

John Colet School

Wharf Road, Wendover, Aylesbury, HP22 6HF

Inspection dates

21–22 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students do not make enough progress overall, especially in science. Boys make much slower progress than girls, particularly in English, and the most-able students do not achieve as well as they should.
- Teaching is too often uninspiring. Teachers do not all offer appropriate challenge to students because they do not know how to use information about students' progress to help them to learn better.
- Teachers' marking and feedback are not good enough to help students make good progress in all subjects.
- The various systems used by staff to gauge students' progress are over-complex or underdeveloped. This means that teachers do not have the information they need to plan lessons which accelerate the progress of specific groups of students.
- The school's leaders are not using information about students' achievement well enough in their planning for school improvement. They do not always take action quickly enough to improve the quality of teaching for those groups who are not doing well enough.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students achieve results in line with other students nationally but this does not represent good progress from their starting points. Teaching in the sixth form is not always as challenging and rigorous as it should be.
- Governors do not challenge the school's leaders well enough about the quality of teaching so that they can check the impact of improvements.

The school has the following strengths

- Students behave well, even in lessons which are not very interesting. They manage their own behaviour sensibly and calmly around the school, even when unsupervised.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well.
- Students' standards in mathematics have improved in recent years and are now good.
- The headteacher models high standards and expectations of behaviour, and has created a positive culture of mutual respect.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are very well cared for on an individual basis and there are very positive working relationships between staff and students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons over two days. This included six joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors met with students from all year groups. They scrutinised the 49 responses to the staff survey carried out by the school and took account of the 261 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, two individual parental communications and a letter from a pupil.
- Inspectors held meetings with several senior and subject leaders, and with members of the governing body. Telephone conversations were held with a representative of the local authority (Buckinghamshire Learning Trust) and an officer from Buckinghamshire County Council.

Inspection team

Catherine Anwar, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Smith	Additional Inspector
Tracey Briggs	Additional Inspector
John Mallone	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a larger than average-sized 11–18 secondary school. It is a non-selective school within the county's selective education system.
- John Colet School converted to become an academy school on 1 August 2011. When its predecessor school, also John Colet School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is much lower than average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average.
- Less than one fifth of students are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children in local authority care and those with a parent in the armed services), a much lower proportion than nationally. Around half of these students are from service families.
- The proportion of students in Year 7 benefiting from the funded catch-up programme is below average with 34 pupils.
- The school shares some sixth-form provision with The Grange School in Aylesbury. In addition, some Year 10 and 11 students attend Aylesbury College for one day a week to follow a range of vocational courses. Typically, about half of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form; some of those who leave do so to attend selective sixth forms in the local area.
- John Colet is a partner in the local teaching alliance, and supports initial teacher training through School Direct. Two student teachers are currently working at the school.
- Some students attend Blueprint Pupil Referral Unit if they have behavioural problems.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is all at least consistently good, and increase the proportion that is outstanding, by:
 - ensuring that teachers build more effectively on what students already know, and offer engaging and motivating challenges in lessons
 - implementing an effective, school-wide system of written and verbal feedback to students about the quality of their work.
- Raise the attainment and accelerate the progress of students in science to at least national levels, by:
 - securing high-quality leadership for the science department
 - embedding learning that is based on students' investigation and inquiry
 - making sure that all science teachers know how to track students' progress from their starting points
 - inspiring students to recognise the importance, relevance and wonder of science.
- Make sure that the progress of boys improves in all subjects, particularly in English.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - making sure that all school leaders can analyse information about students' achievement and the quality of teaching so that the school's self-evaluation and strategic planning can be accurate and precise

- ensuring that support for staff to improve teaching is better targeted.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- A lower proportion of students at John Colet make expected, or more than expected, progress than their peers nationally.
- Not enough students gain the highest grades at GCSE. In several subject areas, including English language, science and geography, the proportion of A* and A grades was significantly below average in 2013. This reflects the lack of challenge seen in some teaching during the inspection; the most-able students were not always inspired or motivated to reach for the highest standards.
- Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. While students in the sixth form make progress in line with students nationally, teaching sometimes lacks challenge for the most-able students, and this is reflected in the relatively low number of A* and A grades they attain at A level.
- Students do not achieve well in science. Work in science seen by inspectors was often scruffy and of a poor standard.
- Most students achieve well in mathematics and their attainment has improved over the last two years.
- Students have begun to make better progress in English. In the GCSE examinations in November, their attainment was above average. Students, particularly the most-able students, now benefit from enthusiastic teaching and challenging work. However, this improvement is not yet secure. There is still a wide gap between the progress of boys and girls, with boys achieving significantly less well.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress overall and do better than other students. These strong levels of progress result from the effective leadership of the special educational needs coordinator. The Year 7 catch-up funding is well used for one-to-one tuition and these students catch-up quickly with their peers. Those students who are supported by the reading skills programme are benefiting from this; their reading ages are rising steadily.
- Most students who are eligible for the pupil premium achieve less well than their peers; their grades at GCSE are on average a third of a grade lower than others in both mathematics and English. However, children from service families achieve well because they benefit from good individual support. The school is taking some effective action regarding other students, particularly in mathematics, where individual tutoring and extra attention from teachers in lessons have helped students in Year 11.
- The school monitors the progress and attendance of students attending any off-site provision very well. The school also meticulously oversees the behaviour and safety of students who learn elsewhere for part of the week.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- In too many lessons, the level of challenge and expectation is too low. This is because teachers, including those in the sixth form, do not routinely use information about what students already know to plan their teaching.
- Students commented that they would like lessons to be more interesting, and inspectors agreed that many lessons are dull. Lessons are frequently formulaic, and student curiosity is not always encouraged or exploited. This curbs students' enthusiasm for their learning which limits their progress.
- Marking and feedback to students are not consistent within departments or across the school. Some teachers mark extremely well, using helpful comments and expecting students to reflect on how to improve. Students reported that they found this process very valuable. In some classes, however, books were hardly marked at all, even in Year 11. This meant that

misconceptions were not addressed and errors of grammar and spelling not corrected.

- Some science teachers do not understand the importance of regularly measuring students' progress. This means that students are not appropriately helped to do as well as they can. Students reported, and inspectors saw, a lack of challenge and inspiration in many science lessons and too little learning that involved students' investigation and inquiry.
- In the sixth form, teachers do not target their interventions and support accurately enough to ensure that students make the best possible progress from their starting points.
- In the best lessons, teachers use well-structured and interesting activities to engage and stimulate students' learning, and students are allowed to direct their own activities and given time to use their imaginations. For example, some able boys produced very good-quality writing in the style of Jane Austen in an English lesson. Where lesson planning is built carefully on their prior learning, and teachers use questioning to challenge students, as in an outstanding German lesson observed, they achieve exceptionally well. Students enjoy practical activities, and in some lessons showed their eagerness to develop their thinking by asking intelligent and thoughtful questions which teachers used skilfully.
- In several lessons, assertive and dynamic teachers used their positive relationships with students to encourage them to learn. Where there were high expectations around difficult work, students enjoyed the challenge and made good progress. The best teachers are acutely aware of the rate at which students are learning.
- Individual support for students with special educational needs is good, for example from additional adults, and this is reflected in their levels of achievement.
- For the first time this year, the school entered the majority of students in Year 11 early for the English GCSE examination. This has secured better outcomes and rates of progress for most students. Results were promising, but the initiative is at an early stage and it remains to be seen whether students, particularly the most-able, will be motivated to achieve the highest grades in summer.
- The school has begun to improve support for students' reading and writing, and in a few lessons, inspectors saw teachers using topical word games to help students to spell key words more accurately. Students are encouraged to read in tutor periods, and to use the library regularly. However, this work is at an early stage.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The school has well-developed systems, all staff are properly trained in safeguarding procedures, and good practice in safer recruitment is well established.
- Students say that they feel safe at school, and they appreciate the support available to them should they need it from peer mentors, student 'buddies' and teachers. Older students commented that 'There is always someone to turn to for help if you need it.' Rigorously implemented processes ensure that the identity of all visitors is thoroughly checked and that they are clear about health and safety and safeguarding. The school has undertaken good work on e-safety, and students reflected on how useful this had been. Parents and carers were positive about how safe their children are in the school, and are very positive about the school overall
- In lessons, most students behave well and are orderly and compliant. In the best lessons, students demonstrate an eagerness to learn and a great sense of enjoyment. Most respond well to opportunities to take responsibility for making their own decisions. In weaker lessons, the majority of students remain calm and follow instructions, although some lose focus.
- The behaviour of students around the site is good, reflecting the high expectations of staff. Students of all ages were positive about behaviour, and parents and carers agreed. Most students show courtesy and respect for each other. When unsupervised, the majority behave in a mature fashion, including sitting quietly before tutor periods. Year 8 students were seen

entering the assembly hall in an orderly manner. While they acknowledged that bullying occasionally takes place, they felt that it is usually dealt with swiftly.

- The school's robust focus on reducing absence has resulted in a sustained high level of attendance for all groups of students. The number of students persistently absent is falling, and is lower than national levels.
- Successful work with a range of external agencies, such as the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, and the effective use of a dedicated room to support behaviour management have resulted in the reduction of fixed-term exclusions, particularly for students supported at school action plus. Exclusions are now rare.
- The school manages the transition and care of children from service families well. Funding for these students is used appropriately to support their welfare.

The leadership and management require improvement

- The school's leaders have not taken quick enough action to address the areas of the school's work that need to get better. This particularly applies to the quality of teaching. Most members of the leadership team have new responsibilities. They have yet to show considered and sharp evaluation of their areas of responsibility, or the capacity to make improvements.
- Judgements about the standards of teaching are sometimes too generous; senior leaders do not concentrate sufficiently on students' learning and progress in lessons, nor on the outcomes for students overall when evaluating teaching. The inaccurate view of the quality of teaching is limiting the effectiveness of staff training. Professional development for teachers is not linked well enough to a robust evaluation of which areas need the most attention.
- There are signs that the school is taking more effective action to improve teaching through better reference to the Teachers' Standards when giving feedback, and mathematics teaching, for example, has improved.
- Self-evaluation judgements are sometimes too generous. Leaders are not properly evaluating the difference made by the actions they have taken. This means time and money can be used inefficiently on projects which do not have a high level of impact. For example, the introduction of whiteboards in science has not improved the quality of science teaching.
- The headteacher has demonstrated an uncompromising approach to the appointment of good new staff. This has yet to make an impact in the classroom and has led to some unfortunate gaps in middle leadership, for example in English, which is currently being managed by an assistant headteacher.
- The head of sixth form maintains a strong pastoral focus and follows up any concerns about students' progress assiduously. However, there is no overall system for, or methodical approach to, gathering information about the achievement of groups of students with similar characteristics. This limits the development of good strategic planning.
- The special educational needs coordinator has detailed knowledge of students who have special educational needs. Case studies of individual students show that they are well supported. However, the progress of groups of students, such as boys, or girls, is not analysed in enough detail to inform longer-term planning.
- Subject leaders are enthusiastic and committed to raising standards in their areas. They have begun to contribute better to whole-school planning. Following training, they are beginning to use information on students' progress to inform their work on teaching and learning, but the impact has yet to be seen.
- Involvement in the teaching school alliance has provided some teachers with a good opportunity to work with trainees who have new ideas and skills to share, but this is not used to best advantage by the school as a whole.
- Students are given many opportunities to contribute to the life of the school and to develop leadership skills. For example, sixth-form students have been supporting Year 7 students in

mathematics. Inspectors saw students enthusiastically preparing for 'make a difference week', by learning sign language for a presentation. Students spoke enthusiastically about the different trips and activities that are available to them; they relish the opportunities that the German exchange programme, for example, offers them to experience another culture and practise their language skills.

- The school promotes the equality of opportunity well. Students reflected on an ethos that encourages mutual respect across the school, and said that discrimination is not tolerated.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are committed and have a reasonable understanding of students' achievement overall, but do not know enough about students' achievement in different subjects or how teaching needs to improve in order to accelerate students' progress. They do not judge the success of new initiatives or investments with enough rigour and have not challenged the overly generous judgements of the school's effectiveness made by its leaders. For example, although governors have been aware of the underperformance of the science department, they have not been insistent enough on seeing a speedy improvement in this area.
 - Governors have a good knowledge of the way in which teachers' professional development targets are set, and how good teachers are rewarded by salary advancement, but have not challenged leaders sufficiently well as to why students' achievement has not improved. They set targets for the headteacher which are too general and do not focus sharply enough on tangible measures of success.
 - Governors keep good track of the funding for pupil premium students and Year 7 catch-up funding, but are not challenging the school sufficiently rigorously to check that it is making enough of a difference to all the eligible students.
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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	137261
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	431804

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Academy
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	1,020
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr. Jeremy Hodge
Headteacher	Christine McLintock
Telephone number	01296623348
Fax number	01296622086
Email address	office@johncolet.co.uk

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