

The Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115207
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	316507
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	697
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Liam Ward
Headteacher	Mr Jonathan Tippett
Date of previous school inspection	15 May 2007
School address	Monkwick Avenue Colchester Essex CO2 8NJ
Telephone number	01206 547911
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College serves a part of Colchester, which includes some areas of deprivation. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly above the national average. The proportion who have statements of special educational needs is below the national average, though a slightly higher proportion has special educational needs. About 95% of the pupils come from White British backgrounds.

When the school was inspected in November 2005, it was judged to require special measures. It is no longer designated as a specialist school for languages. In September 2007 the school joined a federation with The Stanway School which is in Colchester. The headteacher of The Stanway School is also executive headteacher at The Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Nevertheless, in accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards.

The school is showing some significant areas of improvement. These include the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make, particularly in Years 7 to 9 in English; pupils' behaviour and attendance have also improved. Pupils' achievement and standards are better than they were two years ago, but remain inadequate overall. The school's improvement is a result of the strong leadership shown by the headteacher and his senior team. Their evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is largely accurate and has led to some robust action being taken to eliminate weaknesses. The school's leaders recognise that, while a start has been made, further significant improvement is needed. Good quality strategic plans have been drawn up to further improve aspects of the school's work, such as the quality of teaching and learning. A federation has been established with a successful school in Colchester. The two schools have begun to work together for their mutual benefit. The capacity to improve is now satisfactory, but it is as yet too dependent on the school's senior team. Others in position of responsibility such as pastoral and subject leaders are generally not well enough involved in bringing about improvements to their own areas. Where there are exceptions, particularly in the English department, improvements have been marked.

The good recent improvements in the quality of teaching are because the school's leaders know where the stronger and weaker teaching lies. They have been successful recently in reducing much of the latter. Though there remains some that is inadequate or barely satisfactory, the quality of teaching overall is now satisfactory. As a result, pupils' enjoyment of lessons is satisfactory as is the progress that they are making in lessons. This is not currently fast enough to overcome the legacy of the underachievement of recent years.

The strong and uncompromising approach taken to improve pupils' behaviour has led to relatively high levels of exclusion from school. This rate of exclusion is diminishing as behaviour improves. Behaviour in lessons is strongly related to the quality of teaching and is now satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes to work are satisfactory. The school is generally a calm and orderly place, both in lessons and around the school site. Pupils say they feel safe, and report little bullying or racism. Most say they enjoy school. Parents have expressed concern about behaviour, but the evidence from the inspection shows it is now satisfactory.

The quality of care, guidance and support that pupils receive is satisfactory. Although a new system for checking on the progress that pupils are making in their work has been introduced, it is too soon to judge its impact. Currently those whose role includes ensuring that pupils are making the progress they should in all their subjects are not sufficiently involved in monitoring it.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that the school's strategy for improvement is applied with rigour and pace, so that teaching quality and pupils' progress become good.
- Develop the roles of those with pastoral and subject responsibilities to ensure they play a full and effective part in raising pupils' attainment.
- Ensure that the progress of pupils is monitored regularly, accurately and formally so that any underachievement can be identified and acted upon speedily.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work so that they become good.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils' attainment when they enter the school at age 11 is broadly average. In 2007, the Year 9 test results rose slightly, and were much better than in 2005, but they remain below average. Results in English improved significantly and the proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level was above average, though the results were average overall. However, mathematics and science results improved very little and were below average; in both these subjects, progress is inadequate.

GCSE results have shown some improvement in the last two years, but they remain exceptionally low. In the 2007 results, pupils' progress in relation to their attainment on entry was inadequate, although during Years 10 and 11, pupils made up some ground from their very low KS3 results. All pupils gained at least one GCSE pass. There are no significant differences in the progress made by different groups of pupils.

The school failed to meet its 2007 target for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE, but met its other examination targets. However, these targets were not sufficiently challenging. The school is now setting more challenging targets.

