

Holmesdale Technology College

Malling Road, Snodland, Kent, ME6 5HS

Inspection dates 13–14 March 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 progress throughout the school and achieve well. Standards across all subjects, including in English and mathematics, are rising.
- The school is succeeding in narrowing gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged students and their peers.
- Teachers plan activities which are well matched to students' different abilities and interests. They assess students' progress regularly and accurately, and make sure that students know what to do to improve their work.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the school. They have few concerns about bullying.
- Older students help younger ones to feel safe and secure in school.
- Leaders have improved teaching, which is good, by setting staff clear targets and making sure that they receive the support and training they need to achieve them.
- Leaders ensure that students follow courses which enable them to achieve well. The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.
- Governors carefully analyse all aspects of the school's performance. Their willingness to robustly challenge leaders has contributed to the school's improvement.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress from their starting points and gain qualifications which prepare them well for the next stage of their education and for work.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Students do not always work hard enough in lessons.
- Members of staff do not always apply school policies consistently in managing students' behaviour.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 35 lessons, seven of them together with the Principal and other school leaders. They made shorter visits to a number of other lessons and other activities, including a tutor group meeting and an assembly. Inspectors also looked at students' written work and listened to students read.
- The inspectors held discussions with groups of and individual students, the Chair of the Governing Body, the vice chair and another member, and a representative from the local authority. They also held meetings with members of staff, including senior and middle leaders.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents. These included the school's information on students' attainment and progress, as well as information on attendance and exclusions. They examined safeguarding procedures and records relating to the school's own lesson observations. Inspectors also looked at the school's checks on how well it is doing, documents relating to the management of staff performance, and planning documents.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, the inspectors took account of 52 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. They also considered the school's own most recent survey of parents' and carers' views and 62 questionnaires completed by members of the teaching and support staff.

Inspection team

Robin Gaff, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janet Hallett

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Wendy Walters

Additional Inspector

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Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students who are learning English as an additional language is well below average.
- About one in four students is eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional funding provided for children in local authority care, children with a parent or carer in the armed services and those known to be eligible for free school meals. This proportion is below the national average.
- Although this figure varies from year to year, about one in seven Year 7 students is eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium. This extra funding is provided by the government to support those students who have not reached the expected standards in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2.
- Just over one in eight students is supported through school action. This is above the national average. The proportion of students who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Holmesdale Technology College and The Malling School together form the Malling Holmesdale Federation. This is led by an executive Principal and has a single governing body. The current executive Principal took up his post in September 2011, following the retirement of his predecessor.
- A small number of students in Key Stage 4 follow courses at the St James' Centre. This was established by the federation in September 2012 to cater for potentially vulnerable students. The school also shares the teaching of some sixth form courses with The Malling School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable all students to make consistently rapid and sustained progress, and ensure that their behaviour always contributes very positively to their learning, by making sure that:
 - students work consistently hard throughout lessons
 - all staff are fully consistent in the ways in which they apply the school's policies for managing students' behaviour.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students from different backgrounds, including the most able, achieve well. Students join the school with levels of attainment, especially in English, which are consistently below national averages. The standards they reach by the end of Year 11 at GCSE or in equivalent courses, across a range of subjects, have risen steadily over the last few years and are broadly average. This indicates that students make good progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of students who gain five GCSE passes at grade C or above, including in English and mathematics, rose substantially between 2010 and 2012, and at a faster pace than in other schools nationally. Although there was a dip in 2013, school leaders have accurately identified and successfully addressed the factors that caused this to happen. As a result, the levels at which current Year 11 students are working indicate that they are reaching standards which once more are in line with national averages.
- The school now enters only a very few students early for GCSE examinations. Their results show that these students are not being prevented from achieving the high grades of which they are capable.
- The school is succeeding in narrowing gaps between the attainment of those students who are eligible for support from premium funding and that of other students. The standards they reach show that these students consistently make progress which is as good as and sometimes better than their peers'. The school is also making good use of Year 7 catch-up funding to improve their skills in reading and writing. It also enables them to improve their understanding of mathematical concepts and their ability to solve problems.
- By providing eligible students with, for example, high-quality one-to-one and small-group teaching, the school has raised their attainment in both English and mathematics. In 2012, the grades gained by this group of students were more than two grades lower than those of other students in English, and one and a half grades lower in mathematics. In 2013, however, the gaps were much narrower, less than half a grade in English and just over half a grade in mathematics. These students also made faster progress than their predecessors. The school's reliable information on the attainment of the equivalent group of current Year 11 students shows that gaps are continuing to close.
- Disabled students, those with special educational needs and the small number who are learning English as an additional language, also achieve well. This is because teachers give them tasks which are well matched to their needs, and teaching assistants help students to make good progress by enabling them to participate fully in classroom activities.
- Students who follow courses at the Saint James' Centre benefit from expert specialist support. This enables them to overcome the barriers to learning, which they have faced because of prolonged absence from school for example, and to make up lost ground.
- Sixth form students, including those who follow part of their courses at The Malling School, benefit from consistently good teaching and from courses which meet their needs and aspirations. As a result, they gain academic and work-related qualifications which enable almost all of them to go on either to university, further training or directly into employment.
- Students learn well and make good progress in lessons because teachers use their detailed knowledge of students' abilities to plan activities which engage and maintain their interest.
- Achievement is not yet outstanding because occasionally progress is slower for some students. This is because teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what students can achieve or insist upon students working as hard as they could.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teachers make good use of information about students' past attainment and individual needs to plan activities which are well suited to students' abilities. This enables all groups of students,

including disabled students and those with special educational needs, to cope well with the tasks they are given and so to make good progress.

- Teachers make sure that students have good opportunities to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills. They do so by encouraging students to read aloud in lessons, to complete pieces of extended writing and to solve problems. Teachers strongly emphasise the importance of accurate pronunciation, spelling and grammar, and of carefully taking the correct steps when carrying out calculations.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and succeed in sharing their enthusiasm with students, which makes them keen to learn.
- Students know what they are meant to be doing in lessons because teachers explain tasks clearly and check carefully that students have understood them. Teachers' questions help students to learn because teachers give them time to think before they respond. They use students' answers well to develop their knowledge and deepen their understanding of topics by encouraging students to expand on and to justify their responses.
- For example, in a Year 13 lesson, students considerably extended their understanding of different sociologists' explanations for why women commit fewer crimes than men. This was because the teacher presented the topic extremely clearly and succinctly. She checked that all the students understood the complex technical terms, such as 'marginalisation', that were being used. She also made sure that students, including those who were less confident, developed their communication skills by contributing to the lively discussion that took place.
- Teachers mark students' written work thoroughly and often. They give students detailed written comments about their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers also make sure that students follow their advice by writing corrected or extended versions of assignments.
- Students make good or better progress in most lessons because teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. Occasionally, however, teachers allow students to relax their efforts, for example, when they have finished their work earlier than expected. As a result, time is not used as well as it could be and the pace of learning slackens.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Students' positive attitudes make a good contribution to their learning and progress in most lessons. Students respond quickly to teachers' instructions and requests, and listen attentively to their explanations and questions. Students' willingness to work sensibly together in class shows their good moral and social development.
- Around the school, students are considerate of each other as, for example, they move from one part of the building to another during breaks between lessons. They also show respect for the school environment: there is very little litter and no graffiti.
- Students understand the school's systems for rewarding good and discouraging bad behaviour, and many of them say that behaviour has improved in recent years.
- The school has succeeded in improving the behaviour of the small minority of students whose behaviour or attendance has failed to meet its high expectations. As a result, the number of exclusions has fallen substantially. Attendance has risen and is now in line with the national average.
- On the few occasions when students do not behave well in lessons, this is usually because staff have not been consistent enough in, for example, giving and following up warnings.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students say they feel safe in school and most parents and carers agree. They know how to keep themselves safe when, for example, they are using the internet. Students know about different types of bullying, such as racist behaviour and persistent name calling. Students have few concerns about bullying, however, because they say that it is dealt with quickly and effectively. They know that they can turn to members of staff for help, as well as to Year 11 'ambassadors' and sixth form students, who receive effective training to help them to resolve disputes.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal, ably supported by her senior colleagues and by the executive Principal, has been relentless in her successful drive to improve teaching and raise standards.
- She has ensured that the school now has robust and reliable systems for assessing students' attainment and the extent of their progress. She has also made sure that teachers use the resulting information to plan lessons which meet students' needs. This has contributed strongly to improving students' achievement.
- Leaders' success in promoting equality of opportunity is demonstrated by the fact that gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged students and that of other students have narrowed. Students from different backgrounds and cultures relate well to one another, and there is no evidence of any discrimination taking place.
- Subject and other middle leaders, including those who are responsible for the sixth form, bring high levels of expertise and commitment to their roles. This helps them to play an increasingly effective part in raising the quality of education the school provides.
- School leaders have an in-depth knowledge of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. In particular, they understand what constitutes good and outstanding teaching. Their regular observations of lessons and examination of students' work enable them to identify examples of good and outstanding practice from which other teachers can learn.
- Leaders also make sure that weaker teaching is challenged firmly and decisively. They give staff demanding but realistic targets for improvement and the support they need, for example training and coaching, to reach them. Pay increases for teachers are closely linked to the progress they have made towards meeting these targets, which are closely linked to students' progress.
- The local authority has provided good support for the school, particularly in helping new leaders to meet the demands of their roles.
- Leaders have kept the range of subjects constantly under review. They have developed it well by, for example, cooperating with The Malling School to provide alternative courses for potentially vulnerable students and to increase options for sixth form students.
- The school offers a good variety of after-school clubs, trips and special events, which contribute well to developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students take part in a range of sports, as well as drama and musical productions. They also benefit from links with schools in other countries, and visiting speakers and theatre companies.
- Leaders have developed the range of ways by which the school keeps parents and carers informed about their children's progress, and seek their views about future plans. Most parents and carers agree that staff respond well to their concerns.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding. This is because leaders have not yet ensured that teaching is consistently good enough to bring about outstanding achievement and that all staff are fully consistent in applying school policies. However, the strengths noted above, together with leaders' success in tackling the weaknesses identified by the school's last inspection, demonstrate its capacity for further improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance, including information on students' achievement, and how it compares to other schools'. They are fully aware of what leaders have done to improve the quality of teaching and of the links they have established between pay increases and teachers' performance. Governors hold leaders robustly to account for ensuring that any weaknesses in achievement are successfully addressed. They carefully examine the school's spending, including how the extra pupil premium funding is allocated. They understand the impact that its use is having on the achievement and well-being of eligible students. Governors bring a good range of expertise and experience, for example in care and finance, to the school. This helps them to ensure that the school's finances are in good order and that it meets current requirements for safeguarding students.

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	118796
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	433892

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	908
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Sams
Principal	Julia Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 May 2011
Telephone number	01634 240416
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