

Townsend CofE School

High Oaks, St Albans, AL3 6DR

Inspection dates 16–17 December 2014

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------|
| | 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.

- Senior leaders rigorously check all aspects of the school's work. As a result, teaching and students' achievement have improved rapidly.
- Governors provide good support and challenge to senior leaders and are becoming increasingly effective.
- Students learn well in English, mathematics and other subjects. In 2014, the proportion of students achieving the equivalent of five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was above average.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and plan interesting activities which motivate students. Marking helps students to achieve well because it gives them advice on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Behaviour is good. Relationships in the school are positive and the students feel safe, and are known and valued as individuals.
- All groups of students make good progress and the standards they reach are rising. Support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is strong and this enables them to do well.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' learning are well developed. The school prepares students well for life in modern democratic Britain, and its focus on developing respect for all is exemplary.
- The sixth form is good. Collaboration with the Alban Learning Partners Consortium is good and students are provided with a wide range of study programmes.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of work in students' books in a few classes is not as good as that in most of the other classes.
- Teachers' questioning does not always require students to think deeply.
- Some students are not acting on the advice they are given through marking well enough to improve the quality of their work.
- Although the most-able students achieve well, they are not always challenged to reach their full potential.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 lessons, eight of which were joint observations with the headteacher or members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed senior leaders giving feedback to teachers on the quality of their teaching and the progress that students made in lessons.
- Inspectors attended the breakfast club, an assembly, form time sessions and after-school activities. Two inspectors joined members of the senior leadership team scrutinising work on display around the school relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' learning and work on display in the mathematics area of the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the minutes of governing body meetings; self-evaluation; school improvement action plans; records about the behaviour of students; and a wide range of policies, including those designed to ensure that students are safe. They also examined job descriptions and the way the school manages teachers' performance and pay.
- Inspectors looked closely at a wide range of students' books, especially in English, mathematics, science and humanities, sketch books and folders from art, and scrap books from tutor groups.
- Meetings were held with senior, subject and other leaders, three groups of students, the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team considered the views of 154 parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online Parent View survey. They also took account of conversations with parents.
- Inspectors also considered the views expressed in questionnaires returned by 49 members of staff.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Desmond Dunne, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Keith Thomas | Additional Inspector |
| Justine McNeillie | Additional Inspector |
| Neil Stanley | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- Townsend Church of England School is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. It is the only voluntary aided Church of England secondary school in Hertfordshire.
- The large majority of students are White British. At 24%, the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly average. However, relatively few students speak English as an additional language.
- At 18%, the proportion of students who are disadvantaged and so eligible for the pupil premium is lower than average. Pupil premium is extra funding provided by the government for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average, at around 30%.
- Some sixth form courses are taught in other schools, and some courses taught in Townsend are taken by students from other schools.
- A small number of students attend the Links Education Support Centre (Academy) and the Dacorum Education Support Centre. They receive support for full-time GCSE equivalent qualifications and intensive outreach support pending a return to Townsend.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school runs a breakfast club that is well attended.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it always meets the high standards of that of the best in the school, by:
 - ensuring that students respond more effectively to the feedback provided by teachers
 - challenging the most able to reach their full potential more rapidly
 - questioning students so that they think deeply and extend their understanding.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Staff and students say that the work of the headteacher encourages strong and supportive values in the school. Their trust in his ability has created a culture within which marked improvements have taken place in the last two years. Staff questionnaires show that staff find leaders very approachable and confirm that leaders have gained the enthusiastic support of almost all staff.
- Self-review by senior leaders about the strengths and weaknesses of the school are accurate. This demonstrates that leaders understand the priorities that need to be addressed. Leaders' capacity to improve the school further is good.
- Systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching are good. There is a strong record of leaders challenging underperformance, particularly where it impacts most on outcomes for students. Leaders have taken difficult decisions to tackle areas of underperformance and have successfully communicated their high expectations to staff.
- Teachers who perform well access upper pay scales whereas others do not. If members of staff are not reaching the high standards required, senior leaders provide support and training. If this is not effective, senior leaders work with governors to take further action. This has led to recent changes in staffing.
- Subject leaders are increasingly taking responsibility for improving teaching and the progress students make in lessons in their subjects. Leaders are using the information about students' progress well to evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of provision. They regularly scrutinise students' work in books and provide effective feedback to teachers.
- Well-directed training for teachers is helping to improve the quality of teaching. This has allowed staff to share good practice and has led to an increase in effective teaching across the school.
- The strong 'Respect for all' policy permeates throughout the school and leads to a very effective development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Discrimination is not tolerated. Students are clear about what is right and wrong and their responsibilities and opportunities for learning. As a result, students develop respect for and understanding of different faiths, cultures and lifestyles, and are very well prepared for life in a modern democratic Britain.
- The school's curriculum covers the full range of National Curriculum subjects and religious education, and is enhanced by tutor-based 'Learning for life' activities to develop students' personal skills. Students talked confidently about the equality of opportunity provided for them in all aspects of school life. They gave many examples of how ambassador roles help them to support different age groups and areas of the school and in a range of subjects. They also outlined how they help during transition from primary school to secondary school, from Year 11 to Year 12 and with coaching at after school clubs.
- Effective use is made of pupil premium funding to support eligible students. This enables the skills and understanding of these students to improve. Additional funding is used in a wide range of ways from staffing for individual and small-group tuition to the provision of enhancement and enrichment experiences for the students. These include resources and revision guides for classrooms, transport for school trips and extra-curricular activities, support to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, music tuition and the provision of school uniform, sports equipment and a school-run breakfast club.
- The range of subjects on offer has improved, with more GCSE options available at Key Stage 4 and the opportunity to study vocational subjects, such as construction, hairdressing and beauty, both within the school and alongside a wide range of partner schools and colleges. These ensure students develop the skills required by employers. Students who study off-site for part of their learning are regularly visited and their attendance, behaviour, achievement and learning are effectively monitored.
- Extra-curricular provision is popular. Inspectors observed students being supported with homework and coursework catch-up by members of staff in the school discovery centre. The parents who shared their

