. They monitor staff training and patterns in pupil referrals through the regular reports leaders share with them as a matter of routine.
- All staff and governors are trained to the appropriate level. Training requirements are reviewed regularly. Updates to staff training are systematic and routine, including those covering staff responsibilities linked to child sexual exploitation and 'Prevent', the duty to protect young people from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection. Most teachers have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve and work hard to raise their aspirations for the future. Teachers know their subjects and their pupils very well. There is a collegiate and mutually respectful atmosphere in most lessons.
- Teachers' planning for learning is typically matched well to the needs and interests of pupils from their different starting points. Questions are frequently used skilfully to build on pupils' previous learning and to deepen their understanding of applying knowledge in different contexts. Teachers' use of the vocabulary specific to each subject, so that pupils become familiar with it, is typically very strong.
- Effective support is available to pupils who have specific needs, both in lessons and

through focused interventions. Pupils who receive this additional help, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, are making stronger progress as a result.

- The school's marking policy has been changed to make it more meaningful for pupils and manageable for teachers in terms of their workload. As a result, pupils now have a much better understanding of how to improve their work and teachers are meeting leaders' expectations more consistently. However, in lessons, not all pupils could tell inspectors what they needed to do to take their marked responses to the next stage.
- The school's systems for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress have recently been revised. Middle leaders review this information regularly with their teams. This is also used by senior leaders to identify where interventions may be needed, to help pupils who may be falling behind, or to support teachers to improve their practice further.
- Occasionally, teachers' expectations are not high enough and so the most able pupils are not routinely challenged to think hard enough about what they are doing. As a result, these pupils do not always achieve as well as they should.
- For some lower-ability pupils, limitations in their literacy skills make it problematic for them to understand some of the complex, specialist language of their subjects. When this happens, they find aspects of their learning too difficult and fall behind. While teachers are clear that they need to make this a strong focus in their lessons, some are more adept at doing so than others. A literacy leader has been assigned to support subject teams with this work so that pupils can access the language skills they need more readily.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils feel safe because they know safeguarding is a high priority for school staff. Regularly timetabled 'REAL' days and tutor time provide opportunities for pupils to debate lifestyle choices and sensitive issues. These sessions help them to learn to respect the views of others and to become responsible citizens.
- School staff work exceptionally hard to ensure that pupils' positive attitudes towards each other are underpinned by a visible and respectful tolerance for individual differences. It is an expectation that these values are at the core of day-to-day life in the school.
- As a result, most pupils live up to leaders' high expectations. In the very rare cases when incidents occur, leaders do all they can to investigate, taking swift action to address concerns and to act on any lessons learned. Consequently, pupils are confident that staff 'will sort things out'.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and know the risks associated with the use of the internet and social media. They explained to inspectors how they are taught to make well-considered lifestyle choices and about avoiding the inherent dangers of gang cultures.
- Parents are typically positive about the value that the school adds to their children's

education, not just to pupils' individual academic achievement but also to their personal and social development overall.

- Pupils make good contributions to the school and the wider community, supporting a range of charities and local causes. Sixth-form students take on leadership roles, for example in leading enrichment and volunteering to work with younger pupils to support their learning.
- Senior leaders' strong focus on providing effective careers information, advice and guidance ensures that pupils are equipped with the information they need to make informed choices as they prepare for their next steps in education and/or training.
- High-quality, impartial support is provided by specialist advisers and through well-established careers events for pupils at key transition points in Years 8 and 11. As a result, almost all pupils progress to further education or to the school's sixth form at the end of key stage 4. A high proportion of sixth-form students move on to their chosen universities and some opt to follow apprenticeship routes.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are very clear about the implications of unacceptable conduct. They know the rules because they contributed to the development of the school's behaviour policy and most teachers are consistent in enforcing it.
- Inspectors' evidence matched staff and pupils' views that behaviour across the school continues to improve. School records show that any incidence of serious breach of leaders' high expectations is relatively low.
- Working relationships between staff and pupils are typically positive and mutually respectful. Staff supervision at breaktimes and lunchtimes helps to ensure that the school is usually a calm and orderly place.
- Any low-level disruption inspectors observed during their visits to lessons were, in most cases, linked to activities that were not matched appropriately to pupils' abilities.
- Occasionally, inspectors observed a slow response from some pupils when staff challenged them about inappropriate behaviour in lessons and at breaktimes.
- While the school environment is typically well ordered, some overly boisterous conduct was noted in corridors at busy times of the day. Senior leaders are working to reduce any potential for congestion by the recent introduction of a more staggered approach to timetabling.
- A high priority is given to ensuring that pupils attend school regularly and are punctual to lessons. The attendance of the few pupils who follow courses away from the school site is closely monitored.
- Attendance overall has improved considerably since the previous inspection. The staff member who leads on this aspect works very successfully with staff, parents and pupils in continuing to secure a positive trend of rising attendance, including in the sixth form. This trend is coupled with a reduction in the persistent absence of the minority of pupils who do not attend school as regularly as they should.
- The school's internal isolation unit has made a difference to the number of pupils who

