

Meridian School

Garden Walk, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 7JH

Inspection dates

27–28 November 2018

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have significantly improved the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils attending the school are making good progress and standards are rising.
- Trustees and governors set effective strategic priorities to develop a secure future for the school. They offer accurate views about its performance and hold leaders to account for its improvement.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's performance is accurate. As a result, they are very aware of the school's strengths and what must be improved. Staff are united in their support for leaders.
- Attendance has improved because effective steps have been taken to reduce persistent absence for all groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged.
- Subject leaders are skilled in driving the improvement of teaching in their departments. However, some do not work as consistently as others.
- Leaders' arrangements for supporting disadvantaged pupils are effective and their progress is good.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. All leaders and staff maintain high expectations and promote good relationships. There has been a reduction in exclusions.
- Teaching is good. Teachers use their subject knowledge to plan work which is suitably matched to most groups of pupils. However, teaching is not as precisely planned for some pupils who have average prior attainment in subjects including English and history.
- Pupils' written work and reading skills are promoted well. In some subjects, including history, written work is not as fully developed.
- Students who attend the small sixth form achieve well. This is because of strong leadership and provision. Leaders' views of some teaching are not as accurate as their views about other areas of the sixth form.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils of all abilities achieve well, by making sure that:
 - all teachers plan work which is challenging and suitable, especially for those of average prior attainment, in subjects including English and history
 - pupils' written skills are thoroughly developed in all subjects, including history.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by making sure that:
 - all subject leaders, including any recently appointed, are supported to follow the school's evaluation processes consistently
 - sixth-form leaders' evaluations of teaching are as accurate as their assessment of other areas of sixth-form performance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- This school is well led. The new headteacher leads with determination and clarity of purpose. His senior team bring strong skills and experience to their work. The staff of the school willingly work with their leaders as a united team.
- In the period following the previous inspection, there was a decline in the school's performance and pupils' behaviour. A local fall in pupil numbers accompanied financial problems, which saw a large turnover in teaching staff. However, in the previous and current academic years, leaders, governors and trustees have brought about decisive improvements to teaching, pupils' progress and behaviour. As a result, pupils attending the school are receiving a good quality of education.
- Staff, governors and trustees are driven by the same common purpose, which is to provide pupils with a good education and ensure positive working relationships with the entire parental community.
- A very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, approve of leaders' work and what has been achieved. These views are also reflected in parental comments on the Ofsted free-text service. A small number of parents disagreed about the quality of education and the response of the school when they raise a concern. Inspectors did not find evidence to support these concerns.
- Staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire overwhelmingly agree that the school is well led and managed. They are highly appreciative of how well leaders consider their well-being and workload, as well as their health. Staff also feel much supported in their work and career development.
- Leaders accurately evaluate the school's strengths and those aspects of performance which require development. As a result, improvement plans are precise and reflect leaders' priorities for the development of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and increasing pupil numbers. The monitoring of the progress of these plans is rigorous and is shared between leaders, trustees and governors.
- Leaders' development of teaching is a strength. Their arrangements for evaluating the quality of teaching are systematic and accurate. Consequently, they understand where teaching is helping pupils to learn well and where it needs to become more precise. Effective staff training and checks on its impact have driven the improvements to teaching. Leaders are aware of the few remaining areas of inconsistency. However, they have brought about major improvements in a short time.
- Teachers' performance targets reflect the high expectations of senior leaders, governors and trustees. However, teachers are appreciative of the support provided in order to help them reach them, and of leaders' aspirational planning for their career development.
- Target-setting arrangements reflect the school's ambition for all pupils and are based on careful reference to higher national standards. Monitoring and assessment arrangements are systematic and help leaders quickly identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving, so that they are helped to improve.

- Leaders' work to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a strength, and parents agree. Assessment arrangements are accurate and pupils are quickly identified. Planning, care and teaching are carefully matched to each pupil. As a result of this provision and accurate monitoring, those pupils with SEND attending the school are making good progress.
- Leaders make effective use of the pupil premium funding. They identify barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils and have the same high expectations of them as of other pupils. Leaders carefully monitor their achievement and attendance. Consequently, their persistent absence has halved and their progress is good.
- The curriculum is effective, broad and balanced. Senior leaders have introduced carefully considered changes so that when pupils enter the school in Year 9, their programmes of study are suitably matched to the demands of the upper school, key stage 4 and key stage 5. Despite strengths in their acquisition of knowledge and wider skills, the development of pupils' written skills is not as secure in some subjects.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their preparation for life in modern Britain. Pupils are provided with a well-established programme of citizenship education, cultural activities, theatrical productions and assemblies. As a result, they are able to demonstrate their understanding of fundamental British values such as democracy, the rule of law, personal freedoms and respect for differences.
- Leaders develop their practice and share expertise by working closely with schools in the same academy trust. They also undertake responsibilities across the three schools. As a result, leaders at all levels are able to gain much experience and use it to continue to drive improvements.
- Subject leaders make a strong contribution to the development of teaching and pupils' learning. They are provided with strong professional development and are skilled in evaluating performance and guiding staff. However, there are some examples of inconsistency in evaluative practice such as in English, where leaders are relatively new.

