

# Towers School and Sixth Form Centre

Faversham Road, Kennington, Ashford, Kent TN24 9AL

## Inspection dates

22–23 January 2019

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The principal and his senior team provide strong leadership. They have a compelling vision for their school which is supported by pupils, staff and the majority of parents.
- Leaders' expectations for pupils' behaviour and learning are absolutely clear. Pupils understand exactly what they have to do and respond well to clear systems and routines. Standards of behaviour have risen as a result and are consistently good.
- Teaching is good across the school. Leaders' thoughtful development of teachers' skills is having a very positive impact on pupils' learning. Pupils value the consistent approach that they experience across the school, which helps them to learn better than in the past.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are now making good progress.
- Trustees are ambitious for the school. They carry out their duties diligently, providing useful support and challenge to senior leaders. They contribute effectively to improvements in the school, such as the quality of the curriculum, teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff know their responsibilities and take them very seriously. Clear and consistent routines help pupils to feel safe and well looked after.
- Over time, pupils have not made as much progress by the end of Year 11 as they should have. Pupils currently in key stage 3 are making good progress from their starting points. However, pupils in key stage 4 are not currently on track to achieve as well as they should by the time they leave the school.
- Leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance have been largely successful. Overall, attendance is broadly in line with national averages. Pupils with SEND do not currently attend as well as other pupils.
- Leaders use helpful information to check how the school is improving. Trustees hold leaders stringently to account for the impact of their work. At times, leaders' evaluations about standards lack the precision to help them prioritise the school's next steps as it develops.
- Provision in the sixth form is good. Students make good progress and achieve well in academic and vocational courses. Leaders identify priorities for improvement accurately. Aspects of personal development and welfare are not as strong as in the rest of the school.
- The curriculum meets pupils' needs successfully. Extra-curricular activities supplement lesson-based learning well. Leaders' plans to broaden the key stage 3 curriculum further are appropriate.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils currently in key stage 4 make up lost ground by the end of Year 11 so that they attain as well as they should from their starting points.
- Support pupils with SEND to ensure that they attend regularly.
- Leaders at all levels evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing school improvement work accurately.
- Strengthen the quality of personal development and welfare in the sixth form, so that students feel consistently well supported, including by an effective careers programme.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Since the previous inspection, the principal and his senior team have successfully promoted a new ethos within the school. Teachers expect more from their pupils than in the past, and pupils respond accordingly. This creates a strong culture of learning and positive behaviour, which pupils, parents and carers see as a strength of the school. There is increased evidence of parental confidence and a rise in the numbers of pupils choosing the school.
- Leaders monitor pupils' outcomes regularly to identify any underperformance. They now focus this work on the progress that pupils make from their different starting points, rather than on attainment. This enables them to help low-attaining pupils to catch up more quickly with their peers than in the past.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and trustees have inspired and managed a faster pace of school improvement. The rigour behind their actions is visible and supported at all levels of the school. As one member of staff explained, 'Everyone is on the bus.'
- Leaders' clear and thoughtful approach to staff training is enhancing the quality of teaching. Their insistence on pupils' good behaviour enables teachers to concentrate on improving the quality of pupils' learning experiences. Useful work with other local schools supports this aspect of school improvement successfully. As a result, standards are rising throughout the school, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Pupils experience a broad curriculum, although their experience of computing-related subjects is currently limited. Leaders have well-considered plans in place to develop the key stage 3 curriculum further.
- Leaders ensure that there is a rich choice of extra-curricular clubs and activities. These are highly regarded by pupils and well attended. Activities range from cheerleading to a Royal Shakespeare Company Club through which pupils have gained confidence and developed useful social skills. Pupils are proud of the many trophies they have won in competitions, which are conspicuously displayed in the school.
- Inclusion leaders clearly identify and support the learning of pupils with SEND. This has resulted in strong progress for those that they work with, especially in Years 7 and 8. Work to ensure that all pupils with SEND come to school regularly is ongoing.
- Leaders made effective use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and those in Year 7 who need to catch up in English and mathematics. Extra help is targeted appropriately at those who most need it. As a result, these pupils are making good progress that is helping them to catch up.
- Leaders know the school's strengths and areas to improve well. However, they do not always precisely identify which strategies they use have the most impact on improving the educational standards for pupils.

### Governance of the school

- The board of trustees is responsible for the governance of the school. After the last inspection, its membership changed. New trustees and the newly appointed chair of

trustees have provided useful additional capacity that supports and challenges senior leaders better than in the past.

