

Rainham School for Girls

Derwent Way, Rainham, Kent ME8 0BX

Inspection dates 4–5 May 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive and associate headteachers have set a vision aspiring to raise standards further. Governors and staff across the school are on board and committed to the school's continued improvement.
- Senior and middle leaders are driving forward steps to build on the most effective teaching and learning in the school.
- Pupils enter the school with below average levels of achievement. Taking into account all their examinations, by the end of Year 11, pupils' outcomes are above national averages.
- Pupils are making good progress across most subjects, including in English and mathematics. In areas where outcomes have not been as strong in the past, such as science, progress is improving because of more effective teaching.
- Pupils who receive pupil premium funding and pupils who have special educational needs or disability are now making progress similar to their peers.
- Teaching is effective and teachers plan interesting and enjoyable lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and this contributes to strong engagement of pupils.
- Pupils' conduct around the school is very good. They display positive attitudes to learning and clearly want to do well.
- Strong relationships between staff and pupils help to keep pupils safe, promote their personal development and raise their achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The work set by teachers does not consistently take account of pupils' different starting points in order to deepen understanding and fully challenge pupils.
- Leaders do not incisively evaluate how well their actions are improving pupils' progress across all subjects and year groups.
- Students in the sixth form make less progress in academic subjects than they do in work-related courses, and are not always on suitable courses.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress from their different starting points by sharpening teachers' use of assessment so they provide consistently high levels of challenge and support, appropriate to pupils' needs and abilities.

- Strengthen leadership and governance, by:
 - ensuring rigorous evaluation of actions taken to improve the school
 - developing a clear strategy that strengthens pupils' performance in academic subjects in the sixth form, and the advice offered about course suitability before starting in the sixth form.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive and associate headteachers' clear vision for continued improvement in teaching and achievement is well understood. The associate headteacher's commitment and enthusiasm is infectious. Staff morale and relationships within the school are very positive. The vast majority of the staff who completed a survey as part of the inspection support school leaders and feel proud to work at the school.
- Changes to the leadership team have strengthened the capacity to secure further improvements. Since September 2015, the associate headteacher has assumed day-to-day running of the school. The executive headteacher has taken a strategic overview of the school, which allows her to combine leadership of the school with her role as chief executive officer of The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT).
- School leaders show determination to improve the quality of teaching and raise standards. Effective changes to the leadership of science have taken place to improve progress in this subject. Since September, leaders have systematically led the introduction of a new method for teaching, which has inspired and motivated staff. In January, there was a whole-school launch of a strategy to improve pupils' writing, and this further energised teachers to plan collaboratively and share successes. These changes have had a positive effect in a short time, but it is too soon to evaluate their full impact.
- The school's training programme for staff is well targeted to meet the school's priorities for improvement. Staff feel well supported and appreciate the range of professional development opportunities. Newly qualified teachers are particularly well supported. Middle and senior leaders told inspectors how well prepared they were for their leadership roles due to coaching as part of the school's well-developed succession planning.
- Throughout the school, leaders are working hard to drive improvement. However, their monitoring is not consistently sharp enough to identify the impact of their actions. Improvement plans do not consistently allow leaders and governors to judge how successfully actions taken are raising achievement.
- Additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils is being used effectively to close gaps by the end of key stage 4. Leaders have recently introduced a range of steps to accelerate these pupils' progress, which are beginning to show impact.
- The school's key stage 3 and 4 curriculum is well balanced and features a range of subject choices that support the aspirations, needs and interests of pupils of different abilities. The most-able pupils follow a more academic 'stellar' curriculum, designed to improve the achievement of these pupils. The first cohort of Year 11 pupils following this curriculum are due to take GCSEs this summer.
- The sixth form curriculum is not so well suited to students' starting points. Students predominantly follow academic courses, although progress in these subjects has been lower than in vocational courses.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sporting, dance and cultural opportunities and clubs. These are well attended by pupils. Many pupils participate in trips within this country and abroad. Pupils have access to independent careers advice.
- The school works very effectively to promote equality of opportunity. It celebrates diversity within the school and makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development so that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Sixth form students on the school council are impressive role models for younger pupils. Throughout the school, pupils show respect for others.
- A low proportion of parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Of those who did respond, over eight out of ten would recommend the school to other parents. The school is oversubscribed for admission places.
- The school works well in partnership with local schools and a range of other TKAT schools. There has been mutually useful work with local primary schools to provide specialist teaching and also to learn effective teaching strategies. Teachers and leaders from the school have supported several underperforming schools to improve.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors fully share the headteachers' vision for Rainham School for Girls and they care deeply about each pupil. They demonstrate a passion for continued improvement and are very proud of the school's achievements. Governors ensure that they keep up to date through regular training.
 - Governors know about the school's strengths and weaknesses because of information provided by the headteachers and their frequent visits to the school. However, they do not always hold senior leaders to account as rigorously as they should.

