

Colchester Academy

Hawthorn Avenue, Colchester, Essex CO4 3JL

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and trustees are determined to improve outcomes for pupils. As a consequence, in 2017, key stage 4 pupils' overall progress was above average.
- The trust is providing effective support and challenge to senior leaders, helping them to work towards the priorities within the school development plan.
- Leaders know the school well. They address weaknesses effectively. Consequently, teaching, achievement, behaviour and attendance have all improved since the previous inspection.
- Simple but strong processes and procedures are now embedded to support middle leaders and teachers to bring about further improvements. As a consequence, leaders have the capacity to sustain the school's improvement.
- Most teachers use strong subject knowledge to enrich learning in lessons. Occasionally, activities are not sufficiently challenging for pupils.
- Leaders have spent the pupil premium funding effectively and, as a consequence, the overall progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving.
- Leaders make good use of information about pupils' progress to identify underperformance. They provide effective support for pupils who fall behind.
- Pupils' outcomes have improved across most subjects, and are particularly strong in mathematics. Further improvement is needed in English, especially for disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved significantly and is now good, although there are still examples of low-level disruption. Strong relationships between staff and pupils have made an important contribution to this improvement.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. They receive effective and impartial careers guidance.
- Attendance is improving, but persistent absence needs to be reduced further, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning further so that:
 - outcomes improve in English, especially for disadvantaged pupils, and pupils make progress that is in line with that in the other core subjects
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils and challenge them to make rapid progress
 - low-level disruption is eliminated in classrooms
 - good practice from within the school is shared effectively to improve the overall quality of teaching.
- Continue to improve attendance and reduce levels of persistent absence, in particular for disadvantaged pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders know the school well. They understand its strengths and weaknesses and have, with the support of the trust, led effective and sustainable improvements in pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance, and in teaching. Leaders' accurate assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching help teachers to improve their practice.
- Pupils and parents recognise the school's improvement: 98% of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they would recommend the school to another parent. A growing number of parents are choosing to send their children to the school.
- Leaders' desire to improve teaching and learning is central to the staff professional development programme. Middle leaders acknowledge the positive impact of the school-based training. Leaders also make use of subject support from the local authority and they are beginning to utilise training provided by the trust.
- The additional funding the school receives to support disadvantaged pupils is deployed effectively, with the guidance of the trust. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving and in 2017, their overall progress at GCSE was in line with that of all pupils nationally.
- Middle leaders are becoming more effective. They appreciate the strong but simple structures within the school that support their work. In particular, they value the improved use of pupil information that has helped them to identify underachievement and put in place appropriate support.
- The relationship between middle leaders and senior leaders is strong. Middle leaders believe that their voice is heard. Where middle leadership is less effective, the school is providing appropriate challenge and support to bring about improvement.
- The curriculum is appropriate for pupils. A range of subjects is offered at key stage 4 and pupils receive effective guidance when considering their option choices. Pupils are offered a range of extra-curricular clubs before and after school along with opportunities to participate in trips and residential stays. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is becoming more popular at the school. Leaders need to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils benefit from this provision.
- The school promotes British values, especially through assemblies and the tutorial programme. There is also a school council where pupils' views can be expressed.
- The support provided by the trust is becoming more effective, especially for senior leaders. Trust leaders visit regularly and work alongside school leaders to support school improvement.

Governance of the school

- The Bright Tribe Trust introduced a new governance structure in September 2016. This change is allowing leaders to work alongside people who have an understanding of

current educational developments. For example, a national leader of governance has been appointed to review and evaluate the work of the governing body.

- It is clear that leaders are being provided with effective support and challenge. For example, a review of how pupil premium funding was deployed contributed to the improved progress of disadvantaged pupils in 2017.
- There is limited parental participation within the governance structure. The trust is aware of this and is considering how it will engage more effectively with stakeholders in the future.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school is committed to safer recruitment. All required checks are carried out by leaders when recruiting new staff to work with children.
- Leaders ensure that child protection and safeguarding training is up to date and in line with statutory requirements. Recently, staff have received training on female genital mutilation and the 'Prevent' duty.
- The school is a secure site. At lunchtime, inspectors found all external gates to be securely locked.
- Pupils said that they feel safe and parents strongly support this view. The tutorial programme, ICT curriculum and whole-day workshops contribute to helping pupils to understand how to keep safe in modern Britain.
- Leaders monitor vulnerable pupils closely and, for those at greatest risk, appropriate plans and strategies are in place to support them and their families.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Older pupils and parents are positive about the improvements in teaching since the previous inspection.
- Leaders are committed to supporting teachers to improve the quality of their teaching and they provide a wide range of training for staff. The trust is also providing training programmes for teachers. As a result, teaching has improved since the previous inspection and pupils are making better progress.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong and help pupils to learn well.
- Many teachers have strong subject knowledge and they use questioning effectively to check the level of pupils' understanding. Teachers also challenge pupils through sophisticated questioning in lessons and this provides them with a range of interesting learning opportunities. However, this practice is not fully embedded across the school and pupils are not always consistently challenged in lessons.
- Where teaching is less effective, for example in technology and humanities, some pupils lose focus and low-level disruption occurs. This is not consistently challenged by classroom teachers.

