

# Brentwood County High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115375
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	326193
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 July 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1414
Sixth form	191
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Brian Garner
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Carol Mason
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 May 2006
<b>School address</b>	Shenfield Common Brentwood Essex CM14 4JF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01277 238900
<b>Fax number</b>	01277 200853

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 July 2009
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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

Brentwood County High School is a specialist science, mathematics and computing college drawing students from Brentwood and the nearby London Borough of Havering. Around 5% of students are entitled to free school meals, which is below average. In the school as a whole, 18% of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including 1.6% with statements of special educational needs. These figures have risen in recent years but remain a little below average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups has also risen recently but remains well below the national average. English is the first language for nearly all students. In most year groups there are significantly more boys than girls.

The school has Investors in People status and holds the Sportsmark, Eco-School and Healthy Schools awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Brentwood County High School is a satisfactory school with good features. Standards are above average. The headteacher and senior team have set out a clear vision for improving the school. Several important changes have been made since the last inspection. The pastoral system has been changed so that students are now tutored in mixed-age groups. An outstanding 'inclusion centre' is providing an effective alternative to excluding students if their behaviour becomes unacceptable. In addition, students' academic progress is now monitored well so that underachieving students are identified and supported earlier. As a result, care, guidance and support are good. The curriculum provides more flexibility and now meets students' different learning needs well. The school has also invested much time and effort in improving the quality of teaching. Inadequate teaching is now rare and just over half of lessons are now good or better. Teaching and learning are judged satisfactory because some inconsistencies remain, for example in pace, engagement and the quality of marking. The improvements in provision are beginning to have an impact on the outcomes for students. This is most noticeable in the increasing proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. Achievement is judged satisfactory because students' progress from age 11 to 16 matches the average of similar students in other schools.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students make clear gains in their moral and social development, live healthily and behave in a safe manner. However, some students have a limited understanding of the different cultures and faiths represented in Great Britain. Most students are well behaved and engage willingly in lesson activities. They develop skills that will serve them well in the future, but they do not always show a hunger for knowledge. The new system of mixed-age tutor groups means that older students contribute well to the school community by supporting younger students who are feeling less secure. When bullying occurs it is usually tackled effectively by the school, with a particularly strong line being taken on racism. However, a few parents and students say bullying can persist despite the school's efforts.

Although leadership and management are judged satisfactory overall, some aspects are good, including the promotion of community cohesion. The school improvement plan is clearly understood by all. Self-evaluation involves all stakeholders, but has not always been sufficiently self-critical. For example, much staff training has been directed at improving the way teachers use assessment to improve learning. Most staff now make regular references to students' targets and the level of the work being taught. However, feedback to students is variable in quality and does not always include specific advice to students on how to improve. In their lesson observations, senior and middle managers have noted the positive features, but have not taken strong enough action to ensure that marking is consistent or that assessment is used to tailor teaching to students' different needs.

Senior leaders are determined to increase the school's effectiveness so it can be judged good. Although the school has not quite reached that target, improvements since the last inspection demonstrate its good capacity for further improvement. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

The sixth form offers a good range of GCE courses which meet the needs of the 40% of students who stay on to the sixth form. Some more specialised courses are offered through the Brentwood Learning Partnership, which allows students to study some subjects in other local sixth forms. The sixth form offers few vocational courses because students prefer to travel to further education colleges outside Brentwood. Participation in the school's specialist subjects is increasing, though still relatively low. A good curriculum is provided for students in the sixth form, with a range of A level courses on offer.

Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. For the last two years, pass rates have been average in AS and A level, though there was a modest improvement in sixth form standards from 2007 to 2008. However, there is a lower proportion of students than average gaining A and B grades. Sixth form leaders provide effective day-to-day management and leadership but they have yet to develop a clear understanding of what is required to raise levels of achievement, although they do recognise the need to develop students' capacity to work independently.