- Governors have ensured that pay increases for teachers are only awarded when staff are effective in their work, including in securing good achievement among pupils.
- The arrangements to safeguard staff and pupils are effective. There are comprehensive systems in place to keep pupils safe. There are also good systems to check on the suitability of staff. Governors and staff are appropriately trained, so that they know their responsibilities well. Consequently, pupils feel well cared for and safe. Pupils know what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns. Leaders work well in partnership with other agencies so that vulnerable pupils are supported quickly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and improving and this has helped to drive up pupils' achievement. Clear routines and strong relationships between staff and pupils build high levels of trust and confidence so that pupils are enjoying their learning. Pupils in all year groups work very well together to solve problems and are happy to challenge each other's thinking and offer advice.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge, high expectations and expect pupils to do their best. Teachers set tasks which are designed to engage and motivate pupils. For example, in English, Year 8 pupils enjoyed a lively discussion when planning a news article. Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, skilful questioning encourages pupils to develop deep understanding. However, on a few occasions the focus of teaching was on completing activities, rather than extending learning.
- All subjects are supporting improvements in literacy through a strong focus on extended writing. Pupils are encouraged to discuss their ideas with partners before writing them down. Many pupils were finding this helpful to clarify and sequence their thoughts.
- There are some examples of very effective feedback to pupils in line with the school's expectations. In these instances, pupils clearly understand what they have to do to improve and act on this feedback.
- Homework is set in line with the school's policy and is used to check and extend learning.
- Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not consistently set work at an appropriate level for pupils. Sometimes, the most-able pupils have to complete work at lower levels before going on to more challenging tasks so do not make as much progress as they are capable of. At other times, pupils are presented with challenging tasks which they are not yet equipped to tackle, or moved on too quickly, before they have a secure knowledge and understanding of the basics. Some written work in science shows that pupils are not consistently able to draw on basic concepts to explain scientific ideas accurately.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school is a happy place. The vast majority of pupils enjoy learning and show pride in their work and school.
- Pupils take on responsibilities enthusiastically and enjoy contributing to school life. Members of the school council aim to involve many pupils in their drive to improve the school further.
- Pupils told inspectors they feel safe in school and know who to turn to if they have a concern. Leaders make sure that vulnerable pupils receive the right emotional and practical guidance and support.
- Pupils are well trained and are very clear about how to avoid danger when using the internet. There are no problems with racism and derogatory language is rarely used. Although bullying incidents are rare and reducing, they remain a concern for a few pupils. The systems in place to respond to such incidents, however, are robust.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves very well and are polite and courteous. Pupils are punctual and come to lessons well equipped and ready to learn. The vast majority of pupils are keen and attentive in class and disruption is rare. Occasionally, when teaching lacks challenge, some pupils' attention wanes and they lose concentration.
- Pupils are considerate and respectful to staff and visitors and forge strongly positive relationships with their teachers.

- Pupils respect the learning environment. Litter is rare and displays are attractive, well presented and maintained.
- Attendance at the school has improved significantly this year and is now above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs is improving, but still below the national average.
- The school's records show that incidents of poor behaviour and exclusions have significantly reduced.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Year 11 students in 2015 arrived with low prior attainment at the end of key stage 2. According to published results, standards were well below the national average at the end of Year 11. These results were based on students' first entry to GCSE examinations, rather than those achieved when, in some subjects, they took examinations again. These showed improvement and the proportion of pupils attaining the important standard of five A* to C GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics, was above the national average. This represents strong achievement.
- However, the picture was mixed across subjects and some pupils did not achieve as well as they could in science and modern foreign languages. The school is successfully tackling these relative weaknesses. Pupils are no longer taking GCSE examinations early in languages and this is leading to improved attainment. Improved middle leadership, better teaching and more specific feedback are starting to improve progress for pupils in science and for those pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs or disability. Information and work provided by the school indicates a clear picture of improving progress for pupils from their different starting points in these areas.
- Over the last three years, the most-able pupils have made less progress from their starting points on average than others, although the pace of their learning is accelerating. Because of changes to the curriculum and improvements in teaching, leaders expect a much greater proportion of pupils to achieve the highest grades in their GCSE examinations this summer. Work seen by inspectors in books and in lessons supports this view.
- The gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers widened in 2015, mainly due to a fall in the proportion reaching at least a C grade in English. Current gaps are narrowing because of the focus on ensuring that these pupils receive extra help and support, which is leading to accelerated progress.
- Pupils who did not achieve at least level 4 at key stage 2 in reading, writing or mathematics benefit from extra support funded by the Year 7 catch-up premium. Nearly all are making faster progress in their first year in school. These and other intervention programmes, such as using older pupils as 'reading mentors', are providing effective focused support for reading. The use of the school library has noticeably increased.
- The school's current information shows that most pupils in Years 10 and 11 are on track to meet appropriately challenging targets. In September, the school introduced a new method for assessing pupils' performance through key stage 3. However, this process is at an early stage and, although assessment records information about pupils' attainment, it does not yet provide accurate detailed information about the progress of pupils in years 7, 8 and 9. Work seen during the inspection shows that pupils are making at least expected progress across subjects.
- Pupils' learning in English is improving, especially in key stage 4. Outcomes in 2015 were disappointing but leaders have reviewed why this happened and good levels of challenge and support for pupils are now promoting good progress. In key stage 3, the new assessment system being established has limited performance information to check the progress of pupils. Work in books shows recent improvement, linked to teachers' emphasis on extended writing.
- The progress made in mathematics is improving, especially in key stage 4. The school's information, together with work seen by inspectors in lessons and books, shows that the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades is on course to rise this year.
- Learning in science is inconsistent. Some teaching is appropriately demanding and interesting, with a range of activities used to help pupils understand complex ideas. However, misconceptions are not tackled consistently. The curriculum has been overhauled by subject leaders, who are also tackling weaknesses in teaching, and this is beginning to lead to higher standards in science.