opinions with inspectors were, almost without exception, highly satisfied with the school.

- The school has received good support from the local authority. This has helped the senior leadership improve the quality of teaching in the school, which has led to improvement in the standards students achieve.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective. A significant amount of training and development has taken place over the past two years to ensure the governing body is well informed. Governors have worked to develop the necessary skills to challenge and support the school effectively. They know about the strengths of the school and its areas for further development. The members of the governing body bring a wide range of experience and expertise to their role.
 - Committees take specific responsibility for monitoring standards, the curriculum, finance and personnel. The governor's 'Action group' has had a particularly important impact on the continuing development of the school. Individual governors regularly visit the school; for example, to monitor specific subjects and to check how well policies are implemented. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the school's data and how well pupils are performing compared with other pupils nationally.
 - Detailed minutes are kept and governors undertake thorough self-review. Governors know about the quality of teaching and how teachers' performance is managed by the headteacher. They also coordinate the performance management of the headteacher and ensure all safeguarding requirements are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Students conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. They show a pride in and a respect for their school. They are very welcoming and courteous to visitors.
- The school's teaching of respect and responsibility makes a strong contribution to the students' attitudes and personal development. In assemblies and during the four annual visits to the Cathedral, they are orderly, respectful and show great self-discipline.
- The large majority of students concentrate well in lessons and in assemblies. Co-operative behaviour is good and they work well with teachers and each other. They have good listening skills and willingly collaborate during group work activities. Occasionally, learning is affected when students lose concentration. School records show that behaviour continues to be good. No students have been permanently excluded.
- Students have many opportunities to develop their leadership skills, particularly when they undertake the many roles of responsibility available to them. Inspectors talked to sixth form mentors, subject ambassadors, sports leaders and primary school ambassadors. These students from every year group said how much they enjoyed working with students of all ages. One student said, 'This school is about developing whole rounded people with leadership skills and skills for future life', another said 'Everyone knows everyone; you are a name not a number.'
- The behaviour of students in off-site alternative provision is good.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. All safeguarding requirements are met. All staff and governors have safeguarding, child protection and safe recruitment training relevant to their responsibilities. Leaders care for students well and understand their needs. As a result, students feel completely safe in school. Students talked confidently about being safe and showed a good awareness of risk assessment.
- Students talked positively with inspectors about how the recent anti-bullying week raised their awareness of risk and what to do to minimise risk when using the internet and mobile phones. They are aware of the different forms of bullying and say that it happens very rarely. When it does occur, it is mostly name-

calling and they know that these incidents are dealt with effectively by adults. School records show that a large number of older students volunteered to stay after school to join in with debates and watch documentaries supporting the schools anti-bullying work as part of the 'Respect for All' policy commitment to the school.

- Case study evidence to check the experience of students who face difficult circumstances indicates that they receive good academic, emotional and social support. The help and guidance for disabled students and those who have special educational needs are very good. The school works well with external services to provide additional support for students where this is appropriate.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is consistently good. The impact of this is clearly evident in the quality of students' work in their books, and in their positive attitudes towards learning. Relationships are strong and teachers make good use of a range of resources to deepen students' knowledge and understanding.
- Accurate assessment information is regularly gathered and teachers use this information to check on the progress their students are making. Students know and understand their target grades. The majority know what to do and how to improve their work. They engage well with self and peer assessment activities during lessons.
- Inspectors observed many lessons in which students worked well together in both small and large groups. The group work enabled students to share their understanding with confidence and maturity.
- The teaching of English is effective because teachers use a wide range of resources for students to use when analysing text, such as unseen poems. As a result of targeted support and stimulating resources, students have regular opportunities to read widely and this has led to improvements in the fluency and expression of their writing. They are also provided with many opportunities for extended writing.
- The teaching of mathematics is effective because teachers have produced a stimulating environment where students are encouraged to choose tasks of increasing difficulty matched to their personal targets. Regular opportunities for students to discuss ideas with each other help them to learn new knowledge and skills quickly. For instance, in a lesson on probability and prediction, students chose to link this mathematical concept to workplace situations.
- Teachers work effectively to develop students' literacy skills across a range of subjects by asking them to both describe and explain their understanding. In addition, the students thrive during practical work in science, physical education, food technology and art because tasks are made challenging, interesting and enjoyable.
- Marking is good because students know what level or grade they are working at and receive clear advice on what they need to do to improve. Students are given time to respond to the comments made and many make corrections or complete tasks. This helps to reinforce their learning because they understand their errors and are shown what to do to improve. Some go further and write their own comments to the teacher about what they have learnt and provide detailed explanations to challenges or questions set. However, this is not consistent enough across all student groups, as some have not responded as effectively to teacher comments as others.
- Where learning is most effective, teachers adopt strategies to increase the rate of progress. For instance, in a drama lesson on the characteristics of pantomime, groups of students were provided with scripts to extend and personalise and a choice of props to use. A range of short, sharply timed activities enabled the students to make rapid progress. The students responded well to this organisation and were regularly praised for good creative and detailed work. In a few lessons, teachers do not provide work which is challenging enough for the most-able students.
- Some teachers use questioning well to check understanding and to probe students for more detailed answers. For example, the teacher's skilled use of questioning prompted science students to use

knowledge about environmental factors and their own initiative to consider solutions for an environmental problem. Teachers' questioning is less effective in helping students to develop their thinking skills, particularly when it fails to deepen students' understanding.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students are making good progress in all year groups, including the sixth form, and in nearly all subjects. In 2014, the proportion of students achieving the equivalent of five passes at GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was above the national average.
- Almost all of the most-able students achieve well. They benefit from good information, advice and guidance about future career choices.
- Higher numbers of students make the progress expected in English and mathematics than found nationally. Other successful subjects are religious education, studied by every student in the school, history, geography and physical education, where students' attainment is higher than national average for A* to C.
- In English, mathematics and science lessons, students were observed to be making consistently good progress. Good progress was also evident in their books because teachers in these subjects ensure that students are challenged so that their work improves.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because relationships between staff and students are strong. Teaching assistants know and support students well because they provide students with help to read and write with confidence, and catch up with their learning. Students say that, because of this help, they are more confident about approaching subject teachers for extra help and support.
- Gaps in attainment between students eligible for pupil premium and their classmates are reducing over time. Last year, students in Year 11 who were eligible for the pupil premium were three quarters of a grade behind others in the school and one quarter of a grade behind other students nationally, in English. In mathematics, these students were a grade behind others in the school and three quarters of a grade behind other students nationally.
- Year 7 catch-up is good because the support provided in English and mathematics, including support by teaching assistants, enables more than half of the students to raise attainment by almost one level by the end of Year 7.
- There are no students entered early for examinations. Students who study off-site for part of their learning are regularly visited and their progress closely monitored. The students achieve good pass grades in the subjects they study in partner schools.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The good leadership of the sixth form energetically supports student welfare and achievement. The monitoring of teaching in the sixth form by the leadership team is good. This is particularly evident in the transition into the sixth form. Students say that they are well prepared both before and after entry into the sixth form. Their confidence and commitment as learners have grown rapidly throughout their time in the school. As a result, students are ready to meet the increased demands of post-16 qualifications.
- Attainment in the sixth form meets the 16–19 interim minimum standards specified by the Department for Education. Every student who entered the sixth form without Grade C in GCSE mathematics improved their grade; of those who entered without Grade C in English, the large majority also improved their grade.
- The emphasis on improving the quality of teaching across the whole school has had a positive impact on

teaching and progress in the sixth form. Attainment in the sixth form has been broadly average for the last two years reflecting the attainment on entry. Year 12 achievement improved in 2014 and these students are currently making faster progress in Year 13. The progress made by current Year 12 students is good. Current school tracking data shows that they are making comparatively better progress than last year's Year 12 during the same period.

- Collaborative work across the Alban Learning Partners Consortium of five institutions is good. This enables the school to ensure a wide range of courses is available for the students, either at Townsend or one of the other two academies, school or college partners. Students say that this experience is important in helping them to prepare for meeting new people and possible further study at university.
- The sixth form students behave well, take their roles of responsibility seriously and are very involved in the whole school community. They enjoy working across the school and some use personal expertise, such as being a gymnastics coach, to work alongside physical education teachers in the school.
- The proportion of students who see their courses through to completion is above average and the students receive good information, advice and guidance about appropriate courses and about careers options, either at university or in employment or apprenticeships. All students either move onto further or higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

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

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| Unique reference number | 117555 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 442100 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| 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 | 606 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 109 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Ian Downs |
| Headteacher | Andrew Wellbeloved |
| Date of previous school inspection | 16 January 2013 |
| Telephone number | 01727 853047 |
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