

Colmers School and Sixth Form College

Bristol Road South, Rednal, Birmingham, B45 9NY

Inspection dates

5–6 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and senior leaders have high expectations and are committed to improving teaching and raising standards. They have increased teachers' accountability and are well supported by all staff.
- Governors are increasingly skilled in challenging the school to do better. They are clear about what needs to be done to improve teaching and raise students' standards of achievement.
- Students reach standards that are broadly in line with national averages by the time they leave Year 11. This represents good achievement given their starting points.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge and thorough assessments to plan lessons that engage and challenge all groups of students. They use questioning well to deepen students' learning.
- Good support is given to disabled students, those who have special educational needs and those who are disadvantaged so that they make good progress.
- Marking has improved greatly since the previous inspection. Teachers give good written advice on what students need to do to improve and meet their targets.
- Behaviour is good. There is a calm and friendly atmosphere in school built on mutual respect and courtesy. Students feel safe, have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well.
- The curriculum matches students' interests and abilities well, and there are a number of enrichment activities that are well-attended by students.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a number of subjects and well-planned activities. Students show a clear understanding and awareness of British values of respect and tolerance.
- The recently opened sixth form is good. It is well-led. The achievement of students is good because of their own positive attitudes to learning and the good quality teaching they receive.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are not enough opportunities for students to practise writing skills or apply their numeracy skills to solve problems in other subjects.
- A few subject leaders do not sufficiently check or take responsibility for improving the quality of teaching or the levels of students' achievement in their subject areas.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 35 part lessons to observe the progress and engagement of students. Five of these observations were held jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors reviewed the quality of the work in students’ books to judge the effectiveness of marking, students’ progress over time, and the accuracy of the school’s assessment data.
- Other aspects of the school’s work were observed, including an assembly, registration time, behaviour at break and lunchtimes, and students’ arrival and departure from the school.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior and subject leaders and five groups of students. A meeting took place with the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and a discussion took place with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 64 parents and carers who responded to the Parent View online questionnaire, and 78 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- A wide range of documents was reviewed, including: the school’s data on students’ progress; self-evaluation and improvement plans; training arrangements for teachers and other staff; checks on the quality of teaching; attendance and behaviour records; minutes of meetings; documents relating to students’ safety; and documents relating to teachers’ performance.

Inspection team

Ann Behan, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Susan Tabberer	Additional Inspector
Dorothy Martin	Additional Inspector
David New	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Colmers School and Sixth Form College became an 11-18 school on 1 September 2013. Previously, it was an 11-16 school called Colmers School – A Specialist Sports and Science College.
- It is an average-sized 11-18 secondary school.
- Almost half of the students are supported by the pupil premium, which is well above the national average. This is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The very large majority of students are from White British heritage. The proportions who speak English as an additional language, or who are at an early stage in learning English, are well below national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is almost one fifth, which is well above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is around one sixth, which is also well above the national average.
- There are three students who are working towards work-related qualifications offered by Birmingham Edge Sharing Panel.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' achievement and progress by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, so that all students make more rapid progress, by making sure that:
 - there are regular opportunities for students to develop their writing skills in other subjects
 - students have more opportunities to apply their numeracy skills to solving problems.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that all subject leaders take full responsibility for checking and improving the quality of teaching and students' achievement in their departments.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has high expectations, provides an excellent role model, and is dedicated to raising standards. He has created a purposeful atmosphere across the school so that behaviour is consistently good and students listen attentively to teachers and consequently achieve well. He is well supported by the senior leadership team and all staff. Almost all of the staff who responded to the staff questionnaire were positive about his direction of the school.
- The headteacher and senior leadership team have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have introduced a number of policies to help the school improve. A new policy designed to improve teachers' marking, which was a weakness at the previous inspection, has brought about a vast improvement in the quality of written feedback for students.
- Performance management systems have been revised and significantly improved since the last inspection. They are now rigorous and thorough. Teaching and non-teaching staff have to meet exacting targets in order to be rewarded financially. Underperformance is not accepted and, although excellent support is given to staff to improve, leaders take decisive action when necessary. The school's purposeful response to all the issues raised in the last inspection offer strong evidence of its good capacity for further improvement.
- Subject leaders are increasingly held to account for the work in their departments. They closely monitor teaching and students' progress in their areas of responsibility. However, not all subject leaders are quick enough to challenge underperformance in their departments, either by students or by staff.
- Good leadership and rigorous systems for checking and supporting the work of students, have ensured they have made a successful start to their education in the recently opened sixth form.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, meeting the needs of students' different abilities and interests. It is in its early stages of development in the recently opened sixth form. Good links with primary schools, colleges and universities, and good internal and external careers advice aid students' progression at different times in their education. Almost all students are successful in moving to education or training at the end of Year 11. Current Year 13 students are well advanced in completing applications to universities of their choice.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted through the well-planned activities they are given in the classroom and beyond. There are many after-school clubs and educational visits that are appreciated by students. The school actively celebrates a range of cultures and religions, and this promotes a harmonious atmosphere for students from different backgrounds, and develops their understanding of the British values of tolerance and respect well.
- Pupil premium funding and catch-up funding have been used effectively to purchase extra resources, provide additional teaching, one-to-one support, and peripatetic music lessons for eligible students. As a result, these students are making good progress and the gaps between their attainment and progress and others in the school are starting to narrow.
- The school monitors the attendance and achievement of students attending alternative provision carefully and makes sure that these, and all other students have the same opportunities to take part in all aspects of school life, such as school trips and after-school clubs. There is no evidence of discrimination in the school.
- The school meets all government requirements in relation to safeguarding, including recruitment. All policies and procedures are in place to ensure students' health and safety.
- There is a positive working relationship between the school and the local authority, particularly in providing training and support to help governors fulfil their roles effectively. The school has found the participation in Her Majesty's Inspection 'Partnership Working' project with Birmingham City Council a

