

The Bishop's Stortford High School

London Road, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3LU

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Since joining the school, the headteacher has established an ethos of high aspirations. Staff, parents and pupils are exceptionally positive about the school's work. The school is highly regarded in the local community.
- The excellent curriculum ensures that pupils flourish academically while developing outstanding personal and social skills.
- Pupils make excellent progress over time because teachers promote high expectations, through ambitious target setting, rigorous assessment, strong subject knowledge and high-quality teaching. Although improving, outcomes in modern foreign languages are not as strong as in most other subjects.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved year-on-year and now compares very favourably with the progress of other pupils nationally. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress when compared to other pupils with similar starting points.
- Strong leadership of teaching, learning and assessment makes sure that any concerns are addressed swiftly. Actions to secure rapid improvement are clear and very effective.
- The extensive programme of enrichment and high-quality, impartial careers information, advice and guidance ensure that pupils and students are very well prepared to take their next steps in education, employment and/or training.
- The school environment is a calm and orderly place to learn. Pupils are polite, confident and articulate. They are rightly proud of their school and eager to speak about their successes.
- The outstanding sixth form is highly effective in implementing 16 to 19 study programmes to achieve very successful outcomes. Students develop as resilient and independent learners who are role models for younger pupils.
- Senior leaders and governors are rigorous in ensuring that pupils attend regularly and that safeguarding arrangements are effective. The welfare and safety of pupils, including the most vulnerable, is of the highest priority.
- Governors maintain a sharp focus on ensuring that all pupils achieve their potential. They are very effective in holding senior leaders to account, offering an appropriate balance of challenge and support for continuous improvement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve achievement in modern foreign languages, while retaining curriculum breadth so that the vast majority of pupils benefit from studying a language to GCSE level.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Senior leaders are relentless in their focus on securing high-quality learning experiences for pupils across all subjects, groups and key stages. Since his appointment in January 2014, the headteacher has ensured that complacency is not tolerated and that only striving for the best is good enough.
- Evaluations of the school's performance, conducted by senior leaders and subject to regular review, are accurate and detailed. Follow-up actions, to secure further improvement, are swift and decisive. Ensuring that high-quality teaching leads to excellent outcomes for all pupils is the non-negotiable core of professional development for all staff. In the rare cases when teaching falls short of expected standards, interventions are rapid and carefully monitored.
- The senior leadership team has been restructured to ensure oversight of the quality of provision across subjects more effectively. Subject leaders report directly to line managers who are senior leaders. As a result, they are well supported to manage the work of their own teams in securing high-quality learning experiences and excellent progress.
- The quality of teaching and learning is checked thoroughly and systematically. The regular programme of lesson observations, reviews of pupils' work and close analysis of in-year assessment information inform routinely scheduled meetings. The model is very successful in identifying next steps and any interventions needed to secure rapid improvement. For example, this has resulted in the very positive step change seen in pupils' progress in science since the last inspection.
- The headteacher evaluates, individually, every performance management target set for staff. Consequently, review processes are rigorous, supporting challenging conversations that are rooted in raising standards and securing learning at the highest level. Where necessary, teaching development plans are put in place quickly. Difficult decisions are not side-stepped when they need to be taken. Staff have appropriate opportunities to share good practice and new ideas, within subject teams and, more widely, with colleagues across the school. All staff agree that they are very well supported by leaders at all levels.
- Teachers are proud to be part of the school's journey of continuous improvement. The comments of one staff member, in responding to the Ofsted online questionnaire echoed the views of many when they said, 'It is an absolute pleasure to work here. I cannot speak highly enough of the staff, students and parents.' Another said: 'This is a fantastic school. I have worked here for over 10 years and I can honestly say I have never been happier.' Newly qualified teachers are very well supported and are effusive about their role as a member of The Bishop's Stortford High School team.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's work, although a minority feel that communications with them could be strengthened. The overarching theme of their responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and free-text comments was of a school held in high regard for the quality of provision it offers.

