

The Gryphon School

Bristol Road, Sherborne, Dorset, DT9 4EQ

Inspection dates

29–30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and other senior leaders have a strong commitment to raising standards of attainment for all students.
- As a result, standards are good and improving, and students make good progress from their starting points.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good and improving.
- Teachers have good relationships with students and understand their needs, including those of students with dyslexia.
- Students are exceptionally well behaved and feel very safe.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students make good progress and do well in their examinations. The majority of students go on to university.
- The school promotes students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development extremely well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders have not yet ensured that teaching is outstanding, because marking is not consistently good enough.
- Leaders had not, until recently, made sure that gaps between the attainment of students entitled to pupil premium funding and that of other students were closing quickly enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 48 lessons, of which ten were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors also looked at examples of students' work and case studies.
- Meetings were held with three groups of students, eight governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and senior and middle managers.
- Inspectors took account of the 81 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), one letter from a parent and 61 staff questionnaire responses.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, the school's own data on students' current progress, monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

John Mallone, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ken Bush	Additional Inspector
Jerry Giles	Additional Inspector
Stephanie Matthews	Additional Inspector
Ann Sydney	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Gryphon School is a larger than average size comprehensive school.
- The Gryphon School converted to become an academy on 1 August 2012. When its predecessor school, also called The Gryphon School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- Most students are White British. The number of students from a minority ethnic background is small and few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs and are supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, students with a parent in the armed services and for students known to be eligible for free school meals, is low.
- The school has a specialist unit for students with dyslexia.
- About 80 students in Years 10 and 11 attend alternative educational provision at Yeovil College, Rylands Farm, The North Dorset Skills Centre, Kingston Maurward College or Gillingham Youth and Community Centre.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching throughout the school and further accelerate students' progress, especially for those who are eligible for pupil premium support, by:
 - ensuring greater consistency in the frequency of marking
 - making sure that students consistently follow suggestions to make improvements to their work so that they deepen their understanding, skills and knowledge.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students joining the school in Year 7 have slightly higher than average prior attainment. They achieve very well at GCSE across a wide range of subjects. In 2013, the proportion of students achieving A* or A grades was well above the national averages in many subjects, including English and mathematics. This indicates that the most able students achieve well.
- Rates of progress in English and mathematics are above the national average. The school's reliable data for current students show that their achievement is continuing to improve.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Achievement in the sixth form has risen rapidly. Levels of attainment are above national averages in most advanced level subjects. Achievement in vocational courses is consistently strong.
- The gap in attainment between students receiving the pupil premium and others is above average. In 2013, in their GCSE English and mathematics examinations, on average, these students were over a grade behind their peers. However, the group of students currently in the school are making more rapid progress.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is well used so that those students who are behind their peers when they join the school make good progress, especially in reading.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those with dyslexia, make good progress because they receive effective support from specially trained staff and benefit from very good resources.
- Students who receive part of their education at alternative sites are well provided for, following courses tailored to their individual aptitudes and needs. They make good progress both academically and socially.
- The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are learning English as an additional language achieve as well as or better than their peers.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most teaching is good or outstanding.
- Teachers know their subjects well, and have very good relationships with students and high expectations of them. They plan lessons thoroughly to ensure that all groups of students, including the most able, make good progress. They use resources well. For example, in an advanced level English lesson, students watched film of traumatised soldiers from the First World War. As a result they were able to talk and write very effectively about the poetry they were studying.
- In most lessons, work is pitched to provide the appropriate level of challenge so that students respond well and make good progress, developing skills and acquiring knowledge at an impressive pace. For example, in a Year 10 French lesson, students were set three different tasks according to their current knowledge of grammatical structures.
- Teachers use their knowledge of students well to target questions that consolidate or extend individuals' knowledge and understanding. They regularly check students' understanding and adjust their teaching accordingly.
- All teachers carefully monitor the progress of students in receipt of the pupil premium and provide them with extra support where necessary. Students receive good-quality specialist teaching on a one-to-one basis in English and mathematics, particularly when they are studying for their GCSE examinations.
- Homework is set regularly and gives students good opportunities to consolidate and extend their skills, knowledge and understanding.
- When marking work, most teachers provide helpful suggestions for improvement and some have

established routines for students to respond to these, although this is not yet widespread. In a few cases work is not marked, so students do not know how to improve their knowledge or understanding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding
- Students consistently have very good attitudes to learning. They behave extremely courteously to one another, to teachers and other adults and work well whether collaborating in groups, taking part in whole-class activities or on their own. This contributes well to their good progress.
- Students behave exceptionally well when moving around the school. Despite the narrowness of corridors and the large numbers of people involved, they move sensibly and quickly between lessons so that they arrive punctually. They wear the school uniform with pride.
- Students show great respect for the school environment. There is no litter or graffiti. The attractive and stimulating displays around the school are all in excellent condition. As part of their concern for the wider environment students organise regular collections of items for recycling.
- Behaviour management systems are used well by staff. Good behaviour and attitude to learning are rewarded. There is a strong emphasis on celebrating students' many achievements, including at the annual prize giving ceremony in Sherborne Abbey. On the very rare occasions when students misbehave, incidents are responded to quickly and followed up well by senior and pastoral staff.
- Students are encouraged to take responsibility and have many opportunities to do so. There are year and whole-school councils where students can raise any issue. Students participate in governors' meetings and have a voice in the appointment of new staff. They attend meetings of the local Town Council where they give their views on issues affecting young people. Older students also lead acts of worship for those lower down the school.
- Students are also strongly involved in looking at issues beyond their own locality and encouraged to consider the lives of others. They participate in links with schools in many parts of the world and raise large amounts of money for schools with which The Gryphon School is twinned.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Students feel very safe at all times. The school has a very strong e-safety programme, parts of which have been designed by the students themselves. They leave their bags in areas outside the classrooms without fear of others interfering with them.
- There is very little bullying, thanks to the school's strong pastoral education programme. When bullying does occur, there are very good systems in place for dealing with it.
- Attendance is good and has improved rapidly, due to the school's employment of a specialist officer who works closely with parents of students in receipt of the pupil premium.
- The number of students excluded is well below the national average and has declined due to the school's excellent behaviour management systems. Permanent exclusion is extremely rare.

The leadership and management are good

- There is a strong ethos of striving for excellence, coupled with a concern for the well-being of every individual in the school, whatever their academic achievement. This ethos comes from the headteacher and the senior leadership team, but is reinforced by all staff and governors. There is a clear sense that the whole school community is working together towards the same aims.
- Subject leaders are very effective in monitoring the progress of individual students. The systems which ensure that classroom teachers are performing well are effectively monitored by senior leaders.
- The school's process of self-evaluation is thorough and detailed: it has correctly identified the

areas in which improvement is needed and has put in place plans to address these. In particular, the recent work to improve the attendance and achievement of those students who are in receipt of the pupil premium is already improving outcomes for students currently in the school.

- There are rigorous systems in place to monitor the progress of students at every level. When students are falling below their targets, they are given extra support to help them catch up.
- The sixth form is exceptionally well led. Tutors monitor students closely and effective extra help is given to those who need it. Almost all students complete their courses successfully and the large majority go on to university. Others go on to training courses or directly into employment.
- The overwhelming majority of parents are satisfied with the ways in which the school teaches and cares for their children and would wholeheartedly recommend it to others. Students report that they are proud of their school, that they enjoy their experience there, and are appreciative of the many opportunities it provides.
- The school makes good use of performance management systems to improve teaching and achievement and holds teachers to account in the rare instances that they fall below the high standards expected. Pay increases are explicitly linked to the quality of teaching.
- Leaders have identified areas where teaching could improve and have put in place effective training to remedy this, although the measures they have taken have not yet been fully effective in achieving their aims. Work on questioning has improved teachers' abilities more accurately to judge the level at which to pitch work for students. Leaders are also aware of the need to improve the consistency of marking.
- The school's curriculum includes a wide range of academic courses. Excellent and impartial advice and guidance ensure that students more suited to a mix of academic and vocational education follow appropriate courses. This leads to high levels of achievement and excellent behaviour.
- The school's promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school's caring ethos is promoted in many ways: through the work of the chaplain who leads collective acts of worship which focus on students reflecting on the consequences of their actions; through the taught curriculum; and through teachers making links to wider social issues both in this country and abroad.
- Students have numerous opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. All students are encouraged to take part in these and many do. There is a wide range of sporting, theatrical and musical opportunities, with many students taking part, as was the case in a recent production of the musical, *South Pacific*. Their work with the local community is strong, for example in projects organised by the Town Council.
- The school promotes equality of opportunity effectively and students from different backgrounds relate well to one another. There is no evidence of any discrimination.
- Leaders demonstrate the capacity to bring about further improvement. For example, a recent initiative on questioning has led to improved performance in the classroom, with teachers better able to tailor work to students' needs. The focus on students receiving the pupil premium has already improved their attendance and is leading to higher levels of achievement.
- The school works well with its feeder primaries. The headteacher works successfully with local primary schools to ensure a smooth transition for pupils to secondary school.
- Since converting to academy status, leaders have received good support from its school evaluation partner, whom they employ to carry out twice-yearly reviews of the school's work.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are proud of the school and its achievements, but are also aware of the areas in which it needs to improve. They are exceptionally committed to helping it improve still further. Several members of the governing body have received training which has improved governors' ability to judge students' achievement. Governors bring a high level of expertise to their work, which enables them to challenge the school effectively as well as to support it. The governors are aware of the standard of teaching and of the impact of recent initiatives to raise this, as well as of links between pay and teachers' performance. They are knowledgeable about how pupil premium money is being spent and the effect it is having.

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	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. 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.

School details

Unique reference number	138471
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	441149

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy Converter
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	1651
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	435
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Rees
Headteacher	Steve Hillier
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01935 813122
Fax number	01935 816992
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