

William de Ferrers School

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

Inspection dates 30 April–1 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership by the headteacher, senior and subject leaders is good. They have rapidly improved the quality of teaching and standards in the school.
- Teaching in English has rapidly improved across all year groups and teaching has improved in mathematics, humanities and languages, especially in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form.
- Teaching is good in some other subjects including business studies, religious education, physical education and technology.
- Teaching is good. Teachers make students think more deeply by asking effective questions and students work together well in whole-class activities, in groups and on their own.
- Subject leaders are driving improvements in teaching and have a strong understanding of the data and the quality of students' work in their subjects.
- Senior leaders have made effective use of the very high standard of external challenge and support that they have received from a range of education professionals.
- Behaviour in the school is good. Attendance is above average. Students are proud of their school and wear their uniform with pride.
- The school provides a wide choice of courses at Key Stage 4, including academic subjects, vocational courses and a broad range of other GCSE subjects. All students are well prepared for their next steps in education, including at A level.
- Governors appointed the new headteacher to bring about a significant improvement in standards. They have supported him and other leaders in a turbulent time as staff and parents adjust to the new expectations.
- Leaders have successfully improved the progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Leaders have improved the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Their attainment, attendance and rate of exclusions are now in line with the rest of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement in the sixth form is not good. Teachers do not always expect enough of the most-able students, so not enough of them gain the required qualifications for top universities.
- Teachers' marking does not consistently help students to improve, especially in science.
- Teachers sometimes set work that is too easy for students in Years 7, 8 and 9, which does not prepare them well for the rigours of GCSE courses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including the school’s documents on safeguarding, the view of its own performance and plans for future improvement. They also looked at the school’s information about how well students are doing and its records relating to teaching, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors made 58 visits to lessons, some of which were short visits and visited eight tutor periods and two assemblies. Joint visits were made to 15 lessons with subject and other leaders from the school. Inspectors spoke with students in lessons and looked at their books. They observed and talked with students at breaks and lunchtimes and as they moved around the school.
- Discussions were held with four groups of students about how well they are doing in different subjects and to gather their views on behaviour and safety in the school. Discussions were also held with senior and subject leaders in the school, the manager of The Chetwood Centre, an off-site alternative provision managed by the school. In addition, discussions were also held with three governors, and the school’s local authority Standards and Excellence Commissioner.
- Inspectors considered the 113 staff questionnaire responses and 193 responses to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire. In addition inspectors considered written comments from parents sent to the inspection team and the lead inspector spoke to a small number of parents by telephone.
- The Year 11 English GCSE mock resit due to take place during the inspection was rescheduled by the school to the following week. Some Year 13 business studies assessments were initially cancelled but, following concerns raised by parents, these were reinstated and took place as originally scheduled

