

The Gilbert School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 115357 |
| Local Authority | ESSEX LA |
| Inspection number | 311924 |
| Inspection date | 16 January 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Mark Phillips HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1270 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Nigel Hildreth |
| Headteacher | Mrs Linda Exley |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8 March 2004 |
| School address | Brinkley Lane Colchester Essex CO4 4PU |
| Telephone number | 01206 842211 |
| Fax number | 01206 845485 |

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
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Introduction

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

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues; achievement and standards, teaching and learning, and students' personal development and well-being. Evidence was gathered from assessment data, school documents, a joint lesson observation and briefer visits to a range of lessons around the school, visits to assemblies and observation of students at breaktime, scrutiny of students' work, parental questionnaires, meetings with staff and the chair of governors, and three panel meetings with groups of students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

The Gilbert School is a large comprehensive school, situated in the Highwoods ward of Colchester. Most students come from the Highwoods, Mile End, and St. John's wards. The great majority are from White British backgrounds and almost all have English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average; the social and economic background of students is in line with the national average but the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is half the national average. The majority of students come from areas where more adults have experience of higher education than is the national average; fewer than average move into or out of Gilbert School during their secondary education year, although there is rapid development in the school's catchment area which means that there is an increasingly wide mix of students at the school.

The Gilbert has been a specialist mathematics and computing college since September 2002. In September 2007, the school was awarded a second specialism in sports and drama. The Gilbert holds both the Artsmark Gold and the Sportsmark awards, recognising the amount of curriculum and extra-curricular provision made in these areas, together with a BECTA award for information and communication technology (ICT), Investors in People, and Healthy Schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Gilbert is a good school. It is also, as one parent stated, a school that is 'always looking to improve.'

Achievement is good and standards are above average. When students start at The Gilbert in Year 7, standards are broadly average. The 2007 GCSE results were above average; the proportions of students gaining five good passes, in total and including English and mathematics, were well above the national figure, and the school exceeded its challenging targets. Students performed well in the specialist college subjects of mathematics and ICT and in English literature, drama, and German; they achieved exceptionally high standards in dance, geography, and history. In science, standards were broadly in line with the national average and students made satisfactory progress. The school's detailed tracking systems and results attained by current Year 11 students show that they are making good progress overall.

Students taking the Key Stage 3 tests in 2007 made satisfactory progress. The school has accurately identified the reasons why these students did not achieve as well as in previous years. Evidence seen in lessons and through the school's tracking shows that the current Year 9 are making better progress. As important, the school has worked hard to mentor and support current Year 10 students to help them make better progress as they go through Key Stage 4. Year 10 students spoke warmly about what the school has done to help them improve their attitudes and the standard of their work. They said that having a broad and open curriculum choice has helped to improve their motivation and interest in education. The 'Personalised Pathway' option scheme, which includes traditional GCSE courses, a range of vocational courses, and opportunities for alternative work-based education, alongside GCSEs taken in school, does much to encourage students of all abilities to achieve well. All statutory requirements are met for religious education, citizenship, ICT and work-based learning. There is good work-related provision, although the school recognises that enterprise education is not as strong. Specialist college status has led to all students taking a short course GCSE in ICT, and to well-established liaison work with other local schools. The school is now planning to deliver the new vocational diploma in sports, in partnership with other local providers. These are all factors to support the school's view that curriculum provision is good.

Teaching and learning are good. Scrutiny of the school's records of lesson observations shows that lessons are monitored regularly, rigorously and accurately, and that feedback gives a clear focus on improving standards of both teaching and learning. This was confirmed by the lesson observations and visits made jointly with members of the senior team during the inspection. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well. They make it clear to students what they are to learn and make good use of a range of activities to engage and motivate them. Good behaviour and positive relationships in the classroom also help students to make good progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well-known to teachers and always identified in lesson plans. However, there is inconsistent consideration of their individual needs when planning learning activities.

Students' personal development and well-being are good overall. They enjoy school, and are pleased to be at The Gilbert. Because of the school's strategies, attendance has improved over the past three years and is now above the national average, with unauthorised absence being particularly low. Behaviour observed during the inspection was consistently good; there is a small number of students who occasionally behave inappropriately, but levels of exclusions

have decreased and students respond well on the rare occasions their behaviour needs challenging. Students feel safe in school, and they behave sensibly in practical lessons and as they move around the school. A few parents expressed concerns about bullying, but others praised the school's work. Students told inspectors, and the school's records show, that there are few reported incidents of bullying or racism. However, the school recognises that it must remain both vigilant and proactive in this important area. Students know the importance of healthy living and they participate in a good amount of physical exercise each week; they have also helped to ensure that they have good opportunities to eat and drink healthily during the school day. Students contribute well to their community through the year, school, and anti-bullying councils. They raise impressive sums for charity and play an active part in school life, for example by leading assemblies. Preparation for students' future economic well-being is good overall. They acquire good basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

Care, guidance, and support are good. All statutory arrangements for safeguarding are in place and there is good attention to health and safety matters. The school has robust tracking systems for monitoring students' progress, and academic guidance is good, particularly when students are making curriculum choices for Key Stage 4. The school has good links with outside agencies such as the education welfare service to support students' well-being. There are good links with primary schools and the local sixth form college to ease students' progression into Year 7 and after Year 11. The school website, monthly newsletters and student progress reports keep families informed, but communication between school and home is not always effective. As one parent wrote, 'I'd like to know and understand more about how the school works on a day-to-day basis so I can help my son more'.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has been in post since September 2007, having previously been deputy head. She has quickly built an extremely effective team including established, highly experienced senior leaders who know the school well and who have helped to ensure The Gilbert's continued success. They are complemented by a group of more recently appointed senior colleagues, who have brought a range of ideas and experiences to provide new thinking and new challenge. The school's development plan rightly places further improvements in standards at the centre, but also recognises the important contributions that other aspects of provision make to improving students' progress. Since the last inspection, provision in music - a key area for development - has improved considerably, and all other statutory curriculum requirements are now in place. The accuracy of self-evaluation and the impact that the new senior team has already had supports the school's judgement that capacity to improve further is also good. The extremely knowledgeable and efficient governing body fulfils its statutory role very well, and the school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further raise standards, particularly at Key Stage 3 to match the consistently good achievements of students by the end of Year 11.
- Ensure that teachers' use of individual education plans for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is consistently effective throughout the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of home to school communication to encourage and enable all parents to take a more active part in their child's learning and development.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | 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

17 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Gilberd School, Colchester, CO4 4PU

You may remember that we made a short inspection visit to The Gilberd recently. I am writing now to thank you very much for the part that you played in the inspection, particularly if we visited your lessons or spoke to you as part of one of our inspection meetings.

We agree with you, your parents, and your teachers, that the Gilberd is a good school with good teaching, a good curriculum, and good leadership. At the end of Year 11, Gilberd students leave with higher than average numbers of GCSEs at standards that are also above average. That represents good progress, and is a tribute to you and your teachers. You are well cared-for, and you respond with good attendance and good behaviour.

Mrs Exley and I have agreed that there are now three priorities for the school to work on in order to improve your school even more;

- Raise standards even higher, particularly in Key Stage 3 where standards haven't been as good as in Key Stage 4 recently.
- Make sure that everyone is given work to match their particular needs and abilities, especially those of you who have individual learning plans.
- Improve the way that the school and your parents communicate with each other, so that everyone is able to play a full part in supporting your learning and development.

As I have said, your hard work and good attitudes have been an essential part of The Gilberd's success, and you will continue to play an important part in the school's future too. Good luck with your studies and best wishes with your plans for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector