

The Cavendish School

Warners End Road, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 3DW

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement in English and science is not high enough. They do not always complete written tasks well or make good progress in their practical skills. The most-able students do not all achieve higher grades.
- Some disadvantaged pupils do not make the progress they should because their attendance is too low.
- Not all teachers have high enough expectations for students' work and behaviour.
- Some teachers do not set appropriate homework or mark students' written work in enough detail to help them make good progress.
- The targets for students' work set by the school and by class teachers are not always demanding enough.
- Some subject leaders do not check the accuracy of teachers' assessments or the quality of students' written work consistently.
- There has not been enough development of the schools' approach to assessing students' progress with the new Key Stage 3 curriculum.
- Governors have been slow to challenge underperformance in the school in the past and new monitoring arrangements are not yet fully effective.

The school has the following strengths

- Students' progress is good in a range of GCSE subjects, especially mathematics, where students of all abilities approach their work with confidence.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is good. They receive effective support in class and in small groups from staff who match work well to their individual learning needs.
- Students make good progress in the sixth form, which is well organised.
- Students behave well in class and around the school. The great majority contribute well to class discussions and they all say they feel safe in school. Their personal and social development is good.
- The new headteacher provides strong and effective leadership. She has made very good progress in developing a positive working atmosphere in the school. Students say they enjoy coming to school and staff feel well supported in their professional development. As a result, achievement overall at Key Stage 4 is improving.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have successfully introduced more effective systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, which is improving well. They have also made good progress in making available reliable information about students' progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in 38 lessons, including 15 that were seen jointly with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made short visits to other lessons and tutor group sessions. They looked at samples of students' work, interviewed groups of students, and heard Year 7 students read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, year heads, teachers, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and the National Leader of Education who works with the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, school development plans, behaviour records, safeguarding records, governing body documents, and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in the 88 questionnaires returned by school staff, and the 93 responses submitted by parents to the online Parent View survey.

Inspection team

Roger Waddingham, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Paul Ferrie	Additional Inspector
Helen Bailey	Additional Inspector
Catherine Bates	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary school.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds and few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported through the pupil premium is average. This is additional funding allocated by the government for students who are looked after by the local authority or known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for Year 11 students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The sixth form is part of a local consortium involving three other schools.
- The headteacher was appointed in January 2015, having joined the school in the previous term as the interim headteacher.
- The school receives help from a National Leader of Education, the headteacher at Parmiter's School, and from the Herts and Bucks Teaching School Alliance.
- The school offers work-related training in Key Stage 4 for 11 students at the Dacorum Education Support Centre, five at Astley Cooper School and five at West Herts College.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by ensuring that staff consistently:
 - give written and oral feedback to students on what to do to improve, and they check that students respond to their comments
 - set regular homework tasks that give students appropriate opportunities to consolidate and improve their understanding
 - demonstrate high expectations for work and behaviour in all year groups, especially in Key Stage 3.
- Improve achievement in English and science, especially for the most able, by ensuring that:
 - all students are aware of demanding targets for their work
 - students have enough time to complete all written tasks
 - students all have appropriate opportunities to develop their practical skills in science.
- Improve leadership and management in the school by making sure that:
 - demanding targets are set for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, and that staff understand them
 - subject leaders are fully involved in monitoring students' work and checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments
 - new assessment arrangements for Key Stage 3 are put in place
 - greater attention is focused on improving attendance, particularly of disadvantaged students
 - governors review the effectiveness of their monitoring procedures to hold senior managers more closely to account.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- The new headteacher provides strong and effective leadership. She has made a good start in developing the school through the accurate identification of key strengths and weaknesses and setting clear and appropriate priorities for improving outcomes for students. She has made very good progress in developing a positive working atmosphere in the school; this is confirmed by the views expressed by both staff and students. Nonetheless, overall leadership and management in the school require improvement because not all staff consistently show high enough expectations for students' work and behaviour.
- The school system for setting targets for examination outcomes has not been demanding enough in the past and staff have not been clear enough in explaining to students the grades they should be capable of attaining, regardless of their starting points or their backgrounds.
- Senior leaders are now monitoring teaching on a regular basis and identifying areas for staff development. However, this has not been carried out rigorously enough in the past, and there is still a significant minority of staff who need further support so that teaching, while improving, is not yet doing so rapidly enough. Staff report that their professional development needs are now met well through training opportunities in school and those provided by staff from the local authority and the local support school.
- Subject leaders are increasingly involved in monitoring students' work and checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments. However, many have little experience in this work and middle managers do not all understand the production and use of accurate student performance information.
- Work in subject departments on teaching the new curriculum for Key Stage 3 is well under way, but the necessary accompanying assessment arrangements are not yet being considered in enough detail.
- School senior managers make good use of student tracking information, both to identify the support needed for individual students and to hold teachers to account for their performance.
- The sixth form is well led and managed. As a result, students are very positive about the opportunities they receive to develop both academically and in their skills to take up further education or employment.
- Students have a good choice of subjects to study at both GCSE and in the sixth form. They say they enjoy the wide range of after-school clubs and sporting opportunities. Cultural development is promoted well in arts and humanities subjects. Students receive good support on career choices from external advisers who are readily available in school, and through work experience placements throughout their time in school.
- The school programme of themes for the week in assemblies, tutor periods and life skills lessons prepares students well for life in modern Britain. These themes include, for example, respect for individuals, democratic values and the rule of law. Students' wider personal development is also enhanced by a well-planned programme of visits and visiting speakers, where topics such as cyber-bullying, racism and extremism are discussed.
- The support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is managed well. There are detailed arrangements to identify students' individual learning needs on joining the school, and support staff are well trained in helping students to improve their reading, writing and number skills. The impact of this support is monitored carefully. The support for students eligible for the pupil premium or Year 7 'catch up' funding is likewise used to ensure that these students generally make progress in line with or better than that of their peers.
- The school chooses off-site providers for a small number of Key Stage 4 students that are best suited to individual abilities and interests. Leaders carefully monitor their progress, attendance and behaviour.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory requirements and staff are well trained to carry out their responsibilities. Senior managers have a clear commitment to equality of opportunity, and use information from the school council, for example, to make sure that students feel confident that there is no