Inspection team

Anne Pepper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Georgina Atkinson	Additional Inspector
Jonathan Gardiner	Additional Inspector
Janet Shadick	Additional Inspector
Brenda Watson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for the pupil premium is well below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- The proportion of disabled students or those who have special educational needs is well below average.
- The school makes use of alternative provision for a very small number of students in Years 10 and 11 at the Heybridge Centre.
- The school runs a provision for its own alternative curriculum for about 70 students in Key Stages 4 and 5 at The Chetwood Centre, this is about a mile away and special buses are provided to transport students to and from the centre for specific lessons.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has received support from and developed strong professional links with the Saffron Walden Teaching Alliance.
- The school has made substantial changes to staffing since the last inspection, 34 teachers have left the school. Almost all of these have been replaced, although at present a small number of teachers are temporary or supply teachers. Since the last inspection, new appointments have been made to two deputy headteacher posts, the heads of English and science, and head of sixth form. A new special educational needed coordinator has been appointed but has not yet started. There remain vacancies for a head of mathematics and a head of physics. In the interim, the mathematics department is being led by an acting head of department, who is closely supported by a deputy headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - consistently use marking to improve the quality and presentation of students' work, especially in science
 - set more demanding tasks in Years 7, 8 and 9, so that they better prepare students for the new GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11.
- Raise achievement in the sixth form by ensuring that teachers set more demanding work for the most-able students so that they achieve the higher grades of which they are capable and go on to destinations at top universities.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher's clarity of purpose and drive to secure the highest standards of achievement and behaviour are at the heart of the rapid improvements made to the school since the last inspection.
- The headteacher has secured a highly effective team of senior leaders as well as leaders at all levels. All are fully committed to 'the standards agenda', that is aiming for high standards in all aspects of school life.
- The school has made effective use of external advice and has benefited from high-quality support and feedback from a variety of education professionals, including from the local authority. It is the combination of internal leadership drive at all levels, together with highly effective external challenge, that has ensured that the improvements made have been both decisive and rapid.
- Subject leaders are effective and are at the heart of the consistency and rapidity with which improvements have been brought about. Leaders have clear and consistent expectations of subject leaders in tracking data and monitoring teaching. As a result, subject leaders have a sharp understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their departments. They use this to put in place the short- and longer-term support needed to bring about the changes needed. Nevertheless, some inconsistencies in teaching remain, especially in the impact of marking in improving the quality of students' work and presentation.
- The curriculum is good. Changes at Key Stage 4 mean that, in Year 11, most students, and in Year 10 almost all students follow a highly academic curriculum. Students in Year 11 and Year 10 are now able to choose separate science subjects and there is greater uptake of humanities subjects and languages. However, the current curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 is not preparing students for this harder work in Years 10 and 11.
- The range of subjects is broad and balanced and together with other activities, prepares them well for life in modern Britain. All students in the school take a GCSE in religious education and a short course examination in physical education and students achieve above national standards in these. The school has carefully considered the time needed and organisation of the subjects so that students can follow their interests as well as achieve academic qualifications at GCSE and A level.
- Students have an excellent understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of life through the strong integration of these themes into their lessons as well as through tutor time, assemblies and extra activities. Students take many leadership roles and understand the values of democracy. The school is holding an election to mirror the Westminster election next week and a strong feature is that students are leading these events. Equality is promoted effectively and discrimination is tackled. As a result, there is an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Students cooperate very well together in lessons through well-thought out teaching approaches and careful use of class context data sheets.
- Pupil premium funds are being used effectively to provide one-to-one support for some students on Saturdays and in the holidays. The impact of the funding is monitored by leaders and governors four times a year as a result, actions can be adjusted if impact is not being seen. As a result, gaps have closed at the end of Key Stage 4 on all but one measure and gaps for current students in the school continue to narrow to almost no gap in the current Year 8.
- There is a wide range of vocational subjects at the school's own Chetwood Centre, which has specialist facilities for multi-skills construction and salon services. The strong links with the main school ensure high levels of attendance, good behaviour and good progress on these courses. Leaders carefully track the attendance, behaviour and progress of the very few students who attend off-site provision at the Heybridge Centre.
- The previous low take-up of some academic subjects, including separate sciences, humanities and languages, at GCSE meant that students were not well prepared for academic A level study. This has

improved for the current Year 12, but is not the case for the current Year 13. As a result, the sixth form requires improvement. Good leadership in the sixth form is seen in the improvements made to attendance and teaching, but teachers do not always expect enough of the most-able students, so not enough of them gain the required qualifications for top universities.