- The board has a clear view of the direction that it wants the school to take. Trustees are passionate about their school. Trustees have a strong desire to make their school the first choice for their local community. They have the will and expertise to discharge their responsibilities effectively. They enhance their capacity through regular training and by recruiting new trustees strategically when they are needed.
- Trustees question leaders prudently about the impact of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. However, they do not have sufficiently precise information to identify exactly how well disadvantaged pupils achieve in relation to their starting points. This can lessen the impact of subsequent action plans.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The culture to ensure that children are safe is strong.
- The school's single central record of recruitment checks on staff is thorough and well kept. Senior leaders have established effective safeguarding policies and procedures which are up to date and well publicised. Any referrals about pupils who may be at risk are well managed.
- Staff at all levels know their responsibilities well. They receive regular training that hones their skills and keeps them aware of any local issues that might affect young people. Staff are caring, confident and diligent in the exercise of their duties.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and who they can speak to if they have any concerns. Pupils and their parents value the breadth of support that they are given. Pupils' and parents' surveys show that a high proportion of pupils feel safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is strong across a broad range of subjects. Senior leaders have established a consistently effective approach to teaching and learning, based on high expectations of pupils' engagement and achievement. As a result, pupils are making strong progress in their learning, especially in key stage 3.
- Teachers are encouraged to invest in their professional development, learning from tried-and-tested methods within and beyond the school. They share what they learn with colleagues, helping to improve pupils' experiences. Teachers speak passionately about how this improves their own confidence and motivation. A reduction in the number of staff leaving the school contributes to the pupils' increasingly positive learning experiences.
- The 'Towers Learning Model', in which pupils revisit earlier learning to deepen and broaden their understanding, gives pupils increasing confidence. It fosters pupils' curiosity in lessons, particularly in Years 7 and 8, encouraging them to think beyond the immediate topics being studied. Parents commented favourably on how teachers inspire their children with enthusiasm for their learning. As one parent said, 'I was

blown away by how [the teachers] have instilled such a love of Shakespeare.'

- Some teachers' questioning is very skilful. They probe pupils' understanding, make them think hard about the content of the lessons and reinforce aspects which will be most useful to them in the next steps of their learning. Occasionally, where teachers lack subject expertise, or where planning does not take sufficient account of gaps in pupils' prior learning, progress is hindered, but this is increasingly rare.
- Teachers support pupils successfully to strengthen their general literacy and subject-specific vocabulary. Across a range of lessons and year groups, pupils are encouraged to learn and use increasingly complicated language. Pupils who are still catching up with reading and spelling can find this hard but the vast majority respond well to the challenge.
- Improvements to the quality of teaching in English have successfully arrested a decline in pupils' performance since the last inspection. Teachers engage pupils well by choosing stimulating texts designed to appeal to the age group.
- Similar improvements are evident in mathematics. Strong teaching helps pupils to develop their confidence and expertise in mathematical ideas. This is consolidated by careful assessment where pupils check their knowledge. Where older pupils have a lot more ground to cover, small-group, intensive lessons accelerate their progress. As one Year 11 girl said, 'It's hard, but now I get it.'
- Pupils' books show pride and effort consistently across almost all year groups. Pupils say that the school's assessment model, 'Closing the Gap', helps them to correct their mistakes and fill any gaps in their knowledge. The impact of this strategy on the quality of pupils' work is particularly evident in English, mathematics and ethics.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are well looked after. Well-trained staff provide excellent practical support for pupils and their families when they need extra help. A parent reflected the views of others when they commented, 'School staff have always been there for my children and for me.'
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online, through the taught curriculum. They say that bullying is rare and where it does occur, it is dealt with effectively.
- Leaders encourage young people to take responsibility and show respect for each other. Sessions where pupils work together in year groups encourage young people to consider what it means to be a citizen in modern Britain. Initiatives such as 'family lunch', where pupils eat together in tutor groups, help pupils to improve their social skills. Most pupils and parents welcome these activities, although a small number view them less positively.
- Alternative provision supports a small group of pupils in re-engaging with learning well. Some of these pupils now attend more regularly than in the past. The welfare of pupils

in alternative provision is well managed.

- Many pupils receive helpful careers guidance and advice. Some pupils and sixth-form students, however, said that they felt that the advice is not timely enough to help them prepare well for their next steps.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders promote a clear message of 'we are strict because we care.' Teachers' high expectations and a consistently implemented behaviour policy support positive relations in the classroom. Pupils, parents and staff commented favourably on the improvements in behaviour that have resulted since the last inspection. As one parent said, 'Rules are fair and children know where they stand with them.'
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school consistently well. Pupils work hard in lessons, especially in the younger year groups. They respond positively to clear boundaries. Consequently, teachers are able to use their time effectively to help pupils with their learning.
- Instances of poor behaviour have declined notably since the previous inspection. Fewer pupils are excluded from school than is the case nationally. Leaders' decisive actions ensure that pupils take responsibility for their actions.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved since the last inspection and both are now good overall as a result of leaders' determined efforts. However, pupils with SEND do not currently attend as well as they should and this impedes their academic progress. Leaders have successfully improved the attendance of pupils in alternative provision.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- For the last two years, pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 11 have been too low. From their different starting points, pupils have made progress that is below that of other pupils nationally. This progress has been especially poor in mathematics, particularly for pupils with below-average prior attainment.
- Current Year 10 and 11 pupils' outcomes remain too far behind their peers nationally. Although they are now making better progress than before, the overall standard of their work, taking account of their different abilities and starting points, is still too low. Year 10 pupils are closer to being on track than those in Year 11.
- Outcomes in English at the end of Year 11 declined over the past two years. Pupils' learning was not deep enough to enable them to apply it successfully during final examinations. Changes to how English is taught have resulted in current pupils making consistently better progress than in the past.
- Pupils achieve less well than their peers nationally in mathematics by the end of Year 11. Leaders' actions since the last inspection have resulted in greater consistency in the quality of teaching because of more stable staffing. This has led to some improvements in attainment for the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged.
- Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are making strong progress across a wide range of subjects.

