

The Bishop's Stortford High School

London Road, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 3LU

Inspection dates 1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The majority of students are making good progress and they learn well in most subjects.
- Most teaching is good and sometimes outstanding which is why achievement is good.
- Students have outstanding attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is often exemplary. Relationships throughout the school are extremely positive.
- The sixth form is good because students consistently make good, and often outstanding, progress.
- The acting headteacher has quickly gained the respect of students, staff and parents and he has secured their full support in continuing to improve standards.
- Leaders and managers are well placed to secure further improvement. They have maintained the highest standards of behaviour and quickly improved teaching and achievement following a fall in standards in 2012.
- Governors have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and they provide a good level of challenge and support to the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not always pitched at the right level for the most-able students in some subjects, particularly science.
- Teachers' marking does not consistently set clear targets for how students can improve. When targets are set, some teachers do not always check that students have acted on them.
- Teaching, particularly in the sixth form, does not always fully enable students to learn independently.
- The targets that are set for teachers to improve their teaching are not specific enough.
- The monitoring of achievement and teaching by senior leaders and subject leaders is not as effective as it could be.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons, of which 12 were jointly observed with a senior leader. Members of the inspection team also made several short visits to lessons as part of themed learning walks.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students. Other meetings were held with members of the governing body, senior leaders and staff, including those responsible for subjects.
- Inspectors analysed 220 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) during the inspection, as well as responses to questionnaires from 43 staff.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including those relating to the monitoring of teaching and the targets set for teachers to improve their work. They also looked at records relating to attendance, behaviour, bullying and safeguarding, the school improvement plan, data on students' progress and samples of students' work.
- The lead inspector met with one parent and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.

Inspection team

Richard Sutton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Carol Evatt	Additional Inspector
David Belsey	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The majority of students are from White British backgrounds, with around one in ten from minority ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well-below average.
- A well-below-average proportion of students are supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for some students, including those in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The acting headteacher took up the post in September 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in the main school and the sixth form so that it is always consistently good and much is better by:
 - making sure that marking in all subjects consistently sets clear targets for improvement and that these targets are systematically followed up by teachers and students
 - ensuring that teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving are appropriately high enough by teaching lessons which are always pitched at the right level for all students, particularly the most-able
 - building on the high levels of independent learning skills of students, particularly those in the sixth form, so that teaching provides more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning.
- Improve the achievement of the most-able students in science in the main school by:
 - ensuring that teaching is robustly and rigorously monitored so that it is consistently good
 - providing focused and specific training and development for teachers as necessary.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders are fully engaged in monitoring teaching and achievement in a systematic and structured way, including the regular monitoring of work that students produce
 - monitoring the progress that students make more frequently and setting clear targets for departments based on this information
 - making sure that all subject leaders use the information they receive on student progress to further improve the quality of teaching
 - making sure that targets which are set for teachers are more detailed and that they relate to specific aspects of teaching which need improvement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The achievement of students in most subjects, including mathematics and English, is good. Achievement is better in mathematics than it is in English because students of all abilities make faster progress.
- In 2012, the proportion of students who achieved 5A* - C grades, including mathematics and English, was much lower than it has been in the previous two years, though much higher than average. However, the school has accurately identified the main reasons why this happened and is effectively addressing the issues. Consequently, students are now making good progress as a result of the school focusing much more than it has previously on students' progress as well as their attainment.
- The main reason why standards fell in 2012 in Year 11 was because the most-able students did not, overall, achieve the high grades that they should have achieved, particularly in science and modern foreign languages. Around half of all students in the school have skills and abilities well above average. These students are now making good progress in most subjects and year groups because most teaching is more accurately pitched at the right level for these students.
- Achievement is better in Key Stage 4 than it is in Key Stage 3. Achievement in the sixth form is good and sometimes it is outstanding.
- Many of the most-able students take their mathematics GCSE at the end of Year 10. This is an effective strategy for these students as most achieve the highest grades and go on to study AS level mathematics in Year 11.
- The school spends some of its pupil premium funding on additional staff to provide academic support for the small number of relevant students. This additional support is increasingly effective in narrowing the gap between the achievement of these students and other students. However, in 2012, these students achieved almost two-thirds of a grade lower than other students in English and around half a grade lower in mathematics.
- A small number of students are supported through the Year 7 catch-up funding, which is additional funding to support the attainment of students who join the school below the expected level in English and mathematics. The school uses this funding to provide smaller classes in mathematics and one-to-one tuition in English. Students who are eligible are making much better progress in mathematics than they are in English.
- Students who speak English as an additional language and those from ethnic minority groups make good progress. The progress that disabled students and those who have special educational needs make is similarly good.
- Achievement in science in the main school remains a weakness for the most-able students because teaching is not fully enabling these students to make the rapid progress, at the highest level, that they are capable of.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching in the school is good and sometimes it is outstanding. This is why students make

good progress. The majority of teachers expect students to work hard and they provide work and activities which are appropriately challenging and which motivate students very well.