- The well-established high expectations of pupils' participation in all aspects of the wide ranging experiences on offer, coupled with excellent working relationships, make a significant contribution to pupils' academic and personal development. Academic standards are high but the drive to provide a 'truly all-round education' is palpable across the school. It is clearly embodied in, and well promoted through, the work of the senior leadership team. As one parent said: 'The school knows how to garner mutual respect from the boys and is incredibly well led. Our son is growing into a confident, articulate and well-educated young man.'
- The broad and balanced curriculum, alongside an extensive programme of enrichment ensures that pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life beyond school. Senior leaders have sustained an unwavering commitment to ensure that all boys typically study at least one foreign language to GCSE level and usually both GCSE English language and English literature.
- Staff are unequivocally committed to, and successful in, developing the highly valued skills of initiative, confidence, teamwork, perseverance and empathy. Alongside a wide programme of drama, sporting and musical activity, the extra-curricular programme includes over 100 options each term. The schedule of school trips and visits is equally broad. All pupils, in all year groups follow a personal, social, health and economic curriculum. Participation in work experience is an expectation, both at key stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- The very strong spiritual and moral ethos that pervades The Bishop's Stortford High School is reflected in assemblies and across the wider curriculum. The promotion of British values, for example of tolerance, respect and democracy, is integral and a powerful force underpinning the culture and daily life in the school. As a result, the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills is outstanding.
- Resources are deployed very well to ensure that all pupils are given the best opportunities to succeed. This includes removing some of the barriers that may restrict disadvantaged pupils' participation in wider school experiences. For example, they are supported to play a musical instrument and take part in school performances. The systems to monitor pupils' progress are detailed and effective. These include checks on how well the pupil premium, additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and Year 7 catch-up funding is being used to make sure pupils achieve their potential. This additional funding is used very effectively.

Governance of the school

- Governors are rigorous in holding senior leaders to account for pupils' progress and for staff performance. Collectively they are very experienced and have a wide range of skills. As a result, they are well equipped to provide appropriate challenge and support to ensure that their very clear strategic vision is realised.
- Where action is needed to raise standards further, governors are systematic in checking that actions are working and that funds are spent appropriately, including the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding.

- While governors are rightly well focused on safeguarding, and making sure that all pupils achieve their potential, they are relentless in their determination to secure funding to improve the fabric of ageing school buildings over time.
- This ambition is reflected in the views of one parent when they said, 'The dedication and commitment of the headteacher and staff are amazing. They deserve to work in better surroundings.' However, governors' and senior leaders' plans for improving school premises, in the longer term, are at an early stage of development.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils say they feel safe and are well cared for. Typically parents agree with this view. Senior leaders and governors are meticulous in ensuring that safer recruitment practices are thoroughly checked, statutory requirements are met and that staff training is up to date. This includes the required training under the 'Prevent' duty that aims to protect pupils from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Staff provide high-quality support for vulnerable pupils and so they make excellent progress in a caring environment. The welfare and care of all pupils is well grounded in the culture and ethos that permeates the school. When necessary, responsible staff make appropriate referrals to external agencies. The safeguarding team is tenacious in pursuing timely responses to ensure that the best interests of pupils are supported quickly and effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching provides very well managed opportunities for pupils to gain knowledge, skills and understanding in a climate of high expectations. These include the expectations of pupils' commitment to arrive on time, with the right equipment, to work hard and to achieve well.
- Teachers' planning for learning takes appropriate account of pupils' different starting points. In most lessons, high priority is given to ensuring that the most able pupils are challenged to achieve their potential and that no one falls behind. Typically, teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to extend and develop learning in their lessons and to check pupils' progress before moving on to the next stage.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs/and or disabilities are supported very well in lessons and through targeted one-to-one sessions or small group interventions.
- The high-quality teaching in the school is typified by the exceptionally strong working relationships established between staff and pupils. These working relationships are well supported by teachers' excellent subject knowledge. As a result, the well-matched combination makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress and the calm, orderly learning environment which is a particular strength of the school. In their responses to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, parents spoke, for example, of, 'incredibly

conscientious staff who go above and beyond, to achieve not just the best results but also to enrich lives with dedication and inspiration.’

- Teachers set homework regularly through the school’s online system. This is a helpful check on what needs to be done, and by when, for both parents and pupils. In their free-text responses to inspectors, a minority of parents had differing views on this subject but most agreed that the balance of homework was about right.
- Departments have well-documented subject-specific marking policies. Senior leaders are aware that these are at varying stages of implementation and that there is more work to do to secure greater consistency in teachers’ application of policies across the school. During the inspection, the quality of teachers’ oral feedback to pupils, on what they need to do to improve their work, was sometimes stronger in lessons than that seen in books.
- A love of reading is promoted very well alongside the whole-school literacy strategy. A high proportion of boys study English literature in key stage 4. They make strong progress in their GCSE English literature examinations in Year 11 and many secure the highest grades.
- Year 7 pupils who join the school with English and mathematics skills below age-related expectations are supported to catch up quickly. This support is underpinned by the very effective transition arrangements that are in place to smooth the passage from primary school to secondary education.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school’s work to promote pupils’ personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils gain high-quality personal and social skills that make an outstanding contribution to their academic progress and life beyond school. As a result, they are excellent ambassadors for the school’s work and typically reflect its values in their conduct and demeanour. These values are embedded in the culture and ethos, the ‘spirit of the black and gold’, which is well promoted by staff at all levels.
- This ‘spirit’ was captured in the comments of many parents in free-text responses. As one said: ‘my son is thriving, academically, socially and emotionally. The school instils good values and provides many opportunities for boys to grow as individuals, whatever their strengths or weaknesses.’ Another parent commented: ‘my son has been moulded into a young man at this school – the manners, the discipline, the respect. He has been empowered. He believes in himself.’
- Pupils are confident, polite, articulate and eager to talk about their school, and their work, across all year groups. The school environment is friendly and welcoming. Year 7 pupils told inspectors that they settled into school very quickly. Similarly, many parents commented very positively about the high-quality arrangements to ensure a smooth transition from the primary to the secondary stage of their child’s education.
- In their discussions with inspectors, pupils were very clear about what they needed to do to stay safe online. They spoke confidently about tolerance, respect and individual differences. Across year groups, pupils readily answered questions about the risks

associated with the use of social media. They knew about the different types of bullying that could happen but told inspectors that bullying in the school is extremely rare.

- Staff are tenacious in their attention to safeguarding and to the welfare of vulnerable pupils in their care. Concerns are addressed quickly. Follow-up actions are checked regularly and systematically to ensure that interventions, including work with external agencies, are effective and making a difference.
- Pupils readily take on leadership roles. For example, they act as prefects, peer mentors, help younger pupils with reading, lead the school council and an extensive range of clubs and societies. Pupils also work in partnership with local Rotarians raising impressive sums of money for local, national and international charities.
- Careers information, advice and guidance is of exceptionally high quality across the key stages, including in the sixth form. Post-16 choices are very well supported by access to a breadth of first-hand information, including representation from further and higher education institutions, employers and apprenticeships.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school is a calm and orderly place to study. Pupils know and understand what is expected of them. Typically, they respond extremely well to the clear boundaries that are very firmly established. They are knowledgeable about what they need to do to become good national and global citizens.
- Very positive attitudes to learning are reflected in the high levels of attendance across all key stages and groups, including in the sixth form.
- Inspectors noted excellent standards of behaviour in classrooms and in the way pupils conduct themselves around the school. Pupils told us that senior staff are regular visitors to their lessons and seen routinely 'on duty' during the school day. This is a key strategy that is successful in ensuring that the high standards of behaviour, as recorded at the last inspection, continue to be sustained.
- Staff are ably supported by older pupils and sixth form students in leadership roles. These roles are implemented successfully, thoughtfully and sensitively across the school.
- The high levels of tolerance and respect for individual differences were particularly well reflected in a lunchtime debating club, in which 38 pupils considered sensitively, from different points of view, the wearing of the burkah. In doing so they demonstrated an acute awareness of other cultures. Opposing views were offered respectfully by eloquent and confident speakers.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Although many boys in Years 7 to 11 join the school with above-average attainment, when compared to all pupils nationally, the well-planned, broad and balanced curriculum and high-quality teaching combine to ensure that they continue to make

strong progress across the school. In particular, for example, they excel in science, mathematics, English literature and humanities.