Governance of the school

- Trustees and governors have worked successfully to reset the school's strategic direction following a period of instability, significant changes in staffing and reduced pupil roll. They are very experienced in educational matters and finance. Their work is focused entirely on providing a good quality of education, increasing the enrolment of pupils and ensuring strong relationships with parents.
- Trustees and the local governing body (LGB) have ensured that all their activities are addressing teaching, pupils' progress, behaviour and financial stability. As a result, the school has moved forward decisively.
- Members of the LGB and trust fulfil their responsibility to hold leaders to account for all areas of school performance, including their use of additional funding such as the pupil premium and provision for pupils with SEND. Consequently, the funding is used effectively and these pupils make good progress.

- Trustees and the LGB undertake all their statutory responsibilities to safeguard pupils. They regularly check on the school's work in this area and ensure they have an accurate picture of the systems in place and their effectiveness.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All leaders, staff and the LGB promote a culture of vigilance in order to reduce risks to children and protect them from harm. Thorough arrangements are in place for the training of all staff and the LGB, using national guidance and local awareness of potential risks. As a result, all adults are aware of risks children may face, including abuse, neglect, domestic violence, extremism and radicalisation and the misuse of communication technologies. Training and guidance also ensure that staff are alert to potential risks and know how to act in the event of a concern.
- Leaders' systems for vetting staff suitability to work in a school are rigorous and all visitors are subject to appropriate checks.
- School records demonstrate that staff act quickly when safeguarding concerns arise and leaders manage information efficiently. They report any concerns to local authorities and other appropriate agencies in a timely manner. Leaders review information held within school on a regular basis and, as a result, they are able to respond rapidly should circumstances change for the children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is good and this represents a significant improvement since a decline which followed the previous inspection.
- Following a period of instability, changes to staffing have reduced. Teachers have established productive classroom relationships with their pupils and set high expectations. Pupils are appreciative of this improvement and the efforts their teachers make to help them to learn well.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge productively in order to plan challenging work and activities for pupils of different abilities. Knowledge and skills are introduced carefully in order to help deepen pupils' understanding. One good example was in a Year 11 Spanish lesson, where pupils were required to conjugate verbs across different, complex tenses. As a result of effective teaching, pupils of high and average prior attainment were able to articulate the correct grammatical rules in Spanish and explain why they were correct.
- Teachers use questioning to assess pupils' understanding and challenge them to make skilful use of their knowledge. One good example was in a Year 11 chemistry lesson where effective questioning helped pupils to secure their understanding about the complex processes involved in different types of chemical bonding.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to enhance pupils' learning. They are suitably trained. Teachers give them helpful advice about those pupils they support, including those with SEND. Their relationships with pupils are highly productive. They

skilfully check on their learning and reassure them. Consequently, the pupils they support make good progress.

- Reading is promoted well and every pupil is enrolled on a scheme which provides them with interesting and challenging texts suited to their abilities. Assessment of pupils' reading skills is rigorous and results are used to adjust reading schemes and help pupils whose progress is weaker.
- Mathematics is taught well. Teachers offer suitable work for pupils of all abilities, including those with average prior attainment. Accurate checks are made to identify strengths in pupils' knowledge. Adjustments are made to the teaching in order to address any barriers. As a result, pupils are able to apply their number skills to higher-level calculation and problem-solving.
- Writing is taught well and for different purposes. Pupils are helped to develop a strong subject vocabulary. As a result, pupils typically write well in subjects including science, geography, business studies, English, religious education, modern languages, sociology and psychology. However, in some subjects, including history, the quality of written work is not maintained. Similarly, some pupils with average prior attainment do not write as well as their classmates in English.
- Despite strengths in teaching across most subjects and year groups, the planning and work set for some pupils with average prior attainment are less effective than for the most able or those with low prior attainment. Consequently, these pupils have made less progress in subjects such as English and history. However, teaching is currently improving in these areas.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders, the LGB and staff place the welfare of pupils at the heart of their work. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and supportive. As a result, pupils feel safe and report their confidence in raising any concerns with the adults who work in the school.
- Senior staff and pastoral leaders have a clear knowledge of the pupils who attend the school. Robust systems of care are in place and leaders' monitoring arrangements are very thorough. Consequently, pupils receive precise support to help them succeed and overcome personal difficulties, including absence from school.
- Arrangements to help new pupils make a successful start are well organised. As a result, when they enter the school, Year 9 pupils feel well supported and ready to learn.
- Relationships are taught well. Consequently, pupils are respectful to one another and adults. Pupils feel safe. They believe bullying is rare and understand the different forms it can take. They also believe it is tackled quickly when reported. A small number of parents reported that they do not believe bullying is tackled quickly enough. Inspectors did not find evidence to support this.

