

# Verulam School

Brampton Road, St Albans, AL1 4PR

**Inspection dates** 19–20 March 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Students make good progress and the vast majority achieve above-average standards in a wide range of subjects at GCSE, including English and mathematics.
- Teaching is consistently good and some teaching is outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons very carefully. This supports students' good progress and achievement.
- Students eligible to receive government funding, disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well because the targeted funding is used well.
- Behaviour is good in the school. Students feel safe. They are proud to associate themselves with the school and they are good ambassadors for it. Around school they are mature, courteous, polite and friendly. They have positive attitudes to learning.
- The headteacher leads the school well. He receives strong support from governors, staff and parents. Good progress with the key improvement points identified at the last inspection has ensured that teaching and learning are now consistently good.
- The sixth form is good. Teaching, behaviour, and leadership and management are all consistently good and support students' achievement well.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Individual more-able students could do better.
- Whilst individual students benefit from opportunities to serve the school, for example as prefects, there are not enough of these opportunities available to other students.
- The standard with which work is presented by younger students, including their handwriting, is not always good enough.
- Marking is not consistently good in all subjects because teachers do not always provide high quality feedback to students or check whether they act on the guidance they are given.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons. Seven of these observations were completed jointly with the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed students at breaks and lunchtimes and attended tutorial periods.
- Discussions were held with students, staff, governors and the headteacher.
- Inspectors took account of 267 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took account of 77 responses to staff questionnaires and 3 letters from parents.
- A wide range of documents was examined including samples of students' work, information about students' progress, the school's development plan and self-evaluation, governors' minutes, records of any poor behaviour, and safeguarding documents.
- Inspectors listened to students read, observed reading-support lessons and the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make).

## Inspection team

Sherry Gladwin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Greevy

Additional Inspector

Jennifer Griffiths

Additional Inspector

Sa'ad Khaldi

Additional Inspector

# Full report

## Information about this school

- The school is an academy converter. The sixth form is part of a consortium with Sandringham School and Beaumont School and is known as 'BeauSandVer'.
- The school is larger than an average-sized secondary school.
- There are above average proportions of minority ethnic groups and above average proportions of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. This is additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those with a parent in the armed forces.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well-above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well-below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.
- The school collaborates with the Chancellor's School to develop teaching and leadership.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of students and increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
  - providing greater challenge for some more-able students so that they all always work to their full potential
  - improving the way younger students present their work, especially their handwriting
  - increasing the range of opportunities available for students to take on leadership roles within the school and to support the learning of others
  - ensuring teacher's marking provides high quality feedback to students that indicates how they can improve their work and that teachers check that students follow-up on the learning points they are given.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with broadly average prior attainment. Consistently good teaching, supported by students' own positive attitudes to learning, enables them to progress well. In 2013, most students made expected progress and a majority made better than expected progress in English and mathematics.
- In 2013, students achieved above-average standards in a broad range of GCSE subjects including, English and mathematics, although attainment was not as good as in 2012. School information shows current Year 11 students are on track to achieve better results than in 2013.
- The attainment of students eligible for the pupil premium funding was not as good as that of other students. In 2013, they were about half a term behind in English and nearly two terms behind in mathematics. Good checking by leaders of the effectiveness of the quality of support provided has led to better provision. School information currently shows that the progress of these students is now as good as the other students in their different year-group.
- In 2013, a few of the more-able students did not make expected progress. The school has reviewed the provision for this group of students to ensure they are adequately challenged by the work they are given and that all of them reach their full potential. Tighter checking of their progress and improved support are now enabling more-able students to make at least expected progress, with the majority making better than expected progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress across the school. The support for Year 7 catch-up groups in English and mathematics is planned carefully so that it addresses gaps in students' learning quickly so they, too, develop literacy and mathematical skills that are appropriate to their age.
- The progress of minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language is at least as good as that of other students in the school. This is due to their positive attitudes to learning and the benefit they get from good teaching and other support, especially, in reading and writing.
- In 2013, students in the sixth form achieved broadly average standards by the end of Year 12 and above average standards by the end of Year 13. Girls and minority ethnic groups did not achieve as well as other students, either in the school or nationally. This situation has been effectively addressed following a rigorous review. These groups of students are now performing as well as, and often better than, other students in the school. Students are currently on track to achieve higher standards in 2014.
- In 2013, several students were entered early for GCSE English and mathematics to give them the opportunity to extend their studies and improve their grades. In almost all cases, this policy was successful and resulted in students gaining better results in one or both subjects.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding. Teachers have good levels of subject knowledge and understand how to ensure students learn effectively. They plan lessons that reflect what their assessments tell them students already know and understand, making good use of information about their achievement to take their learning forward.

- Activities are well-planned to be stimulating and to hold students' interests and students know what their teachers expect of them. This allows almost all students to work with purpose and make good progress. Occasionally, the work set for the most-able pupils is not demanding enough to ensure they consistently reach the high standards they are capable of.
- Classrooms are calm, harmonious places in which to learn because students maintain good relationships with their teachers and each other. Teachers ensure high levels of co-operation and respect from students. Students work sensibly, whether on their own, in pairs or in small groups and produce high quality work.
- Routine and careful checking of students' progress ensures that those who are not making sufficient progress are identified and discussed during regular 'pupil progress department' meetings. Teachers quickly take actions designed to help students improve their work. The close involvement of parents and students in this process creates an effective three-way partnership that is one reason why so many students do so well.
- Teachers check students' understanding carefully to extend their learning and identify any gaps in their learning. Students are keen to engage in class, group and paired discussions. They respond to teachers' questions spontaneously and thoughtfully, showing good command of the spoken language. They speak with maturity, fluency and good articulation.
- Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught effectively. Students are supported in making good progress through a range of additional support available. These include enrichment activities, such as educational visits and music lessons, as well as by targeted one-to-one or small group sessions, reading buddies, revision classes and summer schools. The whole-school literacy and numeracy initiatives provide opportunities for students to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. The school's 'reading renaissance' programme effectively supports those students who find reading challenging and promotes their enjoyment of reading.
- Teachers and teaching assistants collaborate well to plan small group and in-class support for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs. These are successful, particularly in English and mathematics, and help these students to progress in line with expectations.
- Teachers mark students' classwork and homework regularly and accurately. They provide helpful comments to students. Marking is particularly good in English, mathematics, and design and technology. However, marking is not consistently good across all departments in the school. Teachers do not always include high quality feedback to students that help them improve or ensure that younger students are as careful in the presentation of their work as they should be.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers plan learning, which engages and stretches students. Students work with high levels of personal motivation, researching information for whole class presentations and group learning activities, which they deliver knowledgeably and confidently. Target-setting and tracking are rigorous. Marking is precise and clearly identifies next steps for students. The study programme for students in Year 12 has been revised so that it caters for the full range of students now entering the sixth form.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The school is a harmonious community where students develop

a good understanding of right and wrong. They are mature, courteous, polite and friendly. They behave with a high level of consideration, such as, holding doors open for staff, visitors and each other. Students listen politely to teachers and one another in group situations, taking turns to make well-considered contributions to discussions.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure, including in respect to internet safety, is good. Students feel safe. The vast majority of students go through the school without experiencing any form of bullying. Students have a good appreciation of bullying in all of its forms including, racist and homophobic name calling. They acknowledge that when this does occur it is quickly and effectively dealt with by teachers. Parents were highly supportive of this view.
- Behaviour is managed consistently well. Staff are highly skilled in classroom management and the rapport between staff and students is good. Rewards are used well to motivate students to work hard and achieve good standards. The vast majority of students respond well to the rewards system, particularly in Key Stage 3, where students speak with pride of receiving certificates and house points. There has been a sharp reduction in fixed term exclusions over the past year. Good systems and processes are in place to record and report unacceptable behaviour.
- Students enjoy coming to school and are good ambassadors for it. Visitors are complimentary about their contributions in debating and sporting competitions. Attendance is good and above national average. Students attend school punctually and move between classes quickly so that lessons start on time and continue without disruption. The pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the attendance of eligible students.
- The school works well to support disabled students and those who have special educational needs and or challenging behaviour. Good links with parents and carers and external agencies, and the full involvement of students in decisions about the support they receive, result in clear individual support plans and consistent approaches to behaviour management. Students develop good self-management techniques and progress well towards becoming self-regulating, responsible adults.
- Students benefit from opportunities to serve the school as prefects, house captains or support younger students with reading. Students who apply for these roles and are successful, enjoy the experience, and gain useful insight and leadership skills. Too few opportunities exist for the wider group of students to benefit from these kinds of experiences, however, so that they, too, learn to take responsibility for themselves and others.
- Students' attitudes to their learning are positive and enable them to make good progress by the end of Year 11. However, students' handwriting and presentation lower down the school are not as good as they should be.
- The behaviour and attitudes to learning of those in the sixth form are good. Students demonstrate maturity and exercise personal responsibility. Attendance is good and students are punctual to lessons including travel between the different school sites to attend lessons.