discrimination.

- In the past year, the school has drawn on the local authority, a National Leader of Education and the Herts and Bucks Teaching School Alliance for support to school staff in carrying out their responsibilities. This has been very effective, and leaders are demonstrating the capacity to improve, as the rise in classroom standards illustrates.

■ The governance of the school:

- Until recently, governors have not done enough to challenge school leaders over areas of underperformance.
- After the National Leader of Education promoted the restructuring of their procedures, governors have a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are now receiving more-accurate student performance information through committee meetings and are better placed than they were a year ago to challenge any underperformance.
- Governors are now allocated key school improvement areas to monitor, although the procedures to gather first-hand evidence through school visits are still at an early stage of development.
- Governors have a broad picture of teachers' performance and what is being done to improve it. However, governors do not have enough information on the effectiveness of staff on the upper pay scale.
- Planning for improvement and the monitoring of progress is now better focused through the school development planning that has taken place this year. Governors are aware of the school targets but have not taken steps to inform themselves of wider school development initiatives within departments.
- The governors are aware of the school's expenditure of pupil premium funding and the school website has appropriate detail, although they have not been in a position to challenge aspects of this expenditure until recently as they did not receive enough detailed information.
- Governors are making increasing use of the training opportunities offered by the local authority.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They behave well in lessons, and students acknowledge that the new school behaviour policy has helped them to take their learning more seriously. Older students, in particular, show good maturity in their attitudes to learning, arriving at lessons on time and ready to learn.
- Students move throughout the school in a calm and orderly manner showing a good degree of regard for the buildings, for each other, and for staff. They show good self-discipline in entering and leaving the school grounds. As a result, the school is a harmonious community.
- Sixth form students behave well and enjoy the new responsibilities they have been given to develop the school council and mentor younger students.
- The school checks the behaviour and safety of students educated on other sites carefully, and makes sure that their behaviour is good.
- Some parents expressed concern over behaviour in the school, but students themselves feel it has improved significantly this year and the evidence gathered by the inspection team supports this. Staff, parents and students alike say how well students enjoy being at the school.
- Temporary exclusions from the school have risen recently as a result of the new headteachers' policy on students' conduct, but the overall trend is downwards.
- There are occasions when younger students need to be reminded of the school's behaviour policy.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say that they feel well cared for through the new year-group arrangements. They have confidence in the school's systems to prevent

bullying, and instances of bullying of any kind are increasingly rare.

