

The Gilbert School

Brinkley Lane, Colchester, Essex CO4 9PU

Inspection dates

21–22 November 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The school's key strength is its commitment to a well-rounded education. In addition to academic success, pupils gain the necessary skills to succeed in life through the thoughtful and wide-ranging promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The personal development and welfare of pupils are central to the school's work. This results in highly confident, mature and polite young people. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is excellent.
- The very broad curriculum prepares pupils exceptionally well, and in a variety of ways, for their adult lives, for example through excellently planned careers advice and guidance.
- The academic progress and attainment of pupils of different backgrounds and abilities across a wide range of subjects are consistently above average.
- The very high quality of teaching is one of the major contributors to pupils' outstanding outcomes. Teachers demonstrate excellent knowledge of their subject and understanding of how to teach that knowledge. Teachers skilfully use assessment when planning for learning.
- Leaders prioritise mathematics and technology to meet the opportunities of the local labour market. They give similar prominence to high-quality opportunities in the arts, giving all pupils opportunities to flourish.
- The headteacher has painstakingly presided over many years of incremental improvement. She has created the systems and structures that enable leaders and governors to have an accurate and deep understanding of all aspects of the school's work.
- Over time, areas of weakness have been tackled one by one through a comprehensive performance management and training programme.
- Leaders recognise the need to provide more opportunities to develop extended writing, especially for boys, in subjects beyond English.
- Very nearly all parents and carers responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, say that their children are happy and safe at school. Pupils and staff concur. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and morale is extremely high. Inspectors found a very happy school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on current work to promote and strengthen opportunities for extended writing, for all pupils and particularly for boys, in subjects beyond English.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders at all levels, including governors, have a clear shared vision for how the school community works, embodied in the 'Gilberd Way'. The headteacher and other leaders, over a sustained period, have created a culture that enables pupils and staff to excel.
- The school's view of its own performance is entirely accurate and reflects the deep understanding that governors, the headteacher and other leaders have of their school, as well as its many strengths and possible areas for improvement. This is underpinned by very effective and comprehensive performance management and professional development, along with rigorous quality assurance. Senior leaders are accurate in their assessment of learning.
- Middle leaders are clear about their role and how they contribute to the school's development. They are extremely knowledgeable about their teams, subjects and the pupils they teach. They monitor the quality of teaching regularly and effectively through lesson observation, work scrutiny and the use of progress information.
- The curriculum is very well thought through. Leaders are clear in their intent that key stage 3 should provide a wide education that, in addition to the highly effective teaching of English and mathematics, strongly promotes the arts and technology. The curriculum offers a wide range of opportunity and choice within the timetable and extra-curricular provision. Leaders are committed to providing a curriculum that pupils enjoy, and one where opportunities are open to all pupils regardless of ability.
- Leaders at all levels are clear about the rationale behind their key stage 3 and 4 curriculum. Year 9 is used very effectively to develop pupils' skills to support the transition between key stages 3 and 4. The school's approach to the curriculum, with a strong focus on mathematics and technology, is based on a well-informed understanding of the local labour market and effective liaison with local post-16 providers and the nearby university.
- All pupils take a short-course GCSE qualification in religious education (RE). This ensures cohesion and progression in pupils' understanding of religion and British culture and helps prepare them very well for life in modern Britain. Pupils' understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy and tolerance, is developed well. Overall, the curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well.
- Most parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that they receive information in a timely manner about how well their child is doing. Nearly all say that the school is well led and managed.
- The school works hard to ensure equal opportunities for its pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) progress at least as well as other pupils nationally. All groups of pupils are integrated well into all activities.
- The pupil premium and catch-up funding are both used effectively. Pupils who need additional support to catch up in Years 7 to 9 participate in a programme to rapidly improve their reading skills. Around 150 pupils, across two year groups, also receive

additional reading support in the form of '20 minutes a day' interventions with older pupils who are peer reading mentors. The impact of these programmes is highly effective, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