## **The leadership and management** are good

- The headteacher provides clear leadership and he is not afraid to tackle poor performance. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. His careful analysis of the school's strengths and areas for development, which are then addressed through the school's development plan, has led to consistent improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher is well-supported

by governors, staff and parents.

- The school is systematic in its monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. The leadership team is well supported by subject leaders in conducting lesson observations. Ways of improving teaching and learning are regularly discussed at all levels within the school. Staff regularly observe one another and share ideas. The school promotes excellence for its staff and students through its induction programme called the 'The Verulam Way'. Staff and students are held to account when it is apparent that they have departed from the high standards the school expects.
- Since the previous inspection the school has worked successfully to address the key issues identified. Provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs is now good. High quality teaching, which takes account of students' learning disabilities, together with regular checking of their progress against targets, is supporting good progress. Teaching is now consistently good, including in the sixth form.
- The school is developing its range of subjects to reflect both academic and vocational interests. Students are now able to choose from a growing range of academic A' Levels and vocational BTEC courses. The sixth form is popular and the increasing demand for places has resulted in a new sixth form block being built. Students have access to high quality advice, both from the school and other sources, that prepares them well for the next stage of their education and later life.
- The range of subjects available to students covers artistic, technical, cultural, mathematical and linguistic. Classroom learning is enhanced through assemblies and the 'engaging minds programme', where visiting politicians, academics and religious leaders lead debates on a range of topics, develops students as deep thinkers. Further enhancement comes through a wide range of lunch-time and after-school clubs, including the many sporting competitions with local schools. In addition, the variety of residential trips to the Lake District, Wales and Austria, all serve to develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural values.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted well because students are free from discrimination and harassment. Students from all backgrounds and abilities are helped to make good progress. The pupil premium is used effectively to provide enrichment opportunities and a range of academic support for eligible students.
- Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. The school's engagement with parents is outstanding. The school's website is a good example of how parents are supported with suggested reading lists and homework topics. Parents are highly supportive of the headteacher. In addition to the volume of online responses, several parents wrote to inspectors to express praise and thanks. One parent wrote 'I can only say that under the headteacher, his management team and staff, the school is flourishing. It has worked hand-in-hand with me as a parent to help my children succeed'.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Robust systems are in place to track students' attendance and progress across the three schools in the consortium and ensure their safety. The arrangement between the schools works well and allows students' greater choice and flexibility in the range of courses available for them to study.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are highly skilled, committed and ambitious for the school. They have ensured good

progress with the key issues identified in the previous inspection report. Governors promote equal opportunity for all students by carefully monitoring the school's tracking of students' behaviour and academic progress against set targets. They accurately understand and interpret students' progress and performance information because they are well trained in this and other areas of governance.

- Governors visit the school regularly and possess an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for development. They monitor progress with initiatives in the school development plan, including the quality of teaching and learning through regular reports by the headteacher to governors' meetings. Governors understand the value good teaching plays in securing high standards. The headteacher's performance is managed closely by governors. The headteacher's own targets are used to determine the targets of staff in the school and drive school improvement. The school's finances are managed prudently governors effectively and efficiently deploy staff to support students' learning.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137038
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	441394

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1077
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	208
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Richard Kennedy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Paul Ramsey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 September 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01727 766100
<b>Fax number</b>	01727766256
<b>Email address</b>	admin@verulam.herts.sch.uk

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