- Teachers have good subject and examination specification knowledge and they use this to good effect through the effective use of questions, for example, which enable students to develop their thinking and understanding.
- Most teachers ensure that activities are pitched at the right level for students. This aspect of teaching has been improved considerably since September 2012. However, it is not yet consistent enough across subjects and year groups.
- The support that disabled students and those who have special educational needs receive from teachers is effective because teachers have a good understanding of the specific needs of individual students.
- Most teachers use assessment information well during lessons so that they are able to adapt and modify activities if students are finding the work too easy or too difficult.
- Students' work is regularly marked and most teachers provide effective advice and guidance on how to improve further. However, the setting of targets is not consistent and some teachers do not always check that students have acted on the advice given. Consequently, marking does not help to improve achievement as well as it should.
- Teachers do not always help students to develop their independent learning skills as well as they should. As a result, students do not have enough opportunities to think for themselves and take more ownership for their learning. This is a specific aspect of teaching that would benefit sixth form students, in particular.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' behaviour is outstanding and often exemplary both in lessons and at break times. Their attitudes to learning are similarly outstanding and they respond extremely well to the good teaching which they receive. The vast majority of students are ambitious for themselves and they show excellent determination to succeed in their studies.
- Relationships in the school are a real strength and the vast majority of students are polite, helpful, courteous and well mannered. Students made it very clear to inspectors how proud they are to be part of the school. As one student exemplified in a conversation with an inspector, 'this school is a community and has lots on offer for its students'.
- Students have a good understanding of issues relating to both bullying and safety and they are well equipped with appropriate strategies to manage bullying or safety issues should they arise. They overwhelmingly feel safe in school and say that bullying hardly ever occurs. When it does, students told inspectors that teachers 'really clamp down on it'. School records confirm that bullying is rare.
- Attendance is well above the national average and students arrive at school and to lessons on time.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire agree that behaviour and bullying are managed well by the school.

The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher has quickly and effectively gained the full support and confidence of the whole school community as well as of the parents. Since the fall in standards in 2012, he has put in place a range of effective actions to ensure that underachievement does not continue.
- The acting headteacher is very well supported by a strong team of senior leaders. Collectively, the leadership and management of the school have the capacity to ensure that achievement and teaching continue to improve and they have demonstrated good evidence of this since September 2012.
- Leaders and managers, including those responsible for leading subjects, are fully aware of the need to monitor the progress as well as the attainment of students and they have improved and developed systems to accurately do this since September 2012. This is one reason why the progress of all students and, in particular, the most able who underachieved in 2012, is now good in most subjects.
- The acting headteacher has increased the frequency of department reviews. This is an effective and appropriate strategy as it is helping to ensure that teaching, achievement and subject leadership is strengthened further.
- The subjects that students learn are significantly enhanced by an extensive range of after-school clubs and activities which are valued and well attended by students. Links with schools in the Netherlands and Ghana enable students to learn about other cultures and develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well.
- Senior leaders do not have a systematic and structured approach to monitoring teaching and achievement. This should be more frequent and take account of the full range of information available, including the observation of teachers, monitoring of work that students produce and achievement data so that medium-term targets for departments can be set to further improve teaching and achievement.
- Leaders of subjects are, overall, effective in ensuring that achievement and teaching improve further. However, the use of student achievement data needs to be developed so that specific aspects of teaching can be improved to better meet the needs of individual students.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form is good because the majority of students consistently make good progress in most subjects.
- All teachers are set targets to improve their teaching and guide decisions about pay increases. However, targets are not specific enough to enable teachers to develop particular aspects of their teaching. In the past the connection between teachers' targets, student achievement and staff pay progression has not been made appropriately.
- Leaders are taking appropriate action to improve the achievement of the most-able students in science. However, this does not include specific and bespoke training for individual teachers.
- The local authority has provided good support to the school since September 2012, particularly with respect to facilitating department reviews.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors have an accurate understanding of the main strengths and further areas for development of the school. The governing body has a clear understanding of the school's performance and holds it to account for the quality of teaching and students' achievement. It knows how the pupil premium is spent but has not adequately monitored the impact of this funding on the achievement for eligible students. The governing body is aware of how targets are set for teachers and monitors how these targets are linked to pay increases. However, this was not done as rigorously as it should have been prior to September 2012. The governing body makes sure that the school fulfils its responsibilities regarding safeguarding; all staff have been checked as required and are trained appropriately to keep students safe and free from harm.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117577
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	412135

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1091
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	317
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Fordham
Headteacher	Paul Noble (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	15 May 2008
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