

Chelmer Valley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115345
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311919
Inspection dates	26–27 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Rhona Seviour HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1106
6th form	162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Gill Sterman
Headteacher	Mr David Franklin
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	Court Road Broomfield Chelmsford CM1 7ER
Telephone number	01245 440232
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Chelmer Valley High School is a larger than average-sized secondary school which serves a relatively large urban and rural area. The majority of its students come from socially advantaged homes. The proportion eligible for free school meals, although still well below the national average, has risen since the last inspection. Very few students are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below average. Students' attainment on entry to the school at the age of 11 is broadly average. There is a comprehensive range of post-16 provision in the area. As a result, about half the students leave the school to continue their education or training elsewhere or to take up employment. The school's entry requirements into the sixth form mean that the prior attainment of students is below average. In 2003, the school became a specialist engineering college and it also holds the Investors in People, Sportsmark and Careers Quality national awards. The Department for Education and Skills commended the school in 2007 for its sustained improvement in the Key Stage 3 tests. The school works with others as part of the River Chelmer Partnership, the North Chelmsford Local Delivery Group and the Chelmsford and Maldon 14-19 Planning Group. It is also a member of a local school centred initial teacher training programme (SCITT) and works in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University in training teachers.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Chelmer Valley is a vibrant and dynamic school that has not stood still since the last inspection. The school judges its effectiveness to be good but, because so much of its work is exemplary, inspectors judge it to be outstanding. The active involvement of the staff, governors and students in all aspects of the life and work of the school is impressive. Staff share a sense of purpose and are highly committed to the school's values and its continued improvement. Students' personal development is exceptionally strong. Although there are a few instances of unacceptable behaviour, the vast majority of students are self-disciplined and courteous both in lessons and around the school. The school provides excellent care, guidance and support for the students and, as a result, they feel very well supported and valued. The comment made to inspectors by one student that, 'All staff are kind and helpful, strict and fair', was typical of many others. Similarly, parents commented favourably on the school's work, many citing examples of the dedication of school staff.

The proportion of students reaching the expected levels in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 is slightly above the national average. GCSE results have improved steadily since the last inspection and are now above average, clearly indicating the good progress students make during their time at the school. This good progress continues in the sixth form. The school has a rich and varied curriculum that provides a wide range of vocational and academic options for the students. There is a very broad range of activities within and outside lessons, many reflecting the school's specialist status in engineering; these widen students' horizons, raise their aspirations and improve their achievement.

The inspirational leadership of the headteacher pervades the school and its work. Aided by strong middle and senior leaders, his commitment and energy make things happen. Leaders and managers at all levels tackle any weaknesses in teaching vigorously. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and there are excellent opportunities for the continued professional development of all staff. Governors, too, discharge their responsibilities with diligence and concern for the school's improvement and they, like the headteacher, are highly effective.

The school is justifiably regarded as a highly successful specialist college in engineering. It has excellent provision for design and technology, mathematics and the sciences and is exceptionally successful in embedding the positive influence of engineering in the wider curriculum. It has used its additional funding effectively to greatly expand its information and communication technology (ICT) and specialist facilities. Equally importantly, the school has used its staffing and other resources to enhance very significantly the provision in local primary schools. As a result, it provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has accurately identified the sixth form as a priority for improvement and has begun to consider its future direction. A new head of the sixth form took up his post at the beginning of term and both he and senior leaders know that standards, which are average, could be higher. Students make good progress and perform well in a wide range of subsidiary and advanced courses, and very well in biology, design and technology and history. Whilst the quality of teaching and learning varies, it is good overall. As in the main school, there is a wide range of activities to interest and motivate the students and there are plenty of opportunities for them

to take responsibility, lead activities and learn independently. Students enjoy the sixth form and feel well supported. However, their progress has not always been as closely monitored as in the main school, and some students have not maintained the work rate demanded of more advanced study.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the provision in the sixth form in order to raise standards so that they are comparable with those reached in the main school

