

Harlington Upper School

Goswell End Road, Harlington, Dunstable, LU5 6NX

Inspection dates

9–10 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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 achieve well as they make good progress so that many reach high standards at the end of Year 11. Students' progress in mathematics is particularly rapid.
- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding. With their good expertise and well-established routines, teachers help pupils extend their knowledge, deepen their understanding and learn new skills well.
- The support for disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those in the hearing impaired unit, is a strength of the school. Consequently they make as good progress as other students.
- School leaders have secured good achievement, teaching and behaviour. There has been a significant increase in students' attendance, which is now above average.
- Governors are fully involved in the school's processes of monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement planning. There is a good balance of governor support for and challenge to school leaders that helps in driving forward improvements across the school.
- Students' attitudes to learning, behaviour and all aspects of school life are good. They greatly appreciate the many opportunities to take on responsibility, as well as the exciting range of enrichment activities on offer. As a result, they develop strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural values and develop into well-informed and thoughtful young adults.
- The sixth form is good. Students' achievement and the quality of teaching are good. Students leave the school well prepared for adult life to participate fully and positively as responsible citizens.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' achievement is not yet outstanding, as a few leaders have not secured consistently high standards of teaching and achievement in their subjects.
- In some subjects, not enough of the most able students achieve the top grades as they are not challenged sufficiently by their teachers.
- Marking and feedback does not always tell students precisely how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- In a few instances, students do not get the opportunities to develop independent and group learning skills to help them reach the standards of which they are capable.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 parts of lessons taught by 37 teachers. Eleven of these observations were made jointly with the headteacher and other senior leaders of the school.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, staff, including senior and middle leaders, and groups of students.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at school documentation, including teachers’ planning, the school’s self-evaluation and development plans, assessment information, monitoring files, governing body minutes, safeguarding documentation and samples of students’ work.
- Inspectors considered the 170 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 109 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Susan Cox	Additional Inspector
Patrick Taylor	Additional Inspector
Ronald Cohen	Additional Inspector
John Burridge	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a much larger than the average sized upper school.
- The school converted to academy status in April 2012. When the predecessor school, Harlington Upper School, Central Bedfordshire was last inspected its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority) is well below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds, with the remainder coming from a range of minority ethnic groups.
- A very small number of students attend part-time alternative provision at Bedfordshire College or Active Sports, which allows them to access a course in carpentry or sports leadership away from the school site.
- The school has a specialist resource base to support pupils with a hearing impairment, which currently has 18 students on roll.
- The school belongs to the Harlington Area Schools Trust (HAST), a partnership with 2 middle schools and 6 lower schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to outstanding so that more students make rapid progress in all subjects and a higher proportion reach the top grades by:
 - always setting work that is more challenging to stretch the most able
 - giving students more frequent opportunities to work together or independently to find out information and learn for themselves
 - making sure that all teachers' written feedback tells students precisely how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, and that students routinely act on the advice to enhance their learning
 - ensuring best leadership practice in the school is shared so that all subject leaders further improve the quality of teaching in their area of responsibility and hold teachers to account to secure more consistently outstanding teaching across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school in Year 9 with skills in literacy and numeracy that are well above those found nationally. They make good progress to attain high standards in their GCSE qualifications. The proportions attaining at least 5 good GCSEs, including English and Mathematics, is high.
- The proportion of students across the range of attainment making good progress in English is above that found nationally, and in mathematics, well above. This is because teaching is good and sometimes outstanding.
- Progress in science is also well above average, and, in most other subjects, it is above average. Achievement is not outstanding because not enough of the most able students are attaining the highest GCSE grades across all subjects.
- Progress in languages has been slow owing to poor teaching and weak subject leadership. Senior leaders have recently addressed these weaknesses. Initial indications are encouraging, but it is too soon to judge the impact of these changes.
- The school enters only the most able students early, in Year 10, for the mathematics GCSE examination. They have all attained top grades and continue to study further mathematics. This strategy has led to an increased uptake of mathematics in the sixth form.
- Students eligible for support through the pupil premium funding receive additional teaching support and increased opportunities to enhance their personal development. In English and mathematics in 2013, Year 11 students who were eligible for the funding attained about half a GCSE grade below their peers. This represents a closing of the gap, compared to 2012. Although they attain less well than their peers in the school, the proportions making good progress in English and mathematics are higher than eligible students nationally.
- The school carefully monitors the progress and attendance of the very few students who attend the part-time off-site carpentry or sports leadership courses. These students make similar progress to their classmates.
- The school actively promotes equality of opportunity. Support staff, teachers and pastoral leaders work well together to include all students. As a result, disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those supported in the hearing impaired unit, make the same good and, sometimes, rapid progress as their peers.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form is good. Students are offered a wide range of options and teachers ensure that students are guided to courses that are most suited to their needs. It is not yet outstanding, as not enough students are attaining the top A*-B grades at A level.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is mostly good and some teaching is outstanding. There are a few instances where teaching still requires improvement.
- Teachers, other adults and students work together with mutual respect, creating a good climate for learning. As a result, students are attentive and try their best.

