

Hylands School

Chelmsford Road, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 3ET

Inspection dates

12–13 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
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' achievement has improved substantially and quickly, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Most teaching is good because teachers use interesting and often challenging activities in lessons and they focus strongly on making sure students learn.
- Students' behaviour has improved considerably and the large majority of students contribute well to lessons. Students' attendance has increased well and is good for almost all groups of students.
- The school is a safe place where students have fun, for example by their involvement with the farm, but also learn to appreciate values of respect and courtesy.
- The headteacher wants the very best for all students and keeps in close touch with what happens in the classroom. He makes sure all staff take full responsibility for students' achievement.
- Governors oversee the school's work very closely and they have taken a number of constructive and carefully considered actions to support the strong improvement in achievement and teaching.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students' progress in some subjects is too slow. Good management means much-needed changes to the curriculum and improvements in monitoring students' progress are being made quickly.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The gap between boys' and girls' achievement needs to close further.
- The curriculum for alternative provision does not meet students' interests and abilities sufficiently well.
- Too few lessons are consistently inspiring, exciting and captivating meaning that progress is rarely outstanding.
- A few students' attitudes to their studies are unproductive and they do not take enough ownership of their learning. A few students' punctuality is poor.
- Managers' actions for improvement in a few aspects, such as the sixth form and improving the quality of marking, have not had full impact.

Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice.
- Inspectors observed 35 lessons, taught by 35 different teachers, a few of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including self-evaluation reports, the improvement plan, behaviour logs, safeguarding documents and systems for managing teachers’ performance and improving teaching and learning.
- Inspectors took account of the online Parent View survey, for which there were 82 returns.
- Inspectors took account of 24 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, nominated staff, several groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the Kemnal Academies Trust and a representative from the local authority.

Inspection team

Philippa Francis, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Rosemarie McCarthy

Additional Inspector

John Mason

Additional Inspector

Helen Booth

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Full report

Information about this school

- Hylands is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The sixth form is small.
- Hylands School converted to become an academy school on 1 September 2011. It is part of the Kennal Academies Trust.
- When the predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2010, it was judged to be satisfactory in its overall effectiveness.
- Most students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for the pupil premium (the additional funding provided by the government to support particular groups of students, including those eligible for free school meals) is higher than average.
- The proportion of students who join the school other than in Year 7 is higher than average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is lower than average but the proportions supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are higher than average.
- A very few students attend alternative provision arranged by the school, which includes attendance at local colleges, work placements and two days a week at school.
- The school has a small farm including livestock and small-scale crop production.
- The school makes early GCSE entries in both mathematics and English.
- The school meets government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- A new headteacher took up post in October 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of marking by:
 - making sure that teachers' feedback is precise and highlights clearly where and how students can improve their work
 - linking this feedback more strongly to the targets students are set
 - ensuring there is a consistent focus on increasing students' literacy as part of feedback
 - making sure that marking is frequent in the few subjects where this is not the case.
- Promote outstanding teaching practice by using the very best teachers as role models to demonstrate how students can be consistently motivated and inspired.
- Raise the level of teachers' challenge to students by improving their questioning techniques so that questions probe and extend knowledge and all students are fully involved.
- Review aspects of the curriculum for alternative provision as a matter of urgency, including using students' views to inform revisions, to ensure that there is a better match to students' interests and abilities.
- Use the revised systems for monitoring sixth form students' progress rigorously and take prompt action to intervene where students are at risk of underperformance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- When students join the school in Year 7, a high proportion are working at a lower standard than is found nationally in most subjects. In particular, boys' standards in English are often very low, particularly those who joined the school other than in Year 7.
- In 2012, the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, increased markedly, closing the gap with the national average. Results for mathematics increased dramatically to be close to average. Results in the large majority of subjects increased well in 2012 and were particularly good in the arts, music and the sciences.
- Girls attain very well but boys' attainment is lagging behind, although the gap is closing compared to boys nationally. The gap between the attainment of students who are eligible for the pupil premium and their peers in English and mathematics, of around a grade, is similar to that nationally.
- Students' progress in mathematics and English has improved considerably and is good, particularly in mathematics. The proportion of disadvantaged students who made expected progress increased significantly in mathematics which closed the gap between these and other students.
- The initiatives put in place to support students who are eligible for the pupil premium, notably extra classes for mathematics and one-to-one coaching, proved highly effective as shown by the good increases in their progress. Similar interventions are in place for English in the current year and the school's monitoring records show and inspectors' observations found that good progress in both subjects is likely to be sustained.
- Students with a statement of special education need achieve very well. However, students who are supported by school action or school action plus underachieved in English in 2012. Currently, these students are making improved progress.
- Early entry to English and mathematics GCSE examinations is used well to motivate students and they are encouraged to resit to improve their grades. However, not all take up this opportunity.
- The very few students who take alternative provision do less well, although most attained a qualification in mathematics and English in 2012. They underachieved in other subjects and a number did not take a full quota of qualifications, in part because the curriculum is not yet well matched to their needs.
- Sixth form students' pass rates at A level are close to average but at AS level pass rates are below average and have not increased. The proportion of students who gain high grades has increased. However, too few students stayed on between Year 12 and Year 13 in 2011/12 to complete their A level study. Students' progress has been slow in several subjects and overall at A level. However, current students are making better progress as shown by monitoring records and inspectors' observations.

The quality of teaching is good

- The large majority of lessons in most subjects are consistently good. Teachers use a wide range of activities and set interesting tasks, combined with clear explanations of important points.

Their questioning is mostly very effective and is used well to engage the whole class as well as in a directed way to gauge students' understanding. However, sometimes teachers' questions do not go far enough in demanding full and justified answers from students.

