

# Colmers School - A Specialist Sports and Science College

Bristol Road South, Rednal, Birmingham, B45 9NY

**Inspection dates** 25–26 April 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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, often from low starting points. Some of the least able do better than similar students nationally, particularly in English.
- The proportion achieving five good grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is in line with the national average and has improved year on year for the last three years.
- Students' performance in Art, Geography, Physical Education, Religious Education and vocational subjects is particularly good.
- Teaching is good or outstanding in the very large majority of lessons, and students show very positive attitudes to their learning.
- The headteacher has successfully led this improving school towards higher expectations of its students.
- The school takes particularly good care of the most vulnerable and prepares all students very well for life beyond school.
- Behaviour is good and students say they feel safe at school. There is particularly good instruction in e-safety.
- The leadership team has effectively tackled underachievement in any subjects where it has occurred and have significantly improved the quality of teaching and achievement in the school.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all lessons provide the kinds of challenging activities and sharply focused questioning needed for students to achieve the top grades in all subjects.
- The school's evaluation of its achievement is not precise enough.
- The school does not have a fully developed marking policy that is used by all teachers in all subjects. This means that students are not always clear what they have to do to improve.
- A small minority of students are persistently absent.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons. Six were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, staff, chair of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors spoke to students in lessons, at break and during lunchtimes. They also spoke formally to three groups of students.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including the school's plans for the future, ongoing reviews of those plans and the school's records of their observations of teaching. They also took note of the school's records of the progress that students are making.
- The inspectors looked at behaviour logs and the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- The inspectors took account of 45 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 63 responses to the staff inspection survey.
- Inspectors heard a group of students read on the first day of inspection and listened to students reading in lessons.

## Inspection team

Richard Boswell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Chris Young

Additional Inspector

Robert Bourdon-Pierre

Additional Inspector

Justine McNeillie

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is an average-sized secondary school. It does not include a sixth form, although it will be opening a sixth form in September 2013.
- Since the last inspection the school has appointed a new headteacher.
- The very large majority of students are of White British heritage. The remainder are from a wide variety of heritage groups.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for pupil premium (which provides additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and students with families in the armed services) is well above average.
- The proportions of students supported at school action and at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are all well above average.
- Nineteen students attend a variety of off-site provision for one to four days a week as part of the Edge Partnership. Up to 60 Year 10 students attend the same provision each year as part of an ASDAN course.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has specialist status for sport and science.

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

- Improve teaching so that more students are able to achieve the top grades in their subjects by ensuring all teachers:
  - ask challenging questions of students in lessons in order to encourage deeper thinking and to develop more considered written responses
  - provide a range of activities from the start of each lesson so that pupils of all abilities, including the most able, can immediately begin to make rapid progress.
- Improve students' standards and progress by:
  - refining the school's marking policy and ensuring its consistent use across all subjects and year groups so that students are always clear what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
  - sharpening the focus of the school's evaluation of student achievement and its development plan by concentrating on a smaller number of key priorities.
- Improve attendance by:
  - working more closely with the parents of students whose attendance is known to be irregular.
  -

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students coming into the school in Year 7 have significantly lower levels of achievement than found nationally. Despite this, they leave Year 11 with results that are in line with the national average. This represents good progress over their time in the school and most students do better at Key Stage 4 than predicted from their Key Stage 2 results.
- Significantly more students with particularly low starting points make the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics than found nationally and many of these make more than the expected levels of progress in English.
- The proportion of students at Colmers School that achieve at least five good grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is broadly similar to other schools nationally. In 2012 students performed particularly well in art, geography, physical education and religious education, achieving significantly more good grades in these subjects than in their respective national averages.
- While many students do well, the proportion of students achieving the very best grades at GCSE is significantly lower than is found nationally. Not enough students with high levels of achievement from their primary school go on to obtain the higher grades.
- The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is in line with that of other students. Evidence from recent school records and books shows that these students are currently making good progress across all subject areas. The provision for these students is of a high quality and parents are particularly impressed by the level of care given by all staff at the school.
- A senior leader, who is assigned to this role, closely monitors the group of students making use of alternative provision off the school site. They make progress in line with other students and follow a curriculum that interests them and offers them opportunities in training and employment at the end of their schooling.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium are making good progress. The school has used this funding to provide targeted support for eligible students who are in danger of exclusion and to fund additional teachers to reduce class sizes in Years 10 and 11. There is convincing evidence that the gap between these students and others in the school is closing to the point where they are now two terms behind in mathematics and three terms behind in English. Students achieved the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics in 2012 and their overall GCSE score was in line with other students.
- Some higher achieving students, if they are ready to gain a good grade, are entered early for GCSE as a way of building confidence and to give them some familiarity with the examination process. They generally perform well.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved over the last two years and both the school's own records and the inspection team's observations confirmed that teaching is good or better in the very large majority of lessons. Teachers maintain a clear focus on the progress that their students make and they make well-informed and regular assessments to check this.

- Teachers plan their lessons well, allowing the progress that students made in the last lesson to inform the content of the next one. They also show flexibility in the course of a lesson, making changes to the lesson plan to satisfy students' curiosity or to clarify misunderstandings. Teachers adopt a variety of teaching strategies, such as active and collaborative work in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, where 'magic wallpaper' was used to motivate and interest the students.
- Teachers make imaginative use of students acting as 'learning leaders' in the classroom to promote students' self-confidence and independence and inspectors saw numerous examples of students managing their own learning. In one Year 9 lesson in physical education students made outstanding progress as a result of some dynamic teaching of badminton skills and highly effective group work.
- Teachers make sure lessons proceed at a good pace and have increasingly high expectations for their students' achievement. There is a strong focus on using assessment to stimulate students' learning. In all Year 11 English classes, for example, students' most recent test scores are displayed beneath their photos, encouraging healthy competition and self-motivation.
- In many lessons teachers provide a range of activities that suit different abilities and styles of learning. However, at the start of some lessons, the more able students do not make as rapid progress as they should because all students are given the same initial task.
- Teachers are up to date with their marking and students are receiving an appropriate volume of work that covers all aspects of the curriculum. There were, however, inconsistencies in the application of the school's marking policy, particularly in the use of guidance symbols for students, and teachers' marking does not consistently show students how to improve.
- There was evidence in some lessons of the good use of open-ended questioning but in many lessons opportunities were missed to deepen students' understanding with more probing questions. This also sometimes limited the written responses that students gave, particularly the more able, because they had not given the sufficient thought to their answers.

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

- There is real warmth and respect in many of the relationships between staff and students. This caring and nurturing approach is evident in the school's provision for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Students show care and consideration for each other and some recently made a film about what life is like for a visually impaired student. This was shown to all students to raise awareness.
- The school does all it can to give all students equal opportunities in life when they leave at the end of Year 11. This is clearly shown by the fact that the overwhelming majority of students go on to further education, training or employment. Students at the school recognise the efforts that the school makes and are very positive, for instance, about the arrangements in Year 10 for work experience in construction and in local primary schools.
- The school has worked tirelessly to improve attendance and has succeeded in slowing the rate of absences. Exclusions from school have steadily reduced each year. However, the school needs to find further ways of working with families to reduce some students' levels of persistent absence.
- Students say that they feel safe at school and that the very few incidents of bullying or the use of discriminatory language are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students showed particular

awareness of personal safety on the internet and drama students have made a film about the dangers inherent in social networking sites. They have also successfully campaigned to make access safer to and from the school in an adjacent supermarket car park.

- At a meeting of the school council attended by an inspector the elected student representatives very effectively chaired and ran their own meeting with contributions from staff and students. Students took positive control over their own learning, recommending changes to the layout of their planners to make them easier to use.

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

- The headteacher has provided strong leadership and has successfully communicated his high expectations for the students to their teachers, their parents and the students themselves. He has created a leadership team that has helped to make improvements in teaching, in behaviour and in the achievement of the students. The responses to the staff questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive and showed strong signs of a shared vision.
- Where there are signs of underperformance in a specific subject area, such as science, the causes have been quickly identified and actions taken by subject leaders to make improvements.
- There is a relentless focus on identifying students in danger of underachieving and providing the most appropriate courses for them. Support for literacy is prioritised and Year 7 'Catch-Up' funding for staffing and computer programmes is used purposefully to help students with reading ages well below their chronological age. Readers heard during the inspection showed a good knowledge of phonics.
- The school's provision for students' moral, social, cultural and spiritual education is impressively wide ranging. Students enjoy following the school's 'Learning for Life' course that gives them a broad range of extra-curricular activities and helps them to gain self-confidence. They show awareness of the diversity of cultures in modern Britain and visits to mosques, churches and temples are regularly arranged.
- The school makes good use of its specialist status as a sports and science college. Opportunities for physical education and playing a wide variety of sports exist both within the timetable and after school and there is a thriving sports leadership programme. Pupil premium funding is used to ensure that these additional activities are open to all students. The school has committed to running science courses that are accessible for all abilities, with the more practically based BTEC science course proving popular with many students.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school and the very large majority would recommend the school to other parents.
- The school's evaluation of its own performance is generally accurate but the effectiveness of development planning is hindered by its attempts to cover too many areas for improvement.
- The local authority offers support when requested and is aware of the current performance of the school and what it needs to do to improve.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body take their duties very seriously and there is meticulous attention to proper record keeping and ensuring that all policies, including safeguarding, are signed and up to date. The Chair of governors is very aware of the need to offer a constructive challenge to the

school and the headteacher and as a result the governors have brought in additional, professional expertise. They have a good grasp of data and explore the school's performance beyond the headline figures. They know how good teaching is and where it needs to improve, and ensure students' achievement is used as a critical measure of whether staff should move up the pay spine. The school finances are tightly managed and the school has an appropriate level of contingency funds. In addition the governors are closely involved in ensuring that funds arising from the pupil premium are spent to good effect.

## 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>	103563
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	412340

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>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1016
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nick Hughes
<b>Headteacher</b>	Barry Doherty
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 June 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 453 1778
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