- The school works well to develop students' awareness of personal safety, with a detailed programme of topics, including visiting speakers, to cover areas such as internet safety and anti-bullying.
- The school procedures to promote good attendance are having a positive impact. Attendance is improving rapidly from below average and is now much closer to the national figure. Also the proportion of students missing over 30 school days per year has decreased. The attendance of disadvantaged students and those educated off-site is monitored carefully, but current initiatives have yet to demonstrate success in bringing their attendance rates to the national average.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement, particularly for Key Stage 3 courses. Although the school has now developed clear guidance for staff on planning appropriately demanding tasks, teachers do not always follow the guidance well enough to ensure that all students are challenged and supported to make good progress.
- Students and staff feel that the recently introduced school behaviour policy has helped students to improve their concentration in lessons. However, not all staff apply this policy consistently so that some younger pupils, in particular, are not developing the maturity of approach to learning seen in the majority of lessons.
- The quality of written and oral feedback given to students on what to do to improve is very variable. Some students do not make enough progress because their books show little sign of marking over a long period of time, with very few comments and limited opportunities for them to reflect on their learning. Some teachers do not use time well in lessons; for example, to discuss students' current work and where they might improve it. However, good examples of this were seen in mathematics, where teachers explained possible errors in understanding before students started work.
- Not all teachers use homework tasks sufficiently to give students opportunities to consolidate and improve their understanding of the work they have been doing in class. In some cases, the tasks lack challenge and are too short, in other cases they do not build appropriately on the work done in lessons as they cover different content on a separate worksheet.
- In most Key Stage 4 lessons, students show good motivation and are interested in their work. They make good progress where teachers direct students' learning towards the specific requirements of the examination syllabus. This was a strength of teaching seen in arts, humanities and language lessons.
- Sixth form teaching is good overall. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, and they make appropriate use of technical terms. Staff involve students well in the discussion of key ideas by making sure they have opportunities to carry out their own research on new topics.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students have underachieved at GCSE in the past because teaching was not consistently strong enough in a number of subjects and students were allowed to drop courses when it was not in their best interests. Although teaching is now improving, there are still weaknesses in a number of subjects, so that current students have not yet caught up on work missed previously and their achievement requires improvement.
- GCSE results in English have been too low because students' written coursework was not at the required standard. Senior staff have acted well this year to insist on higher expectations and more rigour in these assessments. The work seen in lessons and in students' books shows that progress at GCSE is improving. However, the challenge in work for Key Stage 3 students is not consistently high and they do not finish off some of their written work, so that this, in particular, requires improvement.

- Progress in science has been too slow in the past for the most-able students following the separate sciences and for middle-ability students following core science topics. Both of these groups are now making better progress in lessons and their written work shows a good recall of key facts and ideas. Younger students do not have enough opportunities to develop their practical skills of recording, graphing and calculating in particular. Also they do not often complete any conclusions to their experimental work, so that their progress in understanding is too slow.
- The school is beginning to make effective use of pupil premium funding and the gap in performance between disadvantaged students and others is narrowing. In 2014, their attainment was lower than that of their classmates and that found nationally by half a grade in English and one grade in mathematics. These students are now making progress closer to that of their peers in English, and reliable school assessments show that the picture is improving for 2015 for mathematics. However, the attendance of many disadvantaged students is below the school average and this has been a barrier to their achievement.
- All students continue their studies in English and mathematics until the end of the courses. The school does not enter any students early for these GCSEs.
- The most-able students have made consistently good progress over time in mathematics, supported by the challenging work and probing questioning seen in lessons. They are now also making better progress in English, where the clear focus on examination expectations has helped students greatly. However, these pupils do not always make enough progress in either English or science.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well in lessons. Teachers monitor their progress carefully and plan tasks that are well matched to their individual learning needs. Teaching assistants are well trained and show good skills in questioning students and explaining ideas.
- Year 7 students who join the school with below-average attainment make good progress. This is because 'catch up' funding for these students is used to give them individual help in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and improving well. Students now make broadly average progress in the great majority of academic and work-related subjects. Progress in written work in English is much improved for current pupils. Students resitting examinations in GCSE mathematics and English are supported well and make good progress.
- The achievement of students educated off-site for part of the week is broadly in line with that of their peers and they make sound progress in their chosen courses, showing good attitudes to learning. The school monitors their progress carefully through regular contact with the outside providers.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Achievement in the sixth form has improved well. Attainment on entry to Year 12 is below the average found nationally, while the overall results per student have risen over the past three years to be close to the national average. Students therefore now achieve well in the great majority of academic and work-related subjects. Success rates at A level are improving and are now above the national average.
- Progress seen in written work in English is much stronger for current pupils than in the past, and this is supported by the school's reliable assessment evidence in this large entry subject. Students resitting examinations in GCSE mathematics and English are supported well and make good progress, with many attaining at least a grade C.
- Teaching is good. Teachers show good subject knowledge when working with groups or individual students, involving them well in the discussion of new ideas. They use technical terms appropriately and ask challenging questions, explaining clearly the standards expected in good-quality examination answers. They plan and set work that builds well on students' previous learning. In many subjects, teachers give detailed written feedback to students, who respond carefully to the comments.

- Students show very good motivation; they behave well and are consistently positive about their learning. They feel safe and they are well supported by the sixth form learning mentors. They collaborate well on group tasks and take an active part in discussions in lessons. Students clearly take a pride in their work and much of their written work is well presented.

- Leadership of the sixth form is good. The curriculum offers an appropriate choice of work-related and academic subjects to meet the needs of a wide range of students. Students joining the sixth form feel well informed about what is expected of them. The monitoring of students' progress is well established so that students falling behind in their work are supported appropriately.

- Students report that they enjoy the opportunities for personal development offered in the sixth form. The recent re-establishment of the student council has given them good opportunities to take responsibility in the school. The school provides a good range of opportunities to prepare students for the next stages in their careers or education.

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	117528
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	462088

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	917
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Terry Douris
Headteacher	Sarah Lansley
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2013
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