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement and standards are good in Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards improve steadily and, by the end of Year 11, they are above average. Students gain knowledge, skills and understanding at a good rate and the percentage obtaining 5 or more GCSE A*-C grades has increased continuously over the past four years. In 2007, the students exceeded their challenging GCSE targets. Both boys and girls progress well in mathematics and science. The school identified that progress made by some less able boys in English was in need of improvement and introduced effective support to help them. Staffing changes over the last two years have strengthened the school's work in developing literacy across the curriculum and the teaching of English, and these are beginning to make an impact on standards. The progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

Standards in the sixth form are broadly average and, although a few students are insufficiently demanding of themselves, most make good progress. In 2007, the school set challenging advanced level targets for the students; nearly half of the students achieved at least one, and in some cases, two grades higher than expected. The school's specialist engineering status provided the impetus for the introduction of new vocational and advanced level courses. Standards and achievement on these courses are good and the number of students progressing to engineering courses in universities has increased.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The strong relationships between all members of the school community reflect a high level of mutual respect and collaboration. Students enjoy school life, attend regularly and are very willing to participate in lessons and other activities. The school manages instances of unacceptable behaviour very well. As a result, the behaviour of most students is exemplary and there is a calm and relaxed atmosphere throughout the school. Students feel very safe in the school. They report that bullying and racist incidents are rare and that the school takes effective action when they occur. Sixth form students provide very good role models as mentors and are actively involved in supporting younger pupils and those who are vulnerable. Students support the school's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles and participation in sporting activities is high. Although students know how to maintain a healthy diet they do not always apply this knowledge to their everyday lives.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are thoughtful, supportive of each other and understand their rights and responsibilities. They are knowledgeable about global issues and translate their concern into action, for example, through assisting with a project in Ecuador. The range of foreign languages that students study and visits abroad help to open their minds to other cultures. Students contribute positively to the local and school communities. The school council plays an active part in school life and its members take their responsibilities very seriously.

The school prepares students well for their future lives. As a result, they are ambitious for themselves and most are keen to benefit fully from all that the school has to offer. Visits to universities and the opportunity to take part in industry-related activities and engineering competitions have been particularly influential in raising their aspirations.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The good quality of teaching and learning contributes to the good progress students make. The arrangements for grouping the students operate flexibly to ensure that they receive the teaching that is appropriate for their needs. Teachers have good subject knowledge and collaborate very well in sharing ideas and practice. Behaviour in lessons during the inspection was excellent and students were fully engaged in the work. These factors create a very positive and productive learning environment.

Lessons have a variety of interesting activities and these are well matched to students' needs. The pace in most lessons is brisk and students are attentive learners. In the most successful lessons, there is excellent planning with clear aims for the lesson that are shared with students and help them to monitor their own progress. The tasks set, often with tight timescales, are challenging and thought provoking. The less successful lessons rely too heavily on the teacher's input and make insufficient demands of the students. Often, in these lessons, teachers do not use questioning skilfully enough to extend students' knowledge and understanding. In conversation with inspectors, one student commented that teachers 'are always telling us where we are and what we need to do to improve'. The inspection confirms this judgement; students are well aware of their targets and understand how to improve the standard of their work.

The school has high expectations of both its teachers and students. There is a robust system for monitoring and evaluating teaching and this has enabled the school to pinpoint areas in need of improvement. Action taken by the school, including the provision of very good training and development opportunities for all staff, has been effective and, as a result, the quality of teaching is steadily improving.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum has improved significantly since the last inspection and is well designed to meet the distinctive needs of different groups of students. All statutory requirements are met. In Key Stage 4, traditional, vocational and scientific pathways provide students with the choice of work-related studies in business, health and social care and leisure and tourism or, for

example, three separate sciences and statistics. Progression routes into the sixth form allow students to opt for vocational courses in business, ICT and performing arts as well as a range of advanced level subjects.

Specialist status has enabled the school to both enhance and extend its curriculum. Schemes of work incorporate a creative range of engineering-related activities. In addition, a wide range of industry and business-related activities helps to extend students' understanding of the relevance of engineering to everyday life and promotes positive attitudes towards engineering as a career. There are also excellent opportunities for students to make regular use of ICT to support their learning and to become familiar with other technologies, for instance, in design and manufacturing.

The curriculum promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Visiting speakers, business and enterprise activities, competitions, and visits enhance learning in all areas of the curriculum. There are numerous sports, art, music, drama and other specialist interest clubs. There is also good provision for students to continue their studies at the end of the school day and to use programs on the school's website from home.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides excellent care for its students. It achieves this by the attention it gives, in equal measure, to students' academic and pastoral needs. Staff know the students well because of the school's emphasis on building strong relationships. Students' academic and personal development is monitored closely and the school takes prompt action when any problems occur. Parents are overwhelmingly positive and appreciative of the care the school shows for their children, and feel very well informed about their progress.

The newly structured student services area provides an innovative combination of pastoral care, counselling and medical support. This complements the very good monitoring procedures and gives focused support to help improve students' achievement. Vulnerable students, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or special educational needs, are particularly well supported and monitored so that they have the opportunity to achieve as well as they can. All requirements for child protection are in place and risk assessments completed.

Good guidance is provided on option choices in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, with individual learning programmes being devised for students when needed. The school works hard to raise the aspirations of the students and, in particular, to promote the advantages of further and higher education to both parents and students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management of the school have been very effective over a considerable period. This is well recognised by parents and students who appreciate the very strong and positive school ethos that promotes academic success and personal and social development in all students. The headteacher, together with governors and staff, constantly strives to improve standards. Recent staff changes, and the additional resources secured through its specialist

status, have provided the opportunity to accelerate the pace of improvement. The school regularly reflects on its practice and has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development, although it underestimated its overall effectiveness. Honest and rigorous self-evaluation is carried out across the school, and there is a readiness by all staff to adopt new and improved practices. Target setting is used effectively to promote improvement and, in all key areas, the school met the targets it set for 2007.

The headteacher and his staff actively lead school improvement initiatives in the county. This has provided excellent staff training. Consequently, subject leaders and other teachers are a fast-developing strength of the school, which is leading to improvement in the quality of teaching and greater rigour in monitoring and evaluating that provision. The school has been particularly successful in developing its non-teaching staff who play a valuable part in managing the school and supporting the outstanding care and guidance provision. The highly committed and long-standing governors make an excellent contribution to the school's leadership and management and ensure that all legal requirements are met. They play a key role in strategic development by working closely with senior staff to regularly refocus the school's vision and identify the priorities for future development. The school's capacity for continued improvement is very strong.

The school is very well resourced and the accommodation is maintained to a high standard. Eye-catching and informative displays, some on plasma screens, promote students' achievements and reinforce aspects of the school's work.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Chelmer Valley High School, Broomfield, Chelmsford, CM1 7ER

On behalf of the inspection team, I should like to thank you for the help you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed our contacts with you and were impressed by your courtesy and your positive views of school life.

We think you are right to be proud of Chelmer Valley. It is an outstanding school. It does everything well and some aspects of its work are excellent. In particular, there is an impressive range of activities in and out of lessons and it was good to see that so many of you take an active part in these. The school works hard to help you make progress in different subjects and that is why so many of you achieve well. It also provides many opportunities for you to take responsibility and learn to work with others. As a result, we think you are developing as responsible and considerate future citizens. The school supports and cares for you very well; staff check your progress closely and you have a very clear understanding of what you need to do to improve. Most of you are ambitious to do well and work hard in lessons. We know that a small number of students sometimes misbehave but you told us that the school takes prompt action when this occurs. Certainly, we noticed how calm and orderly the school is. We were very impressed by your excellent behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school.

Mr Franklin is one of the reasons your school is outstanding. He is absolutely committed to the school and is very determined to keep making Chelmer Valley better. His enthusiasm and energy inspire the staff and motivate everyone to do their best. The school knows that the sixth form could be better and we agree. Not all sixth formers have appreciated how much effort is needed to achieve well and aspects of the sixth form, including some teaching, could be improved. You have excellent facilities in the school and, because of its specialist status, there are many opportunities for you to find out about engineering in everyday life. We know that these have made you more aware of engineering as a future career. Whatever your interests, we hope you keep working hard and aiming high and continue to take an active part in school life. Congratulations to you all for helping the school become so successful.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour Her Majesty's Inspector