- The most successful teaching is characterised by teachers asking searching questions to deepen understanding and planning activities to meet the needs of all students.
- Teachers help students further develop their literacy skills well, for example, though insisting that in writing, across all subjects, students use the same conventions for writing paragraphs.
- Notable strengths in teaching are the opportunities created for students to consider profound issues and moral dilemmas, such as religious attitudes to casual sex, the treatment of minorities as seen in the character of Shylock and the implications of discrimination at work on the individual, society and the economy. This contributes well to students' strong moral understanding.
- In a few instances, teachers give all students the same information and activities and this slows their progress, especially for the more-able, as they do not have the opportunity to fully process their learning and deepen their understanding for themselves.
- Most teachers' marking gives students helpful guidance on how to improve their work and students are usually set a task to improve their work and deepen their learning. The school recognises that this good practice is not yet consistent for all teachers.
- Teaching assistants, including those with specialist skills to support the hearing impaired, plan well with teachers so that small-group teaching and in-class support helps all students to achieve equally well.
- In the sixth form, the majority of teaching is good. At its best, students assess their own progress and work independently or in groups to improve. For example, in an outstanding performing arts lesson on choreography, students studied videos of their previous performances and then discussed and worked together at a rapid pace to improve the quality of their routines. Such outstanding teaching leading to rapid progress though, is not typical across all subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students, including those in the hearing impairment unit, are courteous towards each other and adults alike. They behave well around the school and in lessons. Year 9 students say that they were well looked after when they joined the school by their older peers in their vertical tutor groups.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning, which helps them make good progress. In too many lessons however, the lack of opportunity for students to engage more deeply in activities, such as working with their peers, means that learning can be passive, so inhibiting outstanding progress.
- Students say that they feel very safe in school and they are aware of how to keep safe, for example, when using social media.
- Students are fully aware of all forms of bullying, including prejudiced behaviours based on race, religion or sexual orientation. Documentation confirms the students' view that bullying is rare, and that, should it occur, it is dealt with effectively.
- Pastoral staff work extremely well with any students whose circumstances make them vulnerable

and with their families. As a result, there has been a substantial reduction in exclusions and attendance has risen significantly to above average. The attendance and behaviour of students who attend alternative provision off-site are checked daily.

- Students are proud of their school and relish the many opportunities that they have to make a positive contribution. Sixth form students, for example, have roles, such as being house, charity and sports captains and students across the school have opportunities to serve as house councillors.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, his deputy, other school leaders and governors share the ambition to ensure that all students leave Harlington well prepared, academically and personally, for the challenges of adulthood.
- The school involves staff, students, governors and parents in its self-evaluation processes. Consequently, leaders have an honest and accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. These processes lead to good improvement plans, which detail the intended outcomes for improving the quality of teaching, students' progress and their behaviour.
- House leaders, together with the inclusion leader, provide strong pastoral leadership. As a result, students facing challenging circumstances, including those supported in the hearing impaired unit, are attending more regularly and are making more rapid progress than previously.
- Senior and middle leaders, including of the sixth form, have rigorous processes for monitoring teaching through observations, specific action-research and work scrutiny. Teachers are given professional training opportunities and those needing additional support to improve their performance receive targeted mentoring and coaching. A few staff who responded to the questionnaire felt that more training could be provided to further enhance their expertise; most felt it contributes to improving their skills well. Teacher performance, student outcomes and the appraisal system are clearly linked.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding as leaders have not yet secured outstanding teaching and student progress across all subjects.
- A small number of leaders with subject responsibility last year did not secure the best possible teaching and student achievement. New leaders took up their posts in September. While it is too soon to measure their longer-term impact on the quality of teaching and student progress, inspection evidence indicates that they have begun to successfully implement well thought-out action plans for improvements.
- Through the HAST partnership, senior and middle leaders, as well as other staff, have opportunities to learn from and contribute to best practice in both teaching and leadership across the schools.
- The curriculum offers students a wide range of subject options. Students confirmed to inspectors that they are given a great deal of impartial advice from teachers and external advisors for their GCSE choices, their post-16 choices, including from other providers, and for when they leave school. As a result, the proportion of students completing their courses in the sixth form and the proportion passing their examinations are higher than those found nationally.
- There is a wide range of opportunities offered through the school's enrichment programme,

which contributes well to students' physical well-being and personal development. They have extensive opportunities to participate in sport, theatre productions and visits to art galleries, for example, as well as in many overseas educational journeys. Leaders monitor attendance to these activities carefully to ensure that students whose circumstances make them vulnerable benefit from opportunities to enrich their life experience. The curriculum promotes well the mature attitudes and behaviours that students demonstrate and prepares them well for the future.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are well informed about all aspects of the school's performance. They monitor and evaluate the work of the school closely through regular visits, including to lessons, analysis of students' performance information, including those supported through the pupil premium, and by checking progress against the governors' strategic vision and the school's action plans. They support and challenge senior leaders to improve the quality of teaching and students' achievements. They have good oversight of the school's appraisal procedures and ensure that only the most successful teachers are rewarded. All statutory duties are met and arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements.

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	137941
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	425400

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

Type of school	Other secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1398
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	399
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Holland
Headteacher	Shawn Fell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01525 755100
Fax number	01525 755101
Email address	enquiries@harlington.org

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