- Leaders' relentless drive and passion for the success of pupils have led to outstanding outcomes and progress. The school has continued to make improvements since the previous inspection in March 2018, responding quickly and positively to the areas for improvement in the report. The rapid and effective response to those areas shows leaders' great capacity to drive improvements.
- Science, an area identified for development in the 2013 inspection, has seen a sustained improvement in pupils' outcomes. This has been achieved through effective leadership, rigorous monitoring, improved teaching and learning, and personalised training. Significant gains were made in pupils' modern language outcomes in 2018.
- Leaders' contribution in working with other schools is significant. As well as their working with other schools locally, the school has also worked well with the University of Essex, including the development of the 'Talent Pipeline', with a focus on science and mathematics, helping to address teacher recruitment shortages in these subjects across north east Essex. This has extended to other subjects this year.
- The school's work with partner primary schools is excellent and extensive in its scope. It now includes a range of projects and visits focused on cross-phase learning. This year, the school has become the sole secondary placement school for Essex University's new MA and BSc speech and language therapy degrees.
- The school is heavily involved in 'STEM activities' (science, technology, engineering and mathematics); for example, a member of staff was seconded to the Royal Academy of Engineering to develop a STEM network of schools. The school also takes a leading role in arts education, including representing north east Essex schools on the Royal Opera House Bridge Project.

Governance of the school

- Governors are heavily involved in the school. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. They are extremely well informed about the school. They challenge leaders to continue to secure the progress seen so far. Governors bring a range of technical and professional skills to the roles of the governing body. They are aware of their responsibilities regarding teachers' pay progression and the safeguarding of students. They understand the school's performance, including monitoring the quality of teaching and how it has improved over recent years. Governors evaluate the effectiveness of their decisions by regularly checking on the impact of their work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff recruitment processes are thorough. Files are diligently maintained to enable detailed checking on pupils' welfare and safety. All statutory requirements are met. For example, all staff are trained annually in e-safety, child sexual exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse, radicalisation and extremism. The 'safeguarding governor' is a professional

who specialises in the field of safeguarding within education. The 'Gilberd Way' assembly programme, tutor time, outside guest speakers and parental information evenings all give clear advice to parents and pupils on safeguarding issues. There are established and effective mechanisms for tracking and monitoring vulnerable students.

