

The Howard School

Derwent Way, Rainham, Gillingham, ME8 0BX

Inspection dates 28–29 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The principal's vision, determination and steady hand have ensured that the school has made significant improvements since the previous inspection.
- Good and sometimes outstanding teaching helps all groups of students to achieve well from their starting points in Year 7.
- Students' attainment has risen steadily over the last three years. Their achievement in English is exceptionally strong.
- Students develop good basic skills, including reading, communication and numeracy skills, which equip them well for the next stage of their lives beyond school.
- The sixth form is good. Students are attaining higher results year on year across a range of courses in this rapidly growing sixth form.
- The school's sports specialism makes an exceptionally good contribution to students' social development and physical well-being.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the school. They show consideration and respect for others, so that they feel safe in school.
- Leaders, managers and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for further development. The school is improving because they prioritise development effectively where it will have the greatest impact on students' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Across the school, but particularly in the sixth form, students are not given enough opportunities to be actively involved in lesson activities to help them to gain the skills to manage their own learning.
- In a few lessons, work does not challenge students' thinking well enough.
- Students do not always reflect enough on their learning by responding directly to teachers' written advice.
- The school has not always identified gaps in students' knowledge and understanding early enough to ensure that gaps are closed quickly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 56 lessons, some of which were joint observations with members of the senior leadership group.
- Meetings were held with four student groups, including a sixth form group, school leaders and staff, as well as with representatives of the governing body and from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a range of documents, including those that show how the school checks on how well it is doing, plans for future development, and students’ progress data. They scrutinised students’ work, information about how the school cares for and protects students, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and minutes of recent governing body meetings.
- The inspection team took account of 31 responses to the online Parent View survey, together with questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Elson	Additional Inspector
Noureddin Khassal	Additional Inspector
Jane Ladner	Additional Inspector
David Smith	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Howard School is larger than most secondary schools. It is a boys' school which admits girls into the sixth form. It has held a sports specialism since 2007.
- Most students are of White British heritage, with a wide range of other backgrounds represented in small numbers. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and children of service families) is average.
- Around one in six students in Years 7 and 8 benefit from the nationally funded catch-up programme.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is high, and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school no longer enters students for any GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Currently no students attend any alternative off-site provision.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious allegation of a child protection nature was being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that more teaching is good and outstanding, and eliminate the small amount of teaching that requires improvement, to further raise students' achievement, particularly in the sixth form, by:
 - giving students more opportunities to manage their own learning and to work actively in lessons
 - making sure that work is always challenging to stretch students' thinking
 - increasing the effectiveness of marking by giving students more help to reflect on and respond to teachers' written advice.
- Use the information from the assessment of students' progress to identify and address any gaps in students' understanding and skills as early as possible.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the school in Year 7 with below-average attainment in English and mathematics. There are fewer higher-attaining and more lower- and middle-attaining students than nationally. All groups make good progress so that students' attainment, as measured by the proportion gaining five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics, is in line with the national average, and above average when measured across a wider range of subjects.
- Students' achievement has been rising steadily since the previous inspection, and the improvement trend is stronger than found nationally. Improvements in English have been striking and attainment is significantly above the national average. In 2012, the latest year for which validated comparative data is available, the progress made in English was in the top 5% of schools nationally. Results were similar in 2013.
- Attainment and progress in mathematics and science are also rising but not as rapidly as in English. Senior leaders have taken robust action to address performance in subjects which had been weaker than others. This resulted in students making similar progress in most of their GCSE subjects in 2013 so that performance across subjects is more even than had been the case previously. This ensures that students are prepared well to move into further education, employment or training by the end of Year 11.
- Many students, including girls, join the school's sixth form having taken their GCSE examinations elsewhere. Overall, students make good progress from their starting points. Attainment in vocational courses is above average, and in line with national averages at A level. Until recently, some students embarked on AS courses with GCSE grades which did not effectively prepare them for study at this level. This led to below-average attainment at AS, with some students not progressing to A level. The more stringent entry requirements and rigorous matching of the curriculum to students' needs and GCSE attainment is beginning to show in improved outcomes. In 2013, three quarters of students exceeded the challenging targets set for their attainment at both AS and A level.
- A whole-school emphasis on developing students' communication skills means that they are confident and articulate in sharing their opinions. Reading is promoted well, such as in tutorial sessions, and students' good literacy skills are evident in the quality of their written work.
- The school uses extra national funding well to reduce gaps in students' skills. For example, students in Years 7 and 8 who receive additional help in the school's literacy unit make excellent progress in developing their reading, spelling and numeracy skills. Many make enough progress within six months so that they do not need any additional help beyond that given by teachers in other lessons or occasional support in tutorial sessions. Consequently, almost all students have the necessary literacy skills for effective GCSE study in other subjects.
- Similarly, the school steadily reduces the attainment gap between students eligible for the pupil premium and others as they move through the school. In 2012, there was a gap of around half a grade in English and a third in mathematics, where the national difference was over a grade in both. The gap in 2013 was similar to the previous year, showing the school's success in ensuring equality of opportunity for all.
- Disabled students, those who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make at least the same good progress and sometimes better progress than their peers. This is the result of the high expectation teachers have for students' achievement, whatever their starting points, and the help given by skilled teaching assistants in lessons and focused intervention programmes.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching in most lessons observed by inspectors was good or better. However, a small minority of teaching required improvement, which is in line with the school's self-

evaluation. These lessons were across the school and not within any particular subject.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they are enthusiastic about the training organised in the school to help them to hone their skills further.
- Typically, teachers explain the intended learning and tasks clearly, and check closely on progress through the lesson. They question students effectively to steer them forward in the learning. In the best lessons, teachers give students time to reflect on their achievements and plan their next steps towards the end of the lesson so that students develop their own skills of reflection and taking responsibility for their own learning.
- When teaching is particularly successful, teachers plan activities which require students to apply earlier learning, for example, by working in groups to share learning or in undertaking tasks which mean that they are actively involved. For example, in a very successful geography lesson, activities included 'teaching' one another so that students reinforced their knowledge and understanding when exploring possible conflict between tourism and the environment. In a few lessons, teachers talk for a long time, reducing the opportunity for students to work independently to consolidate and learn by doing things for themselves.
- Teachers give the development of literacy a high priority, for example by emphasising subject-specific language and correcting spelling and grammar. In a Year 11 art lesson, the exploration of 'graduation' and 'gradation' signalled high expectations and developed students' understanding of the characteristics of Cubism quickly.
- While tasks in lessons give students good opportunities to extend their knowledge systematically, now and then the work does not stretch students' thinking to deepen their learning and develop their problem-solving skills.
- The recently introduced assessment policy is becoming embedded in teachers' practice. Students' work is marked regularly and helps them to understand what they have achieved and what still needs to be improved. Some teachers require students to make a response to the advice given or to carry out an additional short task to consolidate their understanding, but this practice is inconsistent across the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students are positive about school life and the range of opportunities available to them. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good, and older students speak of improvements since they joined the school.
- Teachers motivate students well and manage behaviour in lessons consistently so that there is minimal loss of time through chatting or low-level disruption. The opening of the school's internal exclusion unit has had a positive impact on reducing the level of exclusions because students who have identified behaviour difficulties are given good-quality support, for example by volunteer mentors. When they find it necessary to spend time in the unit, the facility ensures continuity in their learning.
- Students say that they get on well together and feel safe in school. They appreciate that any form of harassment or discrimination is not tolerated and that the few incidents of racial, homophobic or cyber-bullying are taken seriously and dealt with effectively by the school. Students are aware of the potential risks they face and how to keep themselves safe, such as on social media internet sites.
- Attendance is average overall, and the previously high level of persistent absenteeism is reducing.
- Students have good opportunities to develop leadership skills and make a contribution to school life, for example through the school council or as ambassadors, and ensure that students' views are heard. Students respect each other's backgrounds and points of view so that the school operates as a cohesive society. Their understanding of the wider world is promoted well, for example, in the recent work to achieve the UNICEF Rights Respecting status.
- The sports specialism makes a strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Engagement in and enjoyment of sport is high, promoting students'

physical well-being and understanding of health-related issues.

The leadership and management are good

- The principal, supported by able senior leaders, has judged the pace of change expertly to ensure that developments are considered and introduced effectively. Staff understand the part they play in school improvement and staff morale is high. Staff and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness.
- The most recent key priority of developing the sixth form has resulted in a curriculum which is matched well to students' needs, and improvements in teaching are leading to better achievement.
- The curriculum has an effective mix of academic and practical subjects which motivate and contribute to good achievement in the main school and in the sixth form. Changes made over the last two years have ensured that those capable of following a broader academic curriculum at GCSE do so and have raised their achievement and readiness for sixth form study.
- Excellent enrichment and extra-curricular clubs, including additional modern foreign languages and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, broaden students' horizons. Personal development is enriched through links with local emergency and army services, and the new public services course further promotes personal development.
- The school's programme for improving teaching and learning is effective and the structured programme matched to different career stages enjoys the confidence of teachers. The school's records show that this is having a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching across the school. Arrangements to check on staff performance have been changed to reflect higher expectations, with targets for improvement closely linked to incentives and rewards. These are seen to be challenging but fair.
- The school has recently introduced a new system to collect and analyse more information about students' progress. While the school has been successful in helping students to close gaps in their knowledge and skills by the time they take GCSE, previously assessment information lacked sufficient detail for teachers to pick up gaps in all subjects at the earliest possible stage.
- The local authority has provided effective support for the school's self-evaluation, including reviewing sixth form and special educational needs provision, which the school has used as the basis for further development. The principal's strengths are recognised as a Local Leader in Education (LLE) and, together with other senior leaders in the school, he has worked closely with the local authority to give support for schools experiencing particular challenges.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a clear strategic overview of the school's work. They know its strengths and areas for improvement well, and use this information to support and challenge senior and middle leaders in equal measure. They ask questions about students' achievement and know how well the school is doing in relation to schools nationally. They know what the school has done to improve teaching and learning, the sixth form and behaviour and to build leadership capacity at middle and senior leadership level. Governors have the necessary expertise to oversee the school's finances and work, and undertake their statutory duties conscientiously. They are very aware of how the pupil premium funding is used and understand the impact this is having on reducing the attainment gap. They have been fully involved in ensuring that successful teaching is rewarded and that underperformance is tackled. Governors ensure that the arrangements to ensure the safety of students and staff meet requirements and are kept under constant review.

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	118929
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	426639

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	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,514
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katrina Brown
Principal	Paul Morris
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 November 2008
Telephone number	01634 388765
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