Students are well cared for and supported and appreciate the good relationships they have with their teachers. As one said, 'Teachers set you a bar and you are always trying to beat it.' Opportunities for students to develop their personal qualities are good. For instance, the 'insight into management' course develops team building and problem solving skills. Students are mature and play a leading role in the life of the school, as mentors and prefects. They have the opportunity to take part in a number of extra-curricular activities. However, in a recent survey, a significant number of students felt there was scope for more extension activities.

### What the school should do to improve further

Continue to raise achievement by:

- addressing the remaining inconsistencies in matters of pace, engagement and marking
- increasing the proportion of lessons where teaching and learning is good or better
- developing strategies to increase the proportion of the two highest grades in GCSE and GCE courses.

Ensure that assessment information is used regularly by subject teachers to:

- personalise teaching approaches to meet individual needs
- advise students on specific ways they can improve their work.
- improve the way that the school prepares students to live in Britain's diverse society by giving them more opportunities to experience the different cultures and faiths represented in Britain.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Students have above average prior attainment. In recent years, progress has been slower than expected during Key Stage 3, but an increasing level of academic support and intervention has enabled students to catch up again in Key Stage 4. As a result, standards are once again above average by age 16. Achievement is, therefore, satisfactory. GCSE art, drama, history, physical

education and sociology have performed well in last two years. Mathematics and English standards have improved, and this has led to a marked increase in the proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Early entry to GCSE English means that the most able students do not get as many A and A\* grades as expected, but it gives them the opportunity to gain AS level English in Year 11.

Results were better in 2008 than 2007 because, on average, the students had better prior attainment than their predecessors. Nevertheless, the progress made by students who took their GCSEs in 2008 was below average, partly due to the marked underachievement of a small number of students. Girls whose attainment was below average when they joined continued to make slower progress, as did some students who find learning difficult. Current students in these groups are now making satisfactory or better progress. Standards in the current Year 11 are higher than last year, even though the year-group was weaker on entry. This shows that progress is improving.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The personal development and well-being of the students are good. The great majority of students feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Attendance is improving and is now close to average. Students adopt healthy lifestyles because the school offers a good range of healthy eating options and has a good health education programme. They take part in regular physical activity both in lessons and after school. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being because they learn about the world of work, become proficient in using information and communication technology (ICT) and develop good levels of literacy and numeracy.

Behaviour is good overall, both in and out of lessons, though some younger students occasionally find it difficult to get along with each other. As students get older, they form more secure and stable relationships. Some take on responsibilities such as peer mentoring and representing others on the school council. Students' moral and social development is therefore good. They have positive attitudes and enjoy the good range of extra-curricular activities. They also make a good contribution to the wider community through many charitable activities. Students' spiritual development is satisfactory, but not always well integrated across the curriculum. In contrast, the school has given greater attention to students' cultural development through various subjects, though some lack experience of cultures and faiths other than their own.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The school's own lesson observations had suggested a higher grade, but the inspection showed that this was a little too generous. The first day of the inspection coincided with sports day, and this undoubtedly affected the pace of learning in some lessons. However, thirteen lessons were observed on the second day, including four that were jointly observed with senior leaders. Six of the thirteen lessons were graded lower than the school's expectation.

The vast majority of teaching seen by inspectors was at least satisfactory and a significant number of lessons seen were good or better. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan effectively. The impact of the school's specialist status is seen in the good use of ICT to support

teaching and learning. In the majority of lessons, good teacher student relationships and classroom management create an environment that students enjoy and where learning can take place and progress is made. In the best lessons teachers use questioning skilfully to check the level of student understanding, adapting their teaching to ensure all make progress. They also make good use of praise to encourage students' efforts. However, in some lessons, teaching is not sufficiently targeted at students' differing needs and levels of attainment, so that they are not always appropriately challenged. The quality of marking is inconsistent; in the best instances it contributes well to students' overall progress by providing them with ways of improving their performance.