- Leaders are passionate about the welfare of pupils. The headteacher has allocated a lot of resources to pastoral support for pupils. Teachers understand their safeguarding responsibilities and are vigilant in referring any cause for concern. Relationships with external agencies are strong and effective. The well-being of the small number of pupils educated off-site is monitored appropriately.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers have a deep knowledge and understanding of the content of their subjects and how best to teach them. As a result, teachers' questioning is highly effective in correcting pupils' misconceptions and developing pupils' responses to deepen their knowledge and understanding. For example, in a GCSE business lesson, the teacher's questioning successfully developed pupils' understanding of exchange rates. Pupils have time to apply their learning, allowing them the opportunity to secure knowledge and skills.
- Teachers' planning is highly effective. It builds upon prior learning and considers what will come next. Teachers use lesson time very well, maximising learning time and securing rapid progress. Teachers skilfully plan for pupils who are disadvantaged or with SEND and ensure that they access the curriculum exceptionally well.
- Teachers use a wide range of strategies to check pupils' understanding, and they intervene quickly to correct misconceptions, ensuring that all pupils make strong progress.
- Pupils actively support one another in giving advice and guidance about how to improve their work. For example, in a Year 8 music lesson, pupils gave praise and identified areas for improvement to one another. Effective working relationships have created a culture where pupils are happy to give and receive constructive criticism that is seen as helpful.
- Teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils regardless of their starting points. This allows all pupils to achieve and make progress at least at the rate expected of them. Leaders are not complacent about pupils' learning and recognise that some pupils, especially but not exclusively boys, write at greater length in English than in other subjects. Giving pupils more opportunities for extended writing in subjects across the curriculum is the next step in the school's continual journey of improvement.
- Pupils show a strong desire to learn and succeed and a real thirst for learning about the world around them. As a result, many take an active part in the wide-ranging extra-curricular provision.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are overwhelmingly courteous and polite to visitors, staff and one another. A Year 9 assembly had a pupil performing music to a very high standard. The focus of the assembly was on being happy, and it focused on pupils' well-being.
- Form time is used well. An example of the promotion of British values and citizenship education was seen in a Year 10 tutor time activity based around the monarchy. It got pupils thinking and they carefully considered the merits of a monarchy. They could articulate their opinions, with many changing their views after considering the material. In an example from Year 8, highly effective one-to-one conversations about future options were supporting pupils in making important decisions. Elsewhere, Year 11 pupils were mentoring Year 7 pupils with clearly focused questions. This was helping pupils to develop strategies to manage their work, conduct and their personal development.
- A small group of pupils access a highly tailored curriculum which allows them to develop employability skills related to their aspirations and interests. These pupils were very enthusiastic about their lesson and were keen to share their afternoon tea they were preparing for their assistant heads of year. They were taking care and pride in what they were doing, demonstrating their strong relationships with staff and desire to achieve well. They were clear about the skills they were focusing on and developing.
- There are extensive leadership opportunities for pupils, such as 'STEM leaders', 'active listeners', 'student governors', and membership of the 'teaching and learning group'. These chances for pupils to contribute to their school are leading to them having very positive attitudes to their learning and a strong pride in their school.
- Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) provision is comprehensive and mapped across the school, covering a wide range of areas. Pupils' welfare is given a very high priority. For example, the pastoral support network for vulnerable pupils at risk of exploitation, self-harm and other forms of abuse includes a dedicated 'student support manager', a trained counsellor, a chaplain and an extensive network of outside agencies. A parent of two children attending the school commented: 'I was very worried before they started that it would all be too much for them, but the school's caring and supportive approach has been amazing.'
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance are excellent and reflect the importance leaders place on raising aspirations, providing role models and developing a sense of pride and confidence, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Representatives from a range of higher and further education colleges address pupils. A growing bank of alumni deliver post-16 advice through assemblies and workshops. Pupils in Years 8 to 11 attend the school's very large careers convention.
- Interview training culminates with 'mock' interviews. Local business mentors provide CV and personal statement support for all pupils. All pupils receive impartial careers advice from an external adviser. The school hosted a successful apprenticeship launch event in conjunction with the Essex County Council Skills Board to promote local

opportunities available to school leavers, with follow-up sessions to coach pupils through the application process. The impact of this work can be seen in the consistently low figures for leavers not in education or training. Careers information and guidance build steadily from Year 7. Very good progress is being made towards fully meeting the 'Gatsby benchmarks' for careers provision (the government's targets for careers provision).

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Very nearly all parents, pupils and staff responding to their surveys agree that behaviour is good. Inspectors found that in lessons, pupils' highly positive behaviour creates ideal conditions for learning. Pupils show great respect for their teachers and for one another. They can appraise and accept criticism of one another's work.
- Around the school, at breaktimes and lunchtimes, pupils get on very well together. Bullying is rare and dealt with quickly, with extensive follow-up and record-keeping.
- Pupils feel that the behaviour system is fair and well used to ensure that they can learn well in lessons.
- This year, there have been no permanent exclusions, while fixed-term exclusions have reduced because of more consistent use of internal provision. The school's use of the internal seclusion room for pupils is well monitored, well managed and used rarely. Where a small number of pupils are accessing this room, high-quality work is provided. Staff also use the opportunity to talk to pupils about how to manage and rectify their behaviour. Pupils' well-being in the room is central to the vigilance of the supervisor.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and appreciate the high-quality education they receive. As a result, their attendance is high, and their punctuality is good. A few pupils do not necessarily have positive attitudes and behave well when they first arrive at the school. However, they quickly learn to improve their behaviour and adopt the 'Gilberd Way'.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 11 have improved year on year. In recent years, pupils' progress from key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4 has consistently been among the top 20% of schools in the country, and significantly above the average progress score seen nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils make overall progress that is at least in line with that of other pupils nationally.
- Overall, pupils' progress was again significantly above the national average in 2018. Progress in English, mathematics and humanities, and a range of other subjects, was particularly strong. Outcomes in science have now improved so that pupils' progress is above average. The number of pupils taking a modern foreign language has doubled over the last four years. Progress in these subjects is now above average.
- A very small number of pupils access an amended curriculum which allows them to study subjects that are relevant to their interests, aspirations and learning needs. For example, inspectors saw these pupils valuably engaged in bicycle repair. These pupils

make exceptional progress from their starting points.

- Pupils who attend off-site alternative provision are monitored regularly. They achieve well, attend regularly and are kept safe.
- The progress of pupils with SEND is above average because of the very well-planned provision. A recent innovation has been to allocate learning support assistants to subject departments. This has allowed these members of staff to gain a better understanding of the subject and support pupils even better than before.
- The most able pupils achieve very well. There are opportunities to gain extra qualifications to provide additional challenge or stretch their abilities to the maximum. As a parent commented: 'My son has been very happy at the school. As a child in the top sets, he is definitely challenged and stretched.'
- Pupils read widely and often, with opportunities during form time and dedicated lessons. They demonstrate fluency and comprehension appropriate for their age.
- Pupils can articulate their knowledge and understanding clearly in an age-appropriate way, confidently explaining what they can do and what they need to do to improve further. The combination of academic and pastoral support is key to pupils' success. For example, a parent commented: 'My daughter is not a natural academic, but the personal attention and encouragement she has received from teachers have been wonderful.'
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education through a combination of academic success and effective careers guidance. The school's work with post-16 providers and local selective schools, to ensure that pupils do not miss out on courses and opportunities that will start to prepare them for competitive university courses or apprenticeships, is excellent.

School details

Unique reference number	137926
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10054406

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 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,539
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	John Simpson
Headteacher	Linda Exley
Telephone number	01206 842211
Website	www.gilberd.com
Email address	headteacher@gilberd.com
Date of previous inspection	16 November 2013

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school and has grown over recent years.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be entitled to the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average, as is the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan.
- A few pupils are educated in off-site alternative provision at the Colchester Institute.
- The school recently formed the Alpha Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) with Colchester County High School for Girls. This is shortly being joined by Manningtree High School. The MAT is also due to open a free school soon to meet the growing number of pupils requiring secondary school places in north Colchester. The headteacher has been appointed as executive headteacher across both schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed pupils' learning in 57 lessons, covering a wide range of lessons and all year groups. Some observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Tours of the school were made with the headteacher and inspectors independently checked the quality of teaching and the behaviour of pupils in lessons. Observations of pupils' behaviour in the dining halls at breaktimes were made, as were observations of pupils around the site. The internal seclusion rooms were visited and checked.
- The inspection team looked carefully at the quality of work in pupils' books to assess progress and teaching over time.
- The inspection team considered the 314 responses to the online parental questionnaire, Parent View, together with 70 written responses, the 104 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 104 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team met with the chair of the governing body, three other governors, the headteacher, senior leaders, a group of middle leaders, pastoral leaders, a group of teachers and four different groups of pupils. Inspectors observed a wide range of school activities, including assembly, form time and pupil leadership activities.
- The inspection team analysed and scrutinised the school's self-evaluation documentation, which included evidence from governors' minutes, school policies and progress information.
- Inspectors examined policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils in the school.

Inspection team

Adrian Lyons, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nicola Hood	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Bell	Ofsted Inspector
Duncan Cooper	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Pepper	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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Manchester
M1 2WD

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