- Students are given clear and unbiased guidance and careers advice. As a result, they go on to a range of destinations at the end of Year 11, including the school sixth form, other local colleges or employment with training. There is strong emphasis on meeting local needs in business, engineering and technology and as a result, progression to all destinations including employment with training is high. However, progression to higher education is below national benchmarks, as is progression to the top universities.
- A very large majority of parents think that their child feels safe at the school, is happy, well looked after and that the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved. Parents were slightly less positive about their children being taught well, the school being well led and managed and the school responding well to concerns raised. From more detailed follow up with some parents, aspects of communication linked to students with special educational or medical needs were seen as not having been good in the past. A new temporary special educational needs leader has been appointed and parents are reporting improvements.
- Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective, with a strong understanding by staff and students of national issues such as extremism. All statutory requirements are met.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governance is good. Governors know the key strengths and weaknesses of the school and ask challenging questions of the school's leadership to check on actions being taken and whether targets are being met. They have maintained a strong overview of the key milestones for improvement, whilst also focusing on the small actions needed to achieve these.
- Governors monitor the progress of different groups of students. They understand how to interpret data about students' progress and have recently undergone training on this to extend their skills further. They know how the pupil premium is spent and understand the impact this has on the attendance, behaviour and progress being made for disadvantaged students in all year groups in the school.
- The governors have a good understanding of teaching and teacher recruitment. Teachers' pay rises are dependent on students making good progress and governors monitor these processes. Governors have been uncompromising in their actions to support school leaders in raising standards and tackling underperformance alongside maintaining high levels of care for staff welfare. As a result, staff are overwhelmingly positive about the leadership of the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students understand and appreciate the standards of behaviour expected of them, both in lessons and around the school, and they meet these with little need for teachers to remind them.
- Students are punctual to lessons and bring the right equipment. They are respectful to each other and adults, and show self-awareness in some narrow corridors and small spaces such as the dining halls. They take pride in their appearance.
- Mobile phones are allowed in school but not headphones. Under the direction of the teachers, students who wish to can use their phones for learning. For example in one lesson, a student had missed the previous lesson and took a picture of the work she had missed so she could make her own notes at home and catch up.
- Students value the rewards for positive contributions. There are many opportunities for leadership roles; for example, within sports, where about half of the students gain a sports leaders qualification. Behaviour in the sixth form is good. All sixth formers can be prefects and a high number are involved in peer mentoring and leadership roles with other students in the school, such as the student council.

- Rates of exclusion within the school have fallen from about one and half times the national rate in 2013, to about half the national rate in 2014 and less than this in this academic year. The school makes more use of internal exclusion. Behaviour data is used to identify possible hot-spots and this data now shows a reducing number of incidents. Inspectors agreed with students who said that very few lessons are affected by poor behaviour. On the rare occasions this occurs, it is dealt with swiftly so that learning can carry on for the rest of the class.
- Some students do not take enough pride in the presentation of their work and some teachers do not ensure that this improves. When work is set that is too easy for students in Years 7, 8 and 9, some students are not fully engaged.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have concerns. Students know about the different forms of bullying and report that bullying, the use of derogatory language or racist incidents are extremely rare. On the few occasions they occur, they are taken seriously by adults and dealt with effectively.
- Students know how to use the internet and social media safely. As with mobile phones, the fact that responsible use is integrated into lessons means that students see this as part of learning and not separate from school life.
- The school has clear policies for safeguarding, including preventing radicalisation, extremism and child sexual exploitation, and link these with the curriculum. For example students had completed a topic overview in science on abortion with scientific as well as moral, social and religious views.
- Attendance has improved rapidly. In 2013, it was close to the lowest 10% nationally; in 2014, it was in line with national figures, and, in this academic year, it is better than for the same period last year. There are fewer students with very poor rates of attendance, especially students with special educational needs or disadvantaged students. The attendance of these groups has improved rapidly and is now in line with national figures. Attendance in the sixth form has improved and is now in line with national figures.
- Attendance is checked for the very small number of students who attend The Heybridge Centre. Attendance at The Chetwood Centre uses the same electronic lesson registration as the main school. Students are taken over and back by bus for individual lessons, so their attendance is good and known at all times. Leaders make careful checks on both centres to ensure students are safe and well-behaved.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The relentless focus of senior and subject leaders on raising standards has rapidly improved teaching in a number of areas including mathematics, humanities and languages. Teaching in other areas such business studies, religious education, physical education and technology remains strong.
- Strong subject leadership has led to rapid and well-embedded improvements in English across all year groups. In English lessons, students are highly engaged as a result of imaginative teaching strategies. For example, in a lesson on descriptive writing, the teacher asked 'What scares you?' suddenly, three times. The teacher made it very clear what was expected next in exploring sensory description in texts. Throughout teaching in English, there is a consistent approach so that all students have targets and there is clear evidence of response and improvements to their work by students. As a result, presentation is consistently high and progress over time is good.
- Teaching has improved in mathematics, humanities and languages especially in Years 10, 11 and in the sixth form. In these key academic subjects, as in most other subjects, except English, the school is at an early stage in its implementation of a new curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9. As a result, the level of challenge in teaching is not as strong in these year groups.

- The teaching of communication skills is a particular strength. Students have to listen and build on an earlier answer or explanation and are expected to ask as well as respond to questions. Subject-specific vocabulary is used and understood in context in speaking, reading and writing.
- Teaching of mathematics is good overall, but is much stronger in Years 10 and 11 than in other years in the school. Standards are high and work is pitched to meet a range of outcomes. For example, in an upper-middle ability group, topics were set at GCSE grades A, B and C, with the vast majority of the class on track to make better than expected progress from Level 4 on entry in Year 7 to a GCSE grade B at the end of Year 11. Mathematics is used well in other subjects such as science, humanities and technology.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students, and students work well on their own, within the whole-class setting and when asked to work in groups by their teachers. For example in a business studies lesson, students worked in groups on revision for their upcoming GCSE examination by trying out different ways of revising. These methods included making and testing themselves on revision cards, looking at the features of a longer answer examination response and a developing a personal learning checklist.
- Teachers show their strong subject knowledge in their skilled use of questioning. For example, the use of word and symbol equations to show thermal decomposition in a science lesson. Following a practical, the teacher carefully questioned students about what they had found and what this told them. A number of misconceptions were uncovered and students were able to correct their work during the lesson.
- Improvements have been made to teaching in science despite difficulties with staffing, but some inconsistencies remain, particularly in the quality and presentation of students' work in this subject. Across the school, not all teachers ensure that students present their work effectively or organise their work so that they have a thorough and clear written record of their learning. This is particularly the case for some vocational science students. In too many cases work is not marked regularly enough or the standard of work is not improving quickly enough.
- A notable feature of teaching is the use made of class context sheets. These are produced centrally in the school and show features of the class, such as the number of disadvantaged students or those with special educational needs. There is also clear information about the names and proportions of students making or not making expected progress. Teachers annotate these context sheets and use them to plan lessons that match students' abilities well in Years 10 and 11. This effective and consistent use is ensuring that most students are making good progress in these years, but in Years 7, 8 and 9 teachers do not always set tasks that are difficult enough for lower attaining students.
- The school employs 33 teaching assistants who are deployed effectively to support learning in class. Teachers set out clearly what is expected of them and teaching assistants are flexible in working in different ways and with a range of students, supporting students on a one-to-one basis or within small groups in the class, as determined by the teacher.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students start in Year 7 with average standards. In 2014, by the end of Year 11, students' overall attainment was above national figures in the majority of subjects, including mathematics. Other subjects such as business studies, religious education, physical education and technology remain well above national averages. However, results in English in 2014 were only average and those for science below average.
- The results in English in 2014 were an improvement on 2013, where outcomes were below average. However, progress in English for students in 2014 was still not good enough, particularly for students who started in Year 7 above the national average. From looking at the school's current data for students, together with talking to students, looking at their books and observing teaching in lessons, progress for current students in the school in English is good. The proportions of students in Year 11 on track to achieve a GCSE A* to C grade in English is above average and is well above the same point last year.

- Results in science in 2014 were also an improvement on 2013, with improvements across two science subjects and some students taking a third science subject in 2014 for the first time. However, outcomes overall for two science subjects were still below national figures in 2014. As result of improved teaching in biology, chemistry and improving teaching in physics, taught as three separate science subjects for the first time in 2015, the proportions of students in Year 11 on track to achieve at least two GCSE science subjects is above average and is well above the proportion at the same point last year.
- Achievement data for other year groups in the school shows that all groups of students are making good progress in English and mathematics, with boys and disadvantaged students making the best progress in response to these groups being identified by the school as underachieving groups at GCSE. Lower attaining students are not making as much progress as other groups and this is because some work set in Years 7, 8 and 9 is too easy.
- The most able students have achieved as well as similar students nationally in the headline measure of 5A*-C including English and mathematics. However, in 2013 and 2014 their results were well below national standards when using the 'English Baccalaureate' measure, which includes two science subjects, a language and history or geography. This is because not enough students were taking these subjects with take-up in 2014 at about half the national figures. This take-up has improved for the current Year 11, and is now in line with national rates, above national in Year 10 and well above for the current Year 9. As a result the school's data shows that current students who are more able are on track to achieve above national standards in this measure.
- There has not been any early examination entry in mathematics. There was some previous early entry in physical education but this has now stopped. However, 2014 results in physical education were affected by some early entry when the students were in Year 9, two years ago, which have been counted differently under the changes to reporting of results for 2014. The school is continuing with early entry to core science in Year 10 for some students. These results are in line with national and above national at the higher grades so this is not depressing higher grades for these students. The school will keep this decision under review.
- Students who attend alternative provision at the Chetwood Centre do well in their vocational courses at both Key Stage 4 and post-16, and progression to further study is good. The very small number of students who attend alternative provision at The Heybridge Centre do as well as expected and progress to further study.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs did not make enough progress in English in 2013 and 2014 and in mathematics in 2014. This is because their progress was not tracked carefully enough student-by-student. Inspectors checked the provision for a random selection of students and the accuracy of their assessment data. The acting head of special educational needs was able to demonstrate the good progress being made by current students with special educational needs in the school.
- The gap in 2014 between disadvantaged students and their peers in English in the school was about a third of a grade and two thirds of a GCSE grade below other students nationally. The gap in 2014 in mathematics between disadvantaged students and their peers in the school as well as other students nationally was nearly a whole GCSE grade. Teachers have made sure they particularly check the work of disadvantaged students in their mathematics lessons to make sure they understand and make good progress. As a result, these gaps have narrowed for current Year 11 students.
- In 2014, not enough disadvantaged students made progress from Level 4 to a GCSE grade C in English compared to other students nationally. There were no gaps for progress in mathematics. Over time, gaps in the attainment of disadvantaged students and their peers has narrowed and, for current students, it has continued to narrow to the point where there is no gap in the current Year 8.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Students join the sixth form with GCSE grades that are above the national average. In previous years, students have not made enough progress by the time they complete their A-level courses, particularly in reaching the higher grades of which they are capable. Current students are making better progress as a

result of improved attendance and better teaching, but further and sustained improvement is needed before achievement in the sixth form is good, particularly for the more able.

- The three-year decline in numbers in the sixth form has been halted for current Year 13 and Year 12, but recent changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 4 in order to prepare students better for A level study, will only follow through with the current Year 11, as they start their A level courses this September 2015.
- Teaching in the sixth form has rapidly improved as a result of much higher expectations of what students can achieve linked to a more formal approach to target setting, assessments and feedback to students. Students have responded to this, showing high levels of responsibility towards their studies. Targets are set earlier in Year 12 than was previously the case in the school. The cycle of assessments includes more formal tasks, tests and examinations than was previously in place so that any students falling behind are identified earlier in Year 12 than was the case previously and teachers can be held to account more rigorously.
- Changes to leadership of the sixth form and the curriculum post-16 are new this year. The new curriculum is much better matched to students' aspirations and their intended destinations. Students feel the guidance they received in Year 11 helped them choose an appropriate number and range of subjects. More students are planning to go to university than previously as a result of a targeted university applications programme. However, to date, the number of students progressing to higher education is below national figures as is the proportion of students going to the top universities.
- Vocational provision for the very small number of students who take it is good, and progress is above national rates. With improved outcomes at GCSE, some Level 2 courses post-16 are being discontinued. The school is focusing on higher quality vocational provision at Level 3; for example, in applied engineering. This is planned to better match the abilities of current students in the school and enable better retention from Year 12 to Year 13 with fewer students on one-year courses.
- Retention rates from Year 12 into Year 13 have not been good in the past. They improved for the current Year 13 and are set to improve again for the current Year 12 with better guidance on courses from Year 11 and improved tracking of attendance and progress during Year 12. As a result, attendance in the sixth form is now in line with national benchmarks. Fewer students are expected to fail AS courses and fewer students are only taking one-year courses post-16. All students who join the sixth form without a GCSE grade C in English or mathematics follow a programme to re-sit this, with all students gaining a C grade or better.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good but very new, only in place since September 2014. As a result, changes made to the curriculum, guidance, tracking of progress and monitoring of teaching and attendance are all showing early signs of impact but it is too early for this to be seen in improved achievement.

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	462116

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1753
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Graham
Headteacher	Neal McGowan
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2013
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