

William de Ferrers School

Trinity Square, South Woodham Ferrers, Chelmsford, CM3 5JU

Inspection dates 13 – 14 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good 2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement requires improvement as students do not always make the progress they could, especially in English and additional science.
- Teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are not always high enough. They do not set work at the right level of difficulty to ensure that all students consistently reach high standards.
- In some lessons, teachers talk for too long and do not encourage students to work on their own or in groups to find out information for themselves.
- Sometimes, teaching assistants are unable to give students good quality support as the class teachers do not involve them in planning lessons.
- Some teachers' written feedback comments do not guide students clearly enough on how to improve their work. Students do not routinely edit their work and correct their mistakes.
- When observing lessons, some subject leaders place too much emphasis on what teachers do rather than on how well the students are learning. Therefore, they cannot help teachers to ensure that all students make at least good progress.
- When planning actions for improvement, subject leaders do not consistently set ambitious progress targets for students that will result in them making good progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has rapidly galvanised his senior colleagues, who together with the governing body, have raised expectations and identified the key priorities for development. They are quickly bringing about significant improvements in all aspects of the school, and particularly in teaching and achievement.
- Students consistently achieve particularly well in mathematics, physical education, religious studies and in work-related learning.
- The sixth form is good. Students' achievement, behaviour and the quality of teaching are good, and they leave the school well prepared for later life.
- Students have good attitudes to learning, feel safe and behave well. Attendance has improved. Bullying is rare and exclusions have reduced dramatically.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 47 lessons taught by 47 teachers. Twenty four of these observations were made jointly with the headteacher and other senior leaders of the school. Inspectors did not observe teaching in Years 11 and 13 as students were sitting national examinations at the time of the inspection.
- Meetings were held with the chair and two other members of the governing body, parents and carers, staff, including senior and middle leaders, and groups of students.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at school documentation, including teachers’ planning, the school’s self-evaluation and development plans, assessment information, monitoring files, governing body minutes, safeguarding documentation and samples of students’ work.
- Inspectors considered the 131 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 103 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Robin Gaff	Additional Inspector
Judith Gooding	Additional Inspector
Christopher Cheswright	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a well-above-average sized secondary school.
- The school converted to academy status in April 2011. When the predecessor school, William de Ferrers School, was last inspected its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- A well-below-average proportion of students are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and the children of service families).
- About one in twelve pupils in Year 7 is eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is average.
- A well-below-average proportion of students speak English as an additional language.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds, with the remainder coming from a range of minority ethnic groups.
- A very small number of students experiencing behavioural and emotional difficulties attend alternative provision at the Heybridge Centre in Maldon, which is the local Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), which allows them to access the curriculum away from the school site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The current headteacher took up his post in January 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what every student can achieve
 - making sure that teachers use the information that they have on their students' achievement to plan lessons at the right level of difficulty
 - improving the quality of marking so that students receive precise guidance about how to improve their work and by ensuring that they frequently edit and correct their work
 - reducing the amount of teacher talk and creating more opportunities for students to work together and to take responsibility for their own research and learning
 - creating opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to plan learning activities together.
- Improve the impact of all leaders by ensuring:
 - subject leaders make accurate judgements of the quality of teaching observed and hold their colleagues to account for their impacts on students' progress
 - leaders check on students' progress frequently and use the information to plan appropriate support in a timely fashion
 - subject development plans are ambitious and quantify precisely how intended actions will result in students making good progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the school with standards in English and mathematics that are well above those found nationally. Achievement is not good as students make inconsistent progress as they move through the school.
- In some subjects, students make consistently good progress and attain well. In others they do not consistently attain the grades of which they are capable, particularly in English and science, as progress has been slow. The proportion gaining five GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics declined in 2012 and was average.
- The very few students who are educated away from the school are making slow progress in their learning as the support they are receiving is initially focussed mainly on helping them modify their challenging behaviours.
- Since January, there has been an intensive effort to raise standards by means of significant amounts of additional targeted support for individual students and target groups. The school's own progress information and inspection evidence show that the current Year 11 students are making faster progress in most subjects, including English and science, and are on track to reverse last year's decline.
- In comparison to the other students, those eligible for the pupil premium generally attained one grade lower in English and almost two grades lower in mathematics at the end of Year 11 in the past. Well-targeted additional tuition and programmes to support personal development, funded by the pupil premium, have been put into place this year. As a result, these students are making much faster progress and are on track to achieving similar outcomes to those of their classmates this year.
- The additional Year 7 catch-up funding is being well spent to provide additional support to those few students who enter the school with standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are below those expected for their age. As a result, they are making rapid progress and narrowing the gaps with their fellow students.
- With the additional support that they receive, disabled students and those with special educational needs are helped to make similar progress to their peers.
- Students are no longer entered early for GCSE mathematics.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is good. In most subjects, including English and science subjects, they make good progress from their starting points. In work-related courses, pupils make outstanding progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school. Inspectors saw lessons that ranged from outstanding to inadequate. As a result, students' progress across the subjects is too variable.

- Aspects of teaching require improvement. Typically this is because:
 - teachers do not always expect enough of their students or make sure that all students consistently do their best
 - activities are not always suitable for every student's needs or set at the right level of difficulty
 - valuable learning time is lost when some more able students are required to sit through whole-class explanations which they do not need
 - students are not given sufficient opportunities to work on their own or in groups to find things out for themselves.
- The quality of marking and feedback has improved with the recent introduction of a new marking policy. In some classes, it is helping students to develop their skills and improve their work well. In some other cases marking does not pick up students' misconceptions or offer clear guidance on how they could improve their work to reach higher grades. Students are not routinely expected to edit and correct their work so that they can learn from their mistakes.
- Teaching assistants provide good one-to-one or small group teaching to help students to catch up. In some lessons however, their effectiveness is reduced owing to a lack of joint planning with the class teacher.
- Teachers across the subjects are helping students to develop their literacy skills well in their lessons.
- In the better lessons, where all students make good progress, teachers have strong subject knowledge and communicate high expectations of what every student can achieve. They set a rapid pace, give students many opportunities to work in a variety of ways, and encourage students to find out information on their own.
- Teaching makes a strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For instance, in one lesson seen during the inspection, students were debating the moral question of whether it is right or wrong for parents to impose religious rites on their infant children.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and helps students make good progress from their starting points in many subjects but, in particular, in art, media and work related courses.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students are polite and courteous. They behave well around the school and in lessons. They try their best as they have good attitudes to learning even when activities are insufficiently challenging and motivating. On the odd occasion there is some low level disruption.
 - Students are well aware of various forms of bullying, including cyber, prejudicial and homophobic bullying. They say that bullying is rare and, when it does occur, it is dealt with effectively by the staff.
 - Students feel safe at school and they have a good understanding of unsafe situations. They are well aware of how to stay safe on the internet and of the dangers of substance abuse. They are confident that if they are experiencing any difficulties there is always an adult they feel they can talk to.
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- Pastoral staff work well with any students or families facing difficulties. As a result, during this academic year, attendance has risen, persistent absence has reduced and exclusions have fallen dramatically.
- Students are proud of their school and welcome the many opportunities that they have to make a positive contribution. For instance, students in the sixth form mentor younger students, and most students get involved in the annual sponsorship day to engage in activities to raise substantial funds for charity.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- On joining the school, the headteacher quickly identified that much needed to be done to improve leadership and to address weaknesses in teaching, students' achievement and behaviour. He has worked tirelessly with senior leaders to raise expectations, putting in new processes and procedures and holding staff to account for their performance. As a result, standards are rising and there has been a dramatic rise in attendance and student behaviour.
- Whole school improvement plans are ambitious and focus on the right key priorities. Planning by some middle leaders however, is not ambitious enough to ensure all students make at least good progress in their subject areas.
- The school has good systems for collecting information about students' performance. Subject leaders use this information to identify individuals requiring additional support, but occasionally are slow to implement the required help. They do not always check frequently enough how well support is raising standards. Student progress information is not always used effectively to hold colleagues to account for the quality of their teaching.
- As part of their appraisal cycle, teachers are observed once a term. Senior leaders are highly skilled in analysing the quality of teaching and giving teachers useful developmental feedback. Some subject leaders however, make over generous judgements as they are not focused sharply enough on students' progress.
- The school benefits from the determined leadership provided by the new headteacher. He has successfully enthused governors, staff, students and parents alike who, together, want to make the school a centre of excellence.
- There is wide ranging programme of training opportunities for all staff, including opportunities to learn from best practice in other schools, such as on how to promote literacy across the subjects.
- The proportion of teachers who historically have been rewarded through the upper scales is extremely high in relation to the quality of teaching. Together with the governors, the headteacher is reviewing current structures and they are determined that only the most successful teachers will be rewarded in future.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good. There is good provision for a wide range of options and good oversight of teaching quality. Students receive good support in choosing courses that are appropriate for their needs and aspirations. Careers guidance is good and students are well supported and well prepared for the next stages of their lives.

- Leaders promote equality of opportunity but have not yet ensured that all students achieve equally well across the subjects. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated.

 - Teaching programmes meet the needs and interests of students, including those who join the sixth form. With additional enrichment opportunities, such as sport, theatrical performances, overseas visits and studying of archaeology, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well.

 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors demonstrated strong strategic leadership in appointing the new headteacher who, with their support, is bringing about rapid improvements. They are well aware of the quality of teaching, what is being done to improve both this and students' overall progress and how the school's performance compares to other schools. Governors usually check spending priorities to ensure value for money. They are making sure that future salary progression will be strongly linked to teachers' appraisal outcomes and to their impact on students' achievement. Governors visit the school regularly to monitor its work, and provide both support and challenge to school leaders. They know how the pupil premium funding is being used and that it is narrowing the achievement gaps. Governors ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are robust and other statutory duties are securely implemented.
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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	136605
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	413444

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1946
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	387
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Graham
Headteacher	Neal McGowan
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2009
Telephone number	01245 326326
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