- Personal development is taught well. As a result, pupils understand how to lead healthier, safer lives. They are encouraged to exercise and participate in sports. They also receive useful guidance about consensual relationships, developing resilience and the risks associated with drugs and alcohol.
- As a result of the school's effective guidance about online risks, pupils understand the dangers associated with using the internet, social media and other forms of electronic communication.
- Pupils are committed to their school and wider community. They undertake positions of responsibility, including the organisation of numerous school shows, the new school council and charitable appeals. They are also supported to participate in competitive sports and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.
- A designated leader is assigned to any pupils who are looked after by the local authority, to ensure they receive appropriate support. Additionally, the school's work to liaise with the appropriate agencies ensures that there are well-established and effective systems in place to support pupils' mental health.
- Arrangements to monitor the attendance, safety and progress of pupils educated elsewhere are effective. Designated staff communicate with the leaders of alternative education to check that pupils attend safely.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly. There was a decline following the previous inspection, which leaders and staff have addressed successfully. As a result, pupils in the school are studying in a calm and purposeful environment.
- All leaders and staff maintain high expectations of attitudes towards learning, courtesy and conduct. The school behaviour policy provides clear and positive guidance to all pupils, who in turn appreciate the consistency and conduct themselves well. Pupils agree that behaviour has improved.
- Rigorous systems are in place to support pupils whose previous behaviour or attitudes did not meet the school's expectations. These include pastoral reports, supportive monitoring and personalised guidance. Evidence from the inspection demonstrates that these measures are working.
- Pupils' attitudes towards learning are good because of the encouraging relationships they have with teachers and the high expectations which are set for their achievement. Pupils are committed to working hard in lessons and appreciate the efforts of their teachers to help them succeed. Pupils are particularly appreciative of the additional help offered by their teachers in many subjects, including English and the sciences.
- Pupils' conduct around the school and site is good. They move around the school sensibly between lessons and conduct themselves well at break, and at lunchtimes.
- Pupils' attendance has improved, which reflects their positive attitudes towards school. Attendance is in line with the national average. Leaders' high expectations of attendance are supported by robust monitoring systems and actions to reduce the absence of any pupils who are at risk. The proportion of pupils who are persistently

absent has significantly reduced, including disadvantaged pupils.

- The incidence of fixed-term exclusions has increased significantly in recent years. Current leaders have tackled all instances of poor behaviour. While exclusions as a whole have been high, the actual number of individual pupils who make up the total number of exclusions has fallen sharply.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The progress of pupils currently attending the school is good in all year groups. Following the previous inspection there was a decline in pupils' achievement. However, senior leaders accurately identified weaknesses in learning and brought about decisive improvements to teaching in order to address them.
- In 2017, pupils' overall progress was below average, having declined in most subjects with the exception of mathematics. The progress of different groups of pupils declined, especially boys, the disadvantaged, and those pupils with average prior attainment.
- Provisional information for 2018 demonstrates that pupils' progress improved significantly in most subjects, including mathematics, humanities, languages and sciences. However, pupils' progress did not improve so much in English.
- Pupils enter the school in Year 9 with broadly average starting points for their age, but with less secure knowledge and skills in literacy compared to numeracy. Leaders' arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment on entry to the school are rigorous and accurate. As a result, leaders and teachers are able to set demanding and realistic targets for pupils' progress by the end of Year 11.
- The most able pupils make good progress, which has been sustained over time. In 2018, they achieved well across the different subjects. Those currently in the school continue to do so. The teaching they receive is appropriately challenging and carefully planned. As a result, they make secure gains in the relevant knowledge and skills which help them make the strong progress they should.
- Disadvantaged pupils currently attending the school make good progress from their different starting points, including those with higher prior attainment and others with SEND. This is because of the school's work to assess them accurately and remove barriers to their learning, including their attendance. In 2018, the difference between their progress and that of other pupils nationally almost halved.
- The progress of pupils with SEND is good across the school from their different starting points. Leaders ensure that they receive effective provision and support, following accurate identification of their needs.
- The progress of pupils who are educated off site in alternative forms of provision is good. When deciding on the suitability of their placements, leaders give careful consideration to the career pathways they seek after Year 11 and Year 13, as well as their attendance, safety and personal development.
- More pupils who leave Year 11 sustain their participation in sixth form, further education or work-with-training than occurs nationally. This is because they are offered effective careers advice and successful preparation for the next step of their education or wider career development.