Initiatives introduced by leaders since the last inspection have had a notable impact in increasing pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding over time.

- In the past, pupils have not performed as well as they should in science, modern foreign languages and the humanities. Leaders' resolute actions are beginning to address this underperformance. Standards in science are improving year on year. Current teaching in humanities and languages is having a positive impact on pupils in key stage 3. Pupils currently in Year 11 are not performing at a high enough level for their age and ability.
- During the past two years, disadvantaged pupils achieved significantly less well than other pupils nationally by the end of key stage 4. The difference is diminishing but not quickly enough. Strategies to support teachers' provision for pupils who are disadvantaged have had a positive impact on pupils' progress. Current disadvantaged pupils' rates of progress now match the good progress of other pupils currently in the school.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress in line with pupils nationally with similar starting points. Leaders identify accurately where pupils need additional support, for example in developing their literacy skills. Younger pupils make strong progress as a result of this extra help. However, some pupils with SEND make less progress because they do not attend school as regularly as they should.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- Leaders have maintained a good quality of sixth-form provision since the previous inspection.
- Leaders provide a well-considered choice of study programmes in the sixth form reflecting the small numbers of students who apply to join. A recently introduced new course, which combines academic and vocational qualifications, has been very popular with students.
- Sixth-form students make good progress across a range of academic and vocational qualifications. This is particularly evident at A level, where students who have lower GCSE starting points make greater progress than those students with the same starting points nationally. Students taking vocational qualifications achieve well in these subjects.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is strong and matches that provided in the rest of the school. Teaching for A-level courses provides substantial challenge to the students, who achieve well as a result. Vocational courses are taught well and are appropriate for most students who have chosen them. Students benefit considerably from the variety of work placements that form part of their study programmes.
- The provision made for those who need to retake GCSE examinations in English and/or mathematics has been variable in the past. Although students typically make good progress in English, this has not consistently been the case in mathematics since the last inspection. Current provision is much stronger and reflects leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching elsewhere in the school.
- Leaders ensure that all students secure a confirmed place in education or work with training when they leave the school, at the end of Year 12 or Year 13. Some students

told inspectors that they did not feel well enough supported in making choices for their next steps. Others reflected more positively about the quality of guidance towards suitable university, higher education or employment choices.

- Sixth-form tutors know students well and are supportive of their needs. However, current arrangements for tutor sessions do not promote all aspects of students' personal development and welfare consistently well. Consequently, some students do not place high value on these sessions, as their purpose is not always clear.
- Students have many opportunities to develop their leadership skills and build their confidence. For example, in dance, older students demonstrate advanced aspects of performance skills to younger pupils. This is highly effective in consolidating the sixth-formers' mastery of technique and encouraging the participation of younger pupils in the subject.



## School details

Unique reference number	136583
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10058139

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	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,100
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	154
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mr Mark Haskell
Principal	Mr Richard Billings
Telephone number	01233 634 171
Website	<a href="http://www.towers.kent.sch.uk">www.towers.kent.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:r.billings@towers.school">r.billings@towers.school</a>
Date of previous inspection	22–23 October 2016

## Information about this school

- Towers School and Sixth Form Centre is a larger-than-average mixed non-selective school. It is based in a local authority where some pupils choose to attend selective grammar schools.
- The school operates as a single academy trust governed by a board of trustees.
- The school roll has slightly larger numbers of boys than girls. There is a higher than average proportion of disadvantaged pupils.

- The school has a lower than average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school works with three alternative learning providers, ASPIRE, Goldwyn and Concept Training, that provide for a small number of pupils.
- There are fewer pupils from ethnic minority groups than is the case in schools nationally.
- The current principal joined the school in January 2014. The chair of trustees was appointed in 2016 after the previous inspection.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 46 lessons, an assembly, two tutor groups, extra-curricular clubs and the school's isolation area. Just over half of the lessons were observed jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors met with school leaders, a range of staff and groups of pupils. There were also meetings with the trustees.
- Inspectors looked at a broad sample of pupils' work from Years 7 to 13, as well as work in lessons.
- The inspection team looked at information on the school's website and a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plan, school policies, minutes of the meetings of trustees, pupils' performance information and other relevant records. Inspectors checked the school's single central record and scrutinised safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors considered 166 Parent View responses, including 150 written comments and letters sent by parents to Ofsted. They looked at survey replies from 144 pupils and 83 members of staff.

## Inspection team

Keith Pailthorpe, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Roessler	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Fearon	Ofsted Inspector
Victoria Webster	Ofsted Inspector

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