are temporarily excluded. The proportion of pupils who are permanently excluded is below the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Many pupils join the school with attainment that is below the national average, typically attaining above average results by the end of key stage 4. While most pupils make at least good progress overall, they make significantly better progress in their BTEC work-related courses than they do in GCSE examinations. Higher-ability pupils do not consistently reach their potential across subjects and boys make considerably less progress than girls in English.
- Pupils' outcomes against the national measure, Progress 8, have been consistently positive over the past three years. In 2017, pupils' progress was well above average for all abilities and all groups, including for disadvantaged pupils.
- While most pupils start in Year 7 with attainment that is below average, typically they end Year 11 attaining above average results in their best eight subjects (Attainment 8). Very few pupils in the school follow the English Baccalaureate route. This requires pupils to study a combined programme of subjects which includes English, mathematics, science, humanities and a modern foreign language. The proportion of pupils who opt for courses in modern foreign languages is very low.
- Senior leaders are taking steps to address the differences in pupils' outcomes between subjects. As a result, the school's assessment information and pupils' work seen during the inspection suggest more consistent progress currently, in particular in humanities.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities generally make good progress overall. School records, and pupils' work, indicate that any differences in progress, between these pupils and other pupils nationally, are diminishing, including for the most able.
- The additional funding for Year 7 pupils who need extra help in English and mathematics is used effectively to help them to catch up quickly.
- The few pupils who attend alternative courses with approved external providers are closely monitored. School records indicate that they usually make better progress than they did previously in school.
- Pupils receive timely and highly effective advice to help them to make informed choices when they move on to the next stage of their education.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Provision in the sixth form is very well managed, representing an increasingly strong picture of continuous improvement.
- Outcomes for students who follow vocational courses are a particularly strong feature of the quality of education provided. Most students who join sixth-form courses stay on and complete their courses successfully by the end of Year 13, making better than average progress overall.
- There are no significant differences in outcomes between disadvantaged students and

others nationally. Students' progression rate to university, or on to further study and/or training, is very high.

- Effective leadership has continued to support high-quality outcomes in students' attainment and progress over time. Leaders' high expectations are reflected in students' typically high levels of attendance and outstanding conduct.
- Students' progress on applied general qualifications has been above the national average for the past three years. Similarly, the small number of disadvantaged students make better progress on applied general courses than they do on A-level routes.
- Those students who need to retake GCSE English and/or mathematics make good progress in improving their grades.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge and very effective development of productive working relationships are contributory factors in enhancing the quality of provision and students' excellent outcomes.
- Sixth-form students have access to a good range of level 3 courses. The offer is extended through the school's collaborative partnership with other local schools and the University of Essex. Senior leaders are taking steps to introduce other level 2 courses, to meet the needs of lower-attaining pupils at the end of key stage 4, alongside the pre-apprenticeship course that is currently in place.
- Students are overwhelmingly positive about their sixth-form experience, especially in relation to the support that they receive from their teachers. The opportunities for work experience have been strengthened through the recent appointment of a coordinator to oversee this work.
- Regular 'learning for life' and 'REAL' sessions develop students' citizenship, personal and social skills, helping to prepare them for life beyond school. In addition, students' employability skills are enhanced through work experience and the leadership roles they undertake as part of their engagement in wider-school life, for example acting as support for younger pupils.
- The proportion of students, including those who are disadvantaged, who go on to further/higher education, employment and/or training is above the national average. Careers guidance and support for next steps, including university applications and information about apprenticeships, are increasingly effective in helping them to make the right choices.

School details

Unique reference number	138084
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10052631

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,652
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	231
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Steve McGrath
Principal	Neil Gallagher
Telephone number	01255 424266
Website	www.countyhigh.org.uk/
Email address	admin@countyhigh.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–21 March 2013

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It became part of the Sigma Trust, a multi-academy trust, in September 2016.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is well above average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportions of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are below the national averages.
- The proportions of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those with an

education, health and care plan are around the national averages.

- A few key stage 4 pupils attend vocational courses for one day each week at a local authority provider of alternative education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across subjects and year groups in 68 lessons, or parts of lessons, and listened to several pupils from Year 8 read. Some of these observations were undertaken jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team.
- The inspection team looked closely at pupils’ work in lessons, across a wide range of subjects and year groups. They also discussed pupils’ work with them in meetings and in the lessons that they observed.
- Meetings were held with the principal, senior and middle leaders, teachers, the chair of the local governing body, other governors, and the chief executive of the Sigma Trust.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils from all year groups in lessons, in meetings and informally around the school at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They also observed them as they arrived at school, and the standards of conduct and behaviour throughout the school day.
- The team took account of 50 written comments from parents and their responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. They also looked at the 35 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 22 responses to the pupils’ questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents. These included senior leaders’ evaluations of the school’s performance, improvement plans, policies, minutes of meetings and information relating to pupils’ progress, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Vanessa Love	Ofsted Inspector
Jennifer Carpenter	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Lawrence	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Bell	Ofsted Inspector

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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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