- The progress of pupils with average prior attainment has improved. However, despite the work of leaders and teachers, in each year group the progress of some of these pupils is not as secure in English or in the development of their literacy skills across other subjects. This is because teaching is not matched precisely enough to pupils' needs.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- There has been a sharp but planned reduction in the size of the sixth form since the last academic year. However, senior staff responsible for this area of the school's work have secured the continued effectiveness of teaching, programmes of study, students' achievement and their personal development.
- Students enter the sixth form with prior attainment which is slightly lower than average. However, as a result of effective provision, they make strong progress and achieve well.
- The proportions of students achieving a place in higher education, further education or work-with-training are higher than other in schools nationally. These outcomes are a positive reflection of the sixth-form provision and the quality of careers advice and independent guidance. As a result, students feel they are helped to make the right choices for their futures.
- Programmes of study for the performing arts are delivered off site and leaders carefully check on the suitability of the courses, safety, attendance and progress. As a result, students' achievement is good.
- Arrangements for target-setting reflect the high expectations seen in other year groups. The monitoring of students' progress is systematic, as are the arrangements for their welfare. Consequently, students feel supported to tackle any challenges which arise, remain on their courses and complete them successfully.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and reflects the strengths seen in the other year groups of the school. There is a strong focus on the development of students' literacy skills and extended writing. One strong example seen was in a Year 13 business studies lesson. Students analysed reasons which led a company to move its manufacturing from the United Kingdom to Poland. As a result of effective teaching, students were able to evaluate critically the different reasons on offer and write convincing summary arguments.
- Students feel safe. They are very confident that bullying in any form is rare and, were it to be reported, staff would quickly address it. They appreciate the supervision and care offered by a small sixth form and feel well advised about relationships, healthy living and reducing risks in their lives.
- The wider curriculum offers a range of interesting work-related learning, as well as suitably planned work experience. This includes the creation of high-quality musical and dramatic performances, which help students appreciate the reality of the entertainment industry. As a result, a growing number are studying qualifications for the performing arts, while others choose routes into medicine, dentistry and mechanical engineering.
- The sixth form meets the minimum requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes

and students have achieved the minimum standards established by the government.

- Between 2015 and 2017, students' progress improved and by 2017 it was positive in relation to most students' different starting points from key stage 4. This profile was also reflected in the 2017 performance of most subjects, although some students did not achieve as well in the sciences, sports and business. This was because some students with average GCSE entry points did not make as much progress as others.
- Provisional results for 2018 indicate that students' achievement has been maintained and improved in those areas where it required development. Students are appreciative of the quality of teaching and the commitment of their teachers, who they say offer challenging and interesting work to help them achieve well.
- Students who have not achieved the minimum expected GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics have made strong progress towards achieving them by the time they leave the sixth form. In summer 2018, they were less successful in mathematics than in English. However, their current progress is improving.
- While leadership of the sixth form is effective, some evaluations of teaching quality are not as precise as other judgements leaders make about progress, welfare, destinations post-16 and the quality of the curriculum.

School details

Unique reference number	137656
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10053887

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	336
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	69
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Carol Boston
Headteacher	Gordon Farquhar
Telephone number	01763 242236
Website	www.meridian.herts.sch.uk
Email address	office.meridian@rsat.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 January 2015

Information about this school

- This school is an upper school which is attended by pupils aged 13 to 18. It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It is an academy run by the Royston Schools Academy Trust. There are three schools within the trust and each has a local governing board with delegated powers of responsibility. Trustees oversee the direction of the three schools and the work of the local governing boards.
- The school serves the town of Royston.
- The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.

- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below average.
- Alternative provision is offered at North Herts Education Support Centre. Some sixth-form students complete their performing arts qualifications at Stage Right Studios, Royston.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been many changes to staffing. There has also been a change of headteachers since the previous inspection, including an interim appointment. At the time of this inspection, the headteacher had been in post for three months.
- Local demographic changes have seen a significant fall in the number on roll.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection gathered evidence from lessons in all year groups of the school, including some jointly observed with senior leaders and the leader responsible for provision for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons across all year groups and a sample of pupils' books and folders.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils. They also checked the school's single central record.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation; improvement plans; curriculum information; records of pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour, and attendance; and checks on the quality of teaching, staff development and the work of governors and trustees.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing board and the chair of the trustees.
- Meetings were held with pupils from key stage 3, key stage 4 and the sixth form. Inspectors also met with pupils who receive additional support. Throughout the two days, inspectors spoke informally with pupils about their experiences and learning.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at lunchtimes and during movement between lessons.
- Inspectors evaluated 51 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including 34 free-text responses. Inspectors analysed the views of 31 respondents to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff, including eight comments to different questions and the 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

David Turner, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jenny Carpenter	Ofsted Inspector
Donna Young	Ofsted Inspector

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