- Teachers often work very closely with teaching assistants to help students learn well. Between them, they create a positive and sometimes vibrant learning environment. This is particularly evident in art, music and drama lessons. Teaching assistants' work is purposeful and tailored well to individual students' needs.
- Students with disabilities, those who have special educational needs and those for whom the pupil premium provides support learn well because of the high level of support they receive. Extra lessons in mathematics and English and one-to-one coaching is in place and ensures these students make good progress.
- Teachers use assessment constructively in lessons and students get regular and good verbal feedback. Teachers use praise particularly well to encourage confidence and motivate students. Students often self- or peer-assess their work. This helps them to know what they need to do to improve their work successfully. However, teachers sometimes use peer assessment at inappropriate points in lessons with little added value.
- Teachers' marking varies in quality. In some subjects, marking is well structured and very good, but this good practice is not widespread. In a very few subjects marking is infrequent. Teachers' feedback comments tend to lack depth and they do not correct spelling consistently in a few subjects.
- Over time, students in the sixth form have made slow progress in their A level study, in part because of insufficient monitoring of their progress and too little academic guidance. Teaching has been sometimes unchallenging for these students because teachers have tended to help them too much, partly because, in some subjects, their learning was insecure at AS level. However, teachers' monitoring of their progress is much improved and most students are now making adequate or better progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most students behave well in lessons and around the school. They are very respectful of staff and friendly and courteous to visitors. They contribute well to group work and work well together. A few students find it difficult to curb their noisiness around the school but generally the site is a relatively calm place.
- Teachers are mostly firm in dealing with behaviour issues and are very well supported in this by senior staff and pastoral non-teaching support staff. Teachers rightly try to make their lessons engaging and interesting in order to keep students' full attention. However, this is not always entirely successful and inspectors observed low levels of distracting chatter in a very small minority of less effective lessons.
- Students' attendance has improved strongly and is good overall. Students like the recognition of 100% attendance they receive and this motivates them well. Students' punctuality to lessons is not consistently good.
- Students show good awareness of different forms of bullying but say that incidences are few and dealt with promptly and effectively. Recording of any incidents is very thorough. The rate of fixed term exclusion is low and permanent exclusion is very rare.

- Students pay good attention to safety and use safe practices well. Their high involvement with the school farm helps to reinforce important aspects of health and safety when dealing with animals and land-based activities. Most parents and carers agree that their children are safe in school. The site is secure, kept free from hazards and well maintained.
- Sixth form students behave very well and are excellent role models for younger students. They readily take on mentoring roles with individual younger students with a high level of success, for example in supporting students to improve their behaviour, and helping them with subjects such as science or with reading.

The leadership and management are good

- Since its conversion to an academy, the management of the school has undergone significant and very positive change. The new headteacher and his leadership team have high expectations and this ambition is shared among staff because of clear communication of their vision. Staff morale is high. Managers and teachers are in no doubt about their responsibilities and accountability for students' achievement.
- Managers have implemented actions to increase pastoral support and to strengthen behaviour management successfully. Teachers and support staff work closely, with evident impact in much improved behaviour, increased rates of attendance and far fewer fixed term exclusions. Nevertheless, teachers do not always take a firm line on punctuality.
- Managers evaluate the school's work rigorously and produce accurate and measurable actions for improvement. They have responded well to senior managers' targets for improved results. Senior managers use data particularly effectively to inform actions. Middle managers' skill in using data has increased significantly. Analysis in a few areas is less sophisticated, for example in analysing information in the behaviour log.
- Managers have instigated a much stronger focus on literacy, knowing that a significant proportion of students struggle with reading and writing. A 'Stop and Read' initiative is working well, for example, students make good use of social spaces in the canteen for extra reading. The revisions to the marking policy ensure that teachers focus strongly on developing students' literacy through their feedback and corrections to their work.
- Managers operate robust performance management of teachers, taking account of the impact of their teaching on students' achievement. Teachers' promotion and progression through pay scales is based on merit. Managers observe lessons frequently and use their findings well to inform teacher development activities, which have ensured a secure basis for good teaching. However, these activities are sometimes too general and do not always closely meet individual teachers' specific development needs.
- Much has been done to improve the curriculum and more actions are in train. The sixth form curriculum, and the associated entry requirements, has been revised to match students' interests and abilities. Teachers make mostly good use of opportunities to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example through the arts. However, the curriculum for the very few students who receive alternative provision is less well tailored to their needs and requires prompt action to ensure that the work placement element is more relevant and that the links between college placements and school are strengthened.
- Managers link closely to parents and carers and work hard to engage those who are hard to reach and to challenge the few negative perceptions of the school's work. Students, parents and

carers are confident that the school is a safe place to learn and inspectors agree. Safeguarding arrangements are fully in place and staff receive thorough and regular training.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors took careful stock of the school's performance after its conversion to an academy. This included reconfiguring the committee arrangements to focus on achievement and teaching and setting a range of challenging targets for students' performance to quicken the pace of improvement. Governors also ensured strengthened arrangements for performance management of all staff in order to increase substantially managers' and teachers' accountability for students' achievement. The academy trust provided good support for governors during this period.
- Governors review appropriate and clearly presented data on students' achievement regularly, including for the sixth form. However, data showing sixth form students' progress is less clearly defined in reports. Governors are aware of gaps in achievement and understand the importance of closing these. Governors ensure that the pupil premium is targeted to good effect, as shown by the substantial improvement in students' rate of progress in mathematics.
- Governors keep close oversight of the quality of teaching and the staffing priorities. They have supported senior staff in tackling underperformance very well. Governors meet their statutory requirements for safeguarding.

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	137072
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	402747

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Foundation
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	754
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Ives
Headteacher	Neil Dunn
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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