In lessons seen, pupils' progress was broadly satisfactory, showing that the improvement seen in the 2007 Year 9 results is continuing. However, progress in lessons is too variable across subjects and is not yet strong enough to overcome the history of underachievement and enable pupils to gain satisfactory examination results.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of pupils is satisfactory. Their social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory, as is their spiritual development, although this is the weakest area. The school's personal education programme prepares pupils satisfactorily for some aspects of their future lives, such as the development of computing skills and the opportunity they have for work experience. Nevertheless, this aspect of pupils' development is inadequate because of they are not making sufficient progress academically, including in numeracy. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community at large, and feature regularly in the Colchester Youth Award programme. Pupils' consumption of healthy foods is satisfactory. This reflects the fact that the school provides meals that meet healthy eating guidelines.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, though there is too much variation in quality. Typically, lesson planning is satisfactory, pupils understand what they are to learn in the lesson and the level of challenge is satisfactory for most. However, despite the generally brisk pace, not enough time is left to allow teachers to fully review pupils' learning. Questions are frequently asked and this encourages pupils' engagement. Sometimes the shouting out of answers is tolerated. This causes some disruption. Learning assistants usually enable pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities to make satisfactory progress in lessons. On occasions though, they are unnecessarily drawn away from matters such as literacy development to give more general and less necessary support to others whose needs are fewer. Lessons do not include enough specific tasks for different groups, particularly higher attaining pupils, and the gifted and talented. Marking is mostly satisfactory, but is not consistently helpful enough in showing pupils what they might improve.

A small proportion of teaching is outstanding. In a Year 9 Spanish lesson, for instance, there were firm and clear expectations combined with warm relationships, animated teaching and the good use of the interactive whiteboard by pupils and teacher together. This created a highly enjoyable learning experience that promoted pupils' confidence, language skills and wider personal development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides pupils with a satisfactory range of courses and other activities. In Years 7 to 9 pupils take all the National Curriculum subjects and a weekly lesson of drama. They have regular lessons in information and communication technology (ICT). There is some additional support for pupils who have literacy difficulties, including reading catch-up sessions.

In Years 10 and 11, most pupils follow a GCSE-based curriculum, which includes a wide choice of four foreign languages. A small minority follow work-related courses that include college courses and work placements. There are too few vocational courses to meet the aspirations and interests of the full range of pupils. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities that includes a variety of sporting activities, several study visits to European countries and a reasonable programme of activities for gifted and talented pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. There are appropriate strategies in place to ensure the welfare of pupils. The designated child protection officer has ensured that all staff are trained and regularly updated. Statutory requirements for safeguarding are met. Support for those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities places an emphasis upon the social and emotional aspects of their development but literacy and numeracy require a greater emphasis. There is a well-considered system for tracking the progress of all pupils including those with special educational needs. The system has been introduced recently and it is too early to judge its impact. Advice on pupils' subject choices is good. Health and safety receives proper attention and risk assessments for educational visits are well-maintained.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is particular strength in the senior leadership team, but too much variability in other areas of leadership and management, such as that of subject leaders. These have had insufficient opportunities hitherto to develop and use their skills. However, their role is developing and they are now involved in activities such as monitoring the quality of work in pupils' books and the setting of homework. They are not sufficiently involved in ensuring that all pupils are making the progress they should be and taking steps to remove the cause of any underachievement. Nor are they closely enough involved in the school's 'short notice reviews' of subject departments.

A good strategy for further improving the quality of teaching and learning, using expertise from within the school, as well as from the other school in the federation has been put into action. It is too early yet to judge its impact.

Governors have taken some important steps. In pursuing the formation of a federation, they have made a positive move, which is providing good opportunities for improvement.

Target setting for GCSE and national tests has until recently not been sufficiently challenging. It now is. Targets for individual pupils are now used to identify those most in need of additional support in the period running up to national tests and public examinations. Attendance targets have been effective in improving pupils' attendance. They have given rise to action plans, which detail how each pupil with low attendance will be encouraged to attend better.

The school is relatively well-resourced, but value for money is inadequate because the progress made by pupils is insufficient.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Thomas Lord Audley School and Language College, Monkwick Avenue, Colchester, Essex CO2 8NJ

Thank you for your help when we inspected your school. We spoke to quite a number of you in our two day visit. Many of you told us that you think that the school is improving. We agree with you. What we found was that you are learning more in lessons because you are being taught better; your attendance is improving too. These improvements have come about because of the strong leadership shown by the headteacher and his team. Because of this, we are removing the school from the category of 'special measures'. However, we agree with your school's leaders that more improvement is still needed. We are therefore giving the school a 'Notice to Improve'. This means inspectors will return to the school in the next year to check on how well it is progressing.

What needs to improve most is the progress you are making. To improve that, we are asking the school to:

- continue to improve the quality of the lessons you receive
- make sure that everyone responsible for your education is playing a full part in making it as good as it should be
- check frequently on the progress you are making and help anyone who is falling behind
- make sure that your behaviour becomes good and that your desire to learn becomes good too.

You can help with all this, for example by making sure you attend school regularly and by making sure you do your classwork and homework as well as you are able to.

Best wishes

Alan Alder

Her Majesty's Inspector