valuable source of support for staff development and school improvement. It has used this initiative particularly well to improve the quality of teaching and leadership and management in science and modern languages.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are well informed and are clear about the strengths and areas for improvement for the school. They gain information about the quality of teaching and students' achievement, behaviour and attendance through presentations and reports from the headteacher and other senior leaders, as well as through visits to the school and by talking to staff and to students.
- Governors have received a wide range of training from the local authority so that they are able to use published data to compare the performance of the school against others nationally. They are clear about their role in ensuring the health and safety of pupils in school, including the requirements to promote British values of tolerance and respect.
- Governors oversee the systems for managing staff performance well. These have recently been revised and the current, more rigorous, systems ensure that exacting targets are set for all of the teaching and non-teaching staff. Governors make sure that salary increases are linked to teachers' success in meeting targets.
- Governors monitor finances closely to ensure that the school gets best value when purchasing goods and services. They plan meticulously to ensure the programme for maintaining the school building is effective. They check how the pupil premium and catch-up funding are being used and look closely at the difference they make.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. There is a friendly and calm atmosphere around the school built on respect and courtesy. One student described the school as 'one big family'.
- Students take a pride in the school, they wear their uniform well, are punctual to school and lessons, and arrive with the correct equipment. There is little evidence of graffiti or litter around the building. Sixth form students provide good role models for younger students.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning. They collaborate well together during lessons, respond positively to their teachers, listen respectfully to other students, and take a pride in the presentation of their work.
- The school has succeeded in improving students' attendance by raising parents' awareness of its importance, and by providing additional support for students who are at risk of becoming persistent absentees. Current figures show that attendance has risen considerably to be in line with the national figures and that there has been a decline in the number of students who are persistent absentees. This was a key issue at the previous inspection.
- School tracking shows that the incidents of unacceptable behaviour have been reduced, as have the numbers of fixed-term exclusions and permanent exclusions. Good pastoral support systems, and the introduction of a withdrawal room for students who are in danger of exclusion, have had a positive impact on students' behaviour.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students said they feel safe and were pleased with the way staff care for them. They were very positive about the support that they receive from the pastoral team. Students value the 'Safe Club', which is available when they feel vulnerable and need help.
- Students appreciate the information that they receive during registration periods, assemblies and through the 'learning for life' programme. They are clear about the dangers of the internet and social media, and know how to stay safe when using them. They spoke knowledgeably to inspectors about the importance of healthy life-styles, and the effects of alcohol and misuse of drugs.
- Students are proud of the school and the positive relationships between students and adults. They told

inspectors that discrimination is not tolerated. They were clear about different forms of bullying such as homophobic, racial and cyber-bullying. They said that incidents of bullying are rare and that on the few occasions that these occur they are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff.

- The school liaises well with providers of off-site and work-related courses and closely checks the attendance, behaviour, safety and progress of the few students who attend the alternative provision.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good across the school. Teachers use their good subject knowledge and information about students' current progress to plan work that is engaging and challenging. They give clear explanations and are quick to adapt work to reflect students' understanding and quality of work.
- The quality of questioning was a weakness highlighted by the previous inspection and this has been a focus for improvement across the school. Teachers now use questioning well to reinforce students' understanding and deepen their learning. They build on the excellent relationships they have established with students and use praise effectively to raise students' esteem and confidence so that most enjoy contributing to discussions. In a Year 8 English lesson on 'inference', the teacher skilfully used film clips alongside the book 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' to develop students' understanding of how issues from the holocaust were being presented. She used very careful and skilful questioning to encourage students to deepen their understanding. Students responded with thoughtful and mature ideas which they were keen to share.
- More rigorous systems have been introduced to track students' progress. The clear targets that students are set for each subject ensure that they know what they are aiming for. Their progress towards these targets is closely monitored, and intervention strategies are provided for those students in danger of falling behind.
- Marking has improved greatly since the previous inspection. Students are generally given good feedback on what aspects of their work they need to improve in order to meet or exceed their targets. This is particularly true in English, modern languages and art, where exemplary marking was seen.
- Well-trained teaching assistants are skilfully deployed to give good support to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, particularly when working with small withdrawal groups of students and providing one-to-one help. Increasingly, they make a valuable contribution to the learning of those students who are supported by the pupil premium, and those for whom English is an additional language. Consequently, these students make progress in line with other students.
- The teaching of reading is good and students read widely and, in many cases, fluently. The school has recently introduced whole-school policies for literacy and numeracy and there has been a considerable focus on improving students' reading skills which is having a positive effect, particularly in raising standards in reading, speaking and listening. However, students are not given enough opportunities to practise their writing skills or apply numeracy skills to problem-solving activities.
- Teachers use tracking data well to identify the needs of the most-able students and plan work that consistently stretches and challenges them.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with attainment that is well below the national average. As they proceed through the school they make good progress and leave Year 11 with standards that are generally in line with averages.
- Until 2014 the proportion of students achieving five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, has been in line with the national average. This represents good achievement given students' starting points. However, in 2014 unverified results show that the proportion has dipped to be

below. This is mainly because of the decrease in the proportion of students gaining A* to C in English. A large number of students missed the higher grade of C by a small number of marks. The school's assessment data, students' work and observations of lessons show that current Year 11 students are making good progress across all subjects, and particularly in English. There is strong evidence to show that they will perform at least in line with national averages when they take their GCSE examinations.

- Students' rates of progress in Key Stage 3 are now better than in previous years. This is because students are benefiting from improvements in teaching and better use of tracking information. Broadly, the proportion making both expected and rapid progress is comparable to national averages in English and just a little lower in mathematics. However, students do not have sufficient opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects and this sometimes restricts the progress of individual students in these subjects.
- The achievement of the most-able students was an area for improvement at the previous inspection and the school has made this a focus for development. As a result, the achievement of the most-able pupils is generally good and is continuing to improve because staff are using assessment data very well to plan more challenging tasks for this group of students to complete. The progress of the most able has been stronger in English than in mathematics and science. However, current information shows that their achievement is improving strongly in both subjects.
- The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium and their classmates is narrowing. In 2013, in GCSE English, disadvantaged students were roughly one grade behind their classmates and three quarters of a grade behind other students nationally. In 2014 this narrowed to approximately two thirds of a grade behind their classmates. In mathematics, in 2013, disadvantaged students were roughly one grade behind their classmates and one and a quarter of a grade behind students nationally. In 2014 this gap narrowed to two thirds of a grade behind their classmates. The progress of disadvantaged students is improving because of the improved additional support that they are receiving.
- Students supported by the Year 7 catch-up funding in 2013/2014 made faster progress than their classmates in literacy and numeracy because of carefully targeted one-to-one teaching, and additional literacy and numeracy lessons.
- The school does not enter students early or use multiple entries for GCSE examinations.
- Disabled students, those who have special educational needs, students from ethnic minorities and those who speak English as an additional language make at least good progress, and in some cases better progress, because of the well-tailored, additional support they are given that ensures their learning needs are fully met.
- The progress of students who attend education in other locations for part or all of the week has been a concern for the school. Previously these students have not done as well as other students. However, the number of students who take part in these courses has been reduced considerably, and current assessments show that the few students taking part in work-related courses are now doing as well as their peers.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Achievement in the sixth form is good. 2014 GCE AS level results were the first for the school. These results are at least in line with national results, and psychology and religious education are above. They indicate students are making at least good and often better progress given their individual starting points.
- The curriculum is developing with a small number of academic courses on offer. Students entering the sixth form, when it first opened, were given very clear advice about the appropriateness of the courses that they selected. As a result retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 compare favourably with those of similar-sized sixth forms.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and some is outstanding. Teachers plan work well to meet the different abilities across groups and subjects. Students' positive attitudes and wholehearted commitment to their

work mean that lessons move purposefully at all times and progress is at least good.

- Sixth formers provide excellent role models for younger students. They demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Their attendance is good; they get on well together and contribute greatly to supporting the school's activities in a number of ways. Examples include: working alongside students in the arts leadership programme, acting as sports' coaches; mentoring younger students to improve their reading and spelling work; and acting as ambassadors at different school events.
- Students are positive about the quality of careers information and guidance they receive, both from the school and other sources. Almost all of Year 13 have already completed their applications for the universities of their choice and value the help and support that they have been given during this process.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Staff ensure that students are well cared for and safe. Monitoring and tracking systems are in place to check students' progress and to provide additional support for any students who fall behind with their work. Students told inspectors that they appreciated the extra support that they receive outside timetabled lessons to ensure that they understand their work and keep pace with other students in their groups. Careful support is given to the few students who enter the sixth form without at least a grade C at GCSE for English and mathematics to enable them to do well in their GCSE re-take examinations.

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	103563
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	447741

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1061
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nick Hughes
Headteacher	Barry Doherty
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2013
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