- Pupils' excellent achievement in science is worthy of note as this was a significant area for improvement at the last inspection.
- Assessment information from the government's new accountability measure, 'Progress 8', indicates that pupils performed well and significantly above the national average. In the context of an all-boys, non-selective school, the headline information masks the even better progress that boys in this school made in 2016, across all groups, when compared with all boys nationally.
- In 2016, 90% of pupils achieved at least a grade C in both English and mathematics. This represents exceptional progress for low- and middle-ability pupils in mathematics and this is also the case for lower-ability pupils in English. Pupils achieved very well in GCSE English literature, with a high proportion of the 127 entrants gaining A*, A, and B grades. This is a testament to the high regard the school places on encouraging a love of reading. In science, pupils made outstanding progress overall and at least good progress from their different starting points across the range of abilities.
- Disadvantaged pupils make very good progress overall when compared to other non-disadvantaged pupils, and, in particular, other non-disadvantaged boys nationally. Because of the small number of pupils, outcomes tend to fluctuate across the ability range. Nevertheless, pupils within this group have made increasingly better progress, year-on-year, since the last inspection.
- The small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported very well to achieve their potential. This was evidenced in the lessons seen by inspectors during the inspection and through examination outcomes published in national progress measures.
- Wider inspection evidence, including work seen in books shows that, across all year groups, pupils continue to make strong progress.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Students make excellent progress when they enter the sixth form, from their different starting points, including those who join from other schools at the end of key stage 4.
- Teachers in the sixth form have excellent subject knowledge. They have very good knowledge of their students' capabilities and, typically, plan learning very effectively to meet their learning needs.
- Close attention is paid to examination assessment criteria to ensure that students are very clear about what they need to do to achieve higher grades. This is a particular focus of ongoing professional development for all teachers. Progress against development targets set is subject to regular checks through routine monitoring and review processes.
- The leadership of 16 to 19 study programmes is strong and very effective. Swift action is taken to address any weaknesses identified in subject performance. Strategies to secure continuous improvement are well managed and systematic.

- Sixth form students provide excellent role models for other pupils in the school. They know they are expected to attend regularly and take responsibility for their learning. Their very positive response is mirrored in the high level of attendance and the outstanding attitudes to learning seen in lessons during the inspection. Retention rates on sixth form courses are high because students are very well supported.
- The very strong programme of careers information, advice and guidance is highly effective in raising aspirations and promoting the range of progression opportunities beyond school, including apprenticeship routes. As a result, almost all students progress to education, employment and/or training. A high proportion of students go on to study at universities, including in some of the highest performing higher education providers nationally.

School details

Unique reference number	117577
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10023468

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,155
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	346
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Fordham
Headteacher	Dale Reeve
Telephone number	01279 868686
Website	www.tbshs.org
Email address	dale.reeve@tbshs.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 May 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is well below average.

- The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is also below average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The school does not use alternative education provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made 17 short visits and 49 extended observations of pupils' learning in lessons. Some of these were carried out jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors also visited enrichment activities, including the sixth form debating club.
- Inspectors observed pupils working in lessons and informally as they moved around the school at the start of the school day and at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, governors, staff, middle leaders and pupils from all year groups, including the sixth form. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority in a pre-arranged telephone call.
- Inspectors analysed over 300 free-text responses from parents; they also considered 375 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire. In addition, they took account of 71 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff, and 89 responses to the questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation including information relating to safeguarding arrangements; leaders' evaluations of the school's performance; development plans; documents linked to the quality of teaching learning and assessment; minutes of governors meetings and a broad sample of policies and procedures.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Jonathan Culpin	Ofsted Inspector
Sally Pemberton	Ofsted Inspector
Ceri Evans	Ofsted Inspector
Rob James	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Barr	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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