- Leaders at all levels ensure that the school's new approach to providing pupils with written feedback is implemented consistently across the school. Pupils appreciate the feedback that they receive from their teachers and say that it helps them to make progress.
- The school's policy of encouraging pupils to respond to written feedback was seen across all year groups. Pupils follow the advice of their teachers in order to extend their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- During practical activities, pupils work confidently in pairs or groups. In these situations, the skilled support of teachers helps pupils to make good progress.
- New teachers, especially newly qualified teachers, appreciate the support leaders provide. They have received relevant training and effective subject mentoring.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders ensure that bullying is dealt with effectively. They have established a team of anti-bullying ambassadors, whose role includes reporting any bullying outside lesson time, and they ask all pupils to sign an anti-bullying charter. The few incidents of racist and homophobic bullying that occur are dealt with effectively.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they are confident that the staff would deal with any concerns they express. The views of parents on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, support this. Pupils learn how to stay safe through computing lessons, tutor time and whole-day workshops.
- Pupils stated that the school curriculum helps them to understand people with different social and religious backgrounds. They also told inspectors that it is 'fine to be different' at this school.
- Pupils are polite and courteous. Most pupils take pride in their work and wear their uniform with pride. When given the opportunity, pupils work well together in pairs and groups. During these tasks, pupils display confidence and independence. They listen and respond maturely to feedback from their peers.
- Leaders use an external provider to ensure that pupils receive effective independent careers advice and guidance. This has contributed to a significant improvement in the proportion of pupils entering education, employment or training at the end of Year 11.
- A small number of pupils are educated off site at local providers. These arrangements are well managed by the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Teachers, parents and pupils acknowledge the improvement in this area since the previous inspection. Where behaviour logs demonstrate an increase in incidents, it is

linked to the higher expectations that leaders now have of pupils. Pupils told inspectors that the standards rise every year.

- Pupils' conduct around the school is good. Break- and lunchtimes are vibrant but orderly.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons, especially where teaching is strong. Teaching assistants are proactive in lessons and encourage pupils to engage quickly with the learning activities.
- Leaders monitor attendance closely and use a wide range of strategies to bring about improvement. Overall attendance rates are improving and are now in line with the national average. Persistent absence is reducing but further improvement is needed, especially for disadvantaged pupils.
- The determined work of leaders has significantly improved the attendance of some pupils who are regularly absent. Pupils and parents say that joining Colchester Academy is a positive experience. 'Super Saturdays' are one aspect of the transition arrangements, all of which are particularly appreciated. Key stage 3 pupils stated clearly that they were well prepared to join the school by the end of Year 6.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils have improved since the previous inspection. In 2017, pupils' overall progress at the end of key stage 4 was above average, with pupils of different abilities all making good progress overall. The overall progress of pupils currently in the school is also good.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has improved since the previous inspection and now matches that of other pupils nationally. Leaders, supported by the trust, have prioritised the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and have used the additional funding to support these pupils effectively.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is improving. Data is now used more effectively to plan and track the impact of the support provided to pupils and, as a result, their progress is improving. Pupils are also supported in lessons by subject-specialist teaching assistants.
- Girls make better progress than boys, and leaders are working creatively with Year 11 boys to engage them more positively in their learning. Three groups, involving 38 pupils, have been created and there are early signs of positive impact, especially in pupils' improved attendance at after-school revision sessions.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics has shown continued improvement since the previous inspection and is above average. Leaders are aware that progress in English is not as consistent as in the other core subjects and they have taken action to address this, including employing additional teachers.
- In some subjects, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable, for example in technology and humanities. Support is in place for the leaders of these subjects; however, the full impact of this support is yet to be seen.

- Leaders have identified the need to improve pupils' reading as a foundation to improving their outcomes. The strategies employed at key stage 3, including reading in tutorial time, are contributing to improvements in pupils' reading ages.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The proportion of pupils entering sustained education, employment or training at the end of Year 11 has improved since the previous inspection and is now in line with the national average.
- Leaders use an external provider to improve links with the local business community. Visits, talks and short-term work experience opportunities help pupils with their decision making. Leaders are developing links with universities, and although the number of pupils participating in these activities is small, pupils value them.

School details

Unique reference number	136195
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10036264

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	648
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Heidi Hoskin
Headteacher	Fiona Pierson
Telephone number	01206 861217
Website	www.colchesteracademy.org.uk
Email address	Fiona.Pierson@colchesteracademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 December 2015

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets the government’s floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils’ attainment and progress.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is significantly above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is significantly above average.

- The school is part of the Bright Tribe Trust.
- A small number of pupils attend Mile End Children's Support Service, Heybridge Children's Support Service, Clacton Children's Support Service and Catten College.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out learning observations across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects. On several occasions, senior leaders joined inspectors in their observations. Inspectors also visited tutor group sessions and watched an assembly.
- Inspectors looked carefully at pupils' books during lessons and carried out a focused work scrutiny in English.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers who recently joined the school, pupils, trust representatives (including their director of secondary education and a committee member) and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors also held telephone conversations with the organisations the school uses for alternative provision, a trust representative responsible for governance and one parent.
- Inspectors took into account 41 staff questionnaires and 53 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including five free-text responses. Pupils did not complete the Ofsted questionnaire.
- Inspectors spent time observing lunchtime, breaktimes, the breakfast club and pupils leaving the school at the end of the school day.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of school documentation, including assessment data, self-evaluations, improvement plans, the single central register, attendance, behaviour and exclusion data, destination data for leavers and homework records. They also looked at reviews of the school's performance undertaken by the trust and the local authority.

Inspection team

David Hutton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
John Wilson	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Neild	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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