- Pupils' progress in other subjects is at least secure, with particular strengths emerging, or being maintained, for example in health and social care, sports studies, geography and languages. Teachers with strong subject expertise are enthusing pupils and driving improvement. Pupils are well prepared for the next stages in their education.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- At the end of 2015, the school met both the academic and vocational minimum standards. Students made strong progress in vocational subjects. Students studying academic courses make significantly less progress than those studying vocational courses. Responses by students during lessons, and the school's current performance information, shows that progress in academic courses is improving.
- The 16–19 study programme offers learners the opportunity to combine academic and vocational courses. Most students study a combination, with an emphasis on AS- and A-level courses.
- Senior leaders have recognised the need to improve the sixth form. They are passionate about the well-being of every student and aim to support them well. A high proportion progress from Year 11 into the sixth form. One student spoke for many when she said she 'couldn't imagine going anywhere else!'
- However, leaders have enabled students to take courses which are not well-matched to their starting points and this has contributed to underachievement. Leaders are now using performance information to develop a strategy for improving the achievement of students following academic courses.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving strongly and is now good. Teachers with considerable subject expertise have the highest expectations of their students and usually provide them with activities which deepen their knowledge and understanding. Skilful questioning encourages students to work out answers for themselves and extend their thinking.
- Leaders of the sixth form carefully track students' progress and identify those who are in danger of falling behind. Leaders work with subject teachers and tutors to support individual academic and pastoral needs. Together with better teaching, this is beginning to help current students, especially those in Year 12, to make better progress.
- Students who have not yet achieved English and mathematics at grade C or above at GCSE by Year 11 are supported well and follow an effective programme of study to improve their understanding.
- Students enjoy the sixth form. They are attentive in lessons and conduct themselves very well around the school. They provide excellent role models for younger pupils. Students are mature, feel safe and reflect sensitively on social and moral issues. Students are very involved in the broader life of the school. Many use their non-contact time to support lower-school pupils through reading and mentoring programmes and run the school council. However, some students who joined the sixth form from elsewhere do not feel as well integrated into school life.
- The school has an effective programme of careers guidance once students are in the sixth form. This includes advice about apprenticeships as well as university applications. All students who left the school in 2015 went on to sustained destinations. The school provides work experience for all Year 12 students to develop employability skills.
- The head of sixth form and her team ensure that all students are cared for and nurtured. The leader makes sure that students in difficulty receive support and counselling and expert advice about health-related concerns. There is a pastoral programme that includes aspects of living in modern Britain, being aware of other cultures and developing an understanding of being a responsible citizen.

School details

Unique reference number	136456
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10000765

This inspection 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	Girls
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,603
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Mann
Headteacher	Karen Roberts
Telephone number	01634 362746
Website	www.rainhamgirls-tkat.org
Email address	admin@rsg.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 June 2012

Information about this school

- Rainham School for Girls is a larger than average-sized school for 11–18-year-olds.
- The school is led by an executive headteacher, who takes responsibility for strategic oversight and, since September 2015, an associate headteacher, who runs the school on a daily basis.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium (funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children looked after by the local authority) is just below the national average.
- A lower than average number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is just above average but the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is lower than average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard that sets the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The academy is part of The Kemnal Academies Trust.
- No pupils attend alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 33 lessons, 12 jointly with school leaders. The lead inspector also visited nine classes with the associate headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils and students, the executive and associate headteachers, senior and middle leaders, newly appointed staff, the chair of the governing body and four other governors and a representative of The Kennal Academies Trust.
- Inspectors looked at a range of pupils' and students' work, observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and at lunchtime and talked informally with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, taking into account the 51 responses on the online Ofsted parent questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered the 41 free text question responses. Responses to the 97 online questionnaires completed by staff were also taken into account.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including those associated with safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, progress information of current pupils, minutes of meetings of the governing body, the school's evaluation of its own performance and improvement plans.

Inspection team

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