Students' behaviour in lessons is usually good; they work well individually and collectively, and peer assessment is used particularly well to reinforce and support learning. However, a few students resort to minor disruptive behaviour in lessons that do not engage them as well as they could.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

Students in Years 7 to 11 are well supported by a good curriculum which meets statutory requirements. The school provides good opportunities for all students, including the gifted and talented, and those who find learning more difficult. The development of the curriculum through regular reviews ensures that students' needs are well met. A range of GCSE courses are offered in Key Stage 4, supplemented by a satisfactory alternative curriculum with college-based vocational courses for the small number of students at risk of disaffection. The impact of the school's specialist status is seen in the higher than average proportion of students taking separate sciences at GCSE, the good results in ICT and the recent improvements in mathematics provision. The school continues to develop its good working relationships with other local institutions to provide additional courses, extension days and enrichment activities. The personal, social and health education provision contributes well to students' personal development and all students follow a GCSE short course in citizenship.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides good care, guidance and support. The very effective academic monitoring system allows teachers and students to identify areas of weakness and set targets for success. As a result, achievement is improving, though it remains satisfactory. The support offered to underachieving students has been a contributory factor in raising standards. Students in Year 11 are given good guidance and direction on choosing appropriate post-16 courses. As a result, nearly all progress to education, employment or training. Guidance for pupils receiving additional support for their learning is good.

Child protection requirements and procedures are securely in place and safeguarding procedures meet government requirements. The recently introduced house system is quickly emerging as a strength of the pastoral support. The school has effective ways to identify and support vulnerable students and liaises well with outside medical and social support agencies including the local authority. The new inclusion centre is helping to reduce the number of fixed term exclusions. It provides excellent support for disaffected students, thereby keeping them in touch with education.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection a considerable number of changes have been made and the culture of the school is changing. Good use is made of past performance data to set appropriate targets and of assessment data to monitor progress against them. Targets are more clearly understood by staff and they feel well supported in their roles. The school has a clear plan to promote community cohesion, based on a thorough audit of existing practice. Racial equality is promoted well and there are satisfactory gender and disability equality schemes.

Improved management systems have been introduced during the last year. Senior leaders systematically monitor the school's work through regular visits to classrooms and frequent reviews of progress with heads of department. Further information is obtained from surveys of students, parents and staff. Departmental self-evaluations are generally accurate, reflecting a growing confidence among middle managers. The school's overall self-evaluation correctly identifies the strengths and weaknesses in provision, although some strengths are overstated. The sharing of good practice is improving, although it could usefully be extended further between subject areas.

The headteacher and senior leadership team have a clear focus on school improvement and standards are rising steadily. However, in some areas they have not had enough impact, for example, to ensure that the marking and assessment of students' work is consistent across all subjects. Governors bring a wide range of skills and experience to their role, which they exercise satisfactorily. They have overseen recent developments within the school, and have given appropriate support while holding the school to account.



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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	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?	3	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

### Achievement and standards

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

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<sup>1</sup>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.

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
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	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

3 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Brentwood County High School, Brentwood CM14 4JF

I recently visited your school with a team of inspectors. Thank you for welcoming us and helping us with the inspection. We judged the school to be satisfactory with some good features.

Mrs Mason and her senior team have set out a clear vision for improving the school. The school improvement plan is clearly understood by all staff and several improvements have been made since the last inspection. These include a more flexible curriculum, a better pastoral system, closer checks on your progress and a new inclusion centre. Care, guidance and support are now good. The school has invested much time and effort in improving the quality of teaching and inadequate lessons are now unusual. We judged teaching and learning to be satisfactory because there are still some areas to improve, such as the quality of marking and the way teachers use assessment to guide your learning.

These improvements are beginning to raise standards. More of you now gain five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. Your progress from age 11 to 16 matches the average of similar students in other schools. Your personal development and well-being are good. The new system of mixed-age tutor groups means that younger students are supported well. Most of you feel that the school tackles bullying well, but a few students reported longer term problems.

We have made three recommendations to the school. We think it should:

- continue to raise achievement through closer monitoring by senior staff, further improvements to teaching and learning, and by making sure that more of you get the highest grades in GCSE, AS and A level examinations.
- make sure that lessons meet your individual needs better and that you get good individual advice on how to improve your work.
- prepare you better for living in Britain's diverse society.

The inspection team felt that the school has a good capacity for improvement. You can help by working hard and by further improving attendance.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector