

West Exe Technology College

Hatherleigh Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 9JU

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

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.

- Students make good and often very good progress. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased and now exceeds the national average.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and many include a rich variety of activities.
- The school's senior leaders, well supported by governors, have been successful in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. They are taking strong actions to bring about further improvements.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress. Individual students' needs are very well understood and skilled support is quickly put in place when necessary.
- Students show pride in their school and respect for one another and for adults. They feel safe and their behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school.
- Governors are effective and show a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong so that they are well prepared to be considerate citizens.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to enable students to make the best possible progress. The strengths present in the school are not sufficiently shared across all subject departments.
- Achievement in some subjects is not as good as that seen in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 42 lessons, of which 11 were jointly observed with a member of the school’s leadership team. Inspectors visited an assembly and tutor groups, and made a number of short visits to classes that included students with special educational needs.
- Inspectors held meetings with three groups of students, talked with students in their lessons and around the school and scrutinised samples of students’ work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, other staff with leadership responsibilities and three members of the governing body. A discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- A variety of school documentation was examined, including the school’s records of current students’ progress, self-evaluation summaries and improvement plans, behaviour and attendance logs, records relating to safeguarding and those relating to the management of staff performance.
- Inspectors took account of the questionnaires completed by 96 staff, together with 82 responses submitted to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and one letter from a parent.

Inspection team

Sean Thornton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Teresa Gilpin

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Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of students whose first language is not English is much below the national average.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is average. This additional funding is provided for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, in local authority care, or with a parent in the armed forces. Almost all these students in this school are those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of these students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision at Exeter College to follow work-related courses.
- About 20 students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding, which is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in English or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that the features of the strongest teaching in the school, relating to pace, challenge and questioning, are implemented fully by all teachers
 - making sure that all teachers give high quality feedback to students, enabling them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, and providing them with time to respond to their teachers' comments
 - extending the impact of the school's literacy strategy by improving the quality of extended writing in all subjects.
- Raise students' achievement by ensuring that the rapid progress students make in English and mathematics is reflected in all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with attainment that is close to the national average. By the end of Year 11 the proportion of students that gain five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased consistently since 2011 and is now above average.
- In English and mathematics students make good progress from their starting points. All groups of students, including the most able, make good progress overall. In some subjects, such as music and geography, progress is less rapid and more variable, and as a result not all students are fulfilling their potential.
- In 2013 girls made exceptional progress. Although the rate of progress of boys was slower, it was still above the national average.
- Recent improvements have been made to the school's tracking systems so that they focus clearly on the progress of all students towards challenging targets. This is contributing to the rise in students' achievement.
- In the past, students' achievement in modern foreign languages was much lower than in other subjects. The school addressed this issue by appointing several new staff in this subject area, including a new subject leader. The school's records show that students currently on roll are now making much better progress in these subjects and that standards are rising.
- The school closely checks the progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs. As a result of well-targeted extra help these students are making good progress.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium funding. Eligible students benefit from small-group teaching in English and mathematics, one-to-one tutorial support and financial support that enables them to participate fully in all school activities. A summer school provided for these students when they are preparing to join the school in Year 7 is very effective. In 2013 the rates of progress of eligible students in English and mathematics were lower than that of their peers but above those of similar students nationally. Their attainment in English was about half a grade less than that of other students in the school and in mathematics the difference was slightly more. All these differences are reducing and the progress of eligible students is accelerating.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is being used effectively to provide reading schemes and close support for the eligible students, and these actions are resulting in rapid increases in reading ages. Students in Year 7 with particular weaknesses in literacy and/or numeracy achieve well in the nurture group where teaching is carefully targeted.
- The school is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its students and monitors the progress of groups of students closely. No form of discrimination is tolerated.
- In the past, some students were entered early for GCSE mathematics but this practice has now been discontinued.
- The small number of students who attend Exeter College for part of their week make good progress in the work-related courses that they follow.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching across the school is typically good and is supporting students' rising achievement. Outstanding lessons were seen in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, but there is not yet sufficient outstanding teaching to ensure that all students achieve their full potential.
- Teachers show good subject knowledge. They have high expectations and show enthusiasm for their subjects, and students respond well to the activities provided for them, extending their

knowledge and deepening their understanding.

- In the best lessons, teachers make sure that work is provided at the right level for the class, maintain a rapid pace, and probe understanding with skilful questioning so that students are fully engaged.
- Lessons are well planned. In an outstanding mathematics lesson on statistics students were gradually provided with a range of information that enabled them to investigate various predictions. They were engrossed in their work and developed a high level of understanding of sampling techniques.
- There is a strong drive across all subjects to improve literacy, and an enthusiastic coordinator has been appointed for this initiative. A wide range of strategies has been introduced to improve reading skills and the results of regular testing indicate success in improving reading ages. However, the school's literacy strategy is not yet having sufficient impact on the quality of extended writing in all subjects.
- Students often take an active part in lessons. In an outstanding Year 11 history lesson students were provided with a range of stimuli about the growth of the Hitler youth movement. They worked in well-organised groups, investigating the growth of the movement, and showed a mature appreciation of not only historical facts but also moral issues.
- Some teachers mark students' work regularly, and in detail, encouraging students to take responsibility by involving them in assessment and giving them clear advice on how to improve. However, this good practice is not consistently applied across the school and in some classes marking is brief, lacks detail and does not involve students enough in their assessment and progress. Students are not always given the opportunity to respond to their teachers' comments.
- Teaching assistants make valuable contributions to students' learning, providing skilful support in lessons and leading small-group sessions on literacy and numeracy.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. In almost all lessons students concentrate well, showing positive attitudes and a desire to learn. Their cooperation contributes to their progress but their behaviour is not outstanding because the impact of this is not consistently strong.
- Teachers are skilled at managing students' behaviour and they follow consistent policies so that students know that there are high expectations. On the rare occasions when there is disruption in lessons, it is dealt with effectively.
- Students show courtesy to each other, to staff and to visitors. They have pride in their school and wear their uniforms smartly. There is little litter around the school, no evidence of graffiti, and the many wall displays are treated with respect.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions increased in 2012 as part of a deliberate policy to improve students' behaviour but it has now returned to below average. Permanent exclusions are very rare. A range of in-school sanctions is used to improve behaviour, including working closely with parents.
- Attendance is above average and is increasing as a result of close monitoring, the use of rewards and prompt interventions.
- Students' safety is good. Students feel safe in school and the curriculum supports them well in learning how to stay safe. They have a good understanding of e-safety, including how to avoid unsafe websites. The school pays great attention to dealing with any incidents of cyber bullying.
- Most students reported that incidents of bullying, including racial or other forms of prejudice-based bullying, are rare and are dealt with swiftly by the school's staff. Safety is not outstanding, however, because a small number of students and parents consider that sometimes bullying is not dealt with quickly enough.
- The school checks that all students attending off-site provision attend regularly and that there

are no concerns with their welfare or behaviour.

- The school council is respected by staff and enables students to express their views and contribute to school improvements.
- The large majority of respondents to Parent View considered that behaviour is managed well, that their children are happy at school and that they feel safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The school's headteacher has high expectations of staff and students, and she is supported in this by senior and middle leaders and governors. Together they have taken effective actions to raise students' achievement and improve teaching. A range of new leadership roles have been created, most with a focus on teaching and learning.
- The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate and rigorous and informs a good school improvement plan that has measurable outcomes.
- The management of teaching and its impact on learning are good. Joint observations during the inspection showed that the school's judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. The school's records of lesson observations are detailed, and middle leaders play a strong part in bringing about improvement.
- The results of departmental evaluations are used to provide a wide range of personalised professional development which responds to the needs of staff at all stages of their careers. However, the features of the strongest teaching in the school, relating to pace, challenge and questioning, are not yet sufficiently shared across all subject departments.
- The system of teachers' performance management is well organised and relates fully to the Teachers' Standards. There is evidence that salary progression occurs only when merited by sustained good performance.
- The curriculum is constantly being evaluated, and plans are now in place to teach the new National Curriculum in September 2014. The school provides a wide range of courses that meet the needs of all its students, combining GCSE and high-quality, work-related subjects. Students also have good opportunities to engage in a wide range of activities outside the normal school day.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well, both through the curriculum and in the wider life of the school. It is fostered by a range of visits and by the wide variety of opportunities in music, art, drama and sport, together with effective assemblies and religious education lessons that give many opportunities to reflect on serious issues. Many students spoke of the impact made by a visit of Holocaust survivors to the school. Students raise large amounts of money that they donate to charities that they have chosen.
- All aspects of safeguarding are fully met.
- The school works closely with the local authority which has supported the school effectively in its plans to raise achievement, in providing staff training opportunities and in appointing senior staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have effective structures in place for undertaking their statutory responsibilities. They make sure that all safeguarding responsibilities are met and that all appropriate policies are in place. Governors manage the school's finances well, including the pupil premium. They can speak confidently about the quality of teaching in different parts of the school and what is being done to improve it in weaker areas. Governors are ambitious for the school and can describe the contributions they have made to school improvement, for example in raising standards in English. They show a detailed understanding of students' achievement information and can describe measures that are being taken to improve the progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals. Minutes of meetings confirm that governors are prepared to challenge the headteacher and other school leaders. Governors are involved in the performance management system for teaching staff; all promotions, with their

financial consequences, are discussed in committees following recommendations from the headteacher. They know what the school is doing to reward good teaching and to tackle underperformance.

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	113505
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	424611

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phil Lewis
Headteacher	Vicki Carah
Date of previous school inspection	May 2009
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