

The Appleton School

Croft Road, Benfleet, SS7 5RN

Inspection dates 9–10 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- When students come into the school, their attainment is broadly average. Their progress is impressive, so that by the end of Year 11 their attainment is above average.
- Recent examination results show sustained improvements, especially in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is outstanding, overall, although some marking does not tell students clearly enough how they can improve.
- Students' behave exceptionally well. They are courteous and considerate and their attitudes to learning are exemplary.
- Students who are at risk of not doing well are given extra help so that they progress at least as rapidly as other students.
- Parents and staff, rightly, speak very highly about the school.
- Leaders, managers and governors work well together in a relentless drive for improvement, based on frequent monitoring of students' progress, which leads to rising standards.
- Students who are eligible for additional government funding (the pupil premium) are supported very well both academically and pastorally. As a result, the gap between their attainment and that of other students has narrowed considerably.
- Excellent learning opportunities and promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development mean that students' interests and aspirations are met.
- The governing body gives an excellent balance of challenge and support to the headteacher and staff, who have worked closely together to create an environment where teaching continues to improve, and learning can flourish.
- The leadership of teaching and management of achievement are highly effective. Responses to the staff questionnaire indicate that the school is well led and managed.
- The governing body manages the school's finances well, and uses the pupil premium wisely to help those students whom it supports.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, of which nine were joint observations with members of the school's senior leadership team.
- Students' books were examined during lessons, and on a series of short visits to lessons in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and senior staff, including staff responsible for subjects and for the pastoral care of students. They also met governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, and two groups of students.
- They took into account 81 responses to the staff questionnaire, and 121 responses to the online Parent View survey.
- They looked at key documents, including: the school's self-evaluation, minutes of meetings, information about safeguarding, the school's own data about progress, documentation on the management of staff performance, and records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

David Lewis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Edwin Powell	Additional Inspector
Linda Austin	Additional Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Additional Inspector
Kevin Morris	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Appleton School converted to become an academy on 11 March 2011. When its predecessor school, The Appleton School Business and Enterprise College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school is administered by the Appleton School Academy Trust, covering the education of young people between the ages of 11–19.
- The school is a larger-than-average secondary school. It is a specialist business and enterprise college. Approval has been gained to admit students into the sixth form from September 2014, and planning is under way for this important change.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and Mathematics.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for students eligible for free school meals, those looked after, or those with a parent in the armed services) is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average, but the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A few students in Years 10 and 11 are taught a small range of vocational subjects offsite.
- The school has links with local businesses, and with the Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Brighton. It is an Investor in People.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of marking to match that of the best by making sure that all students understand how they can improve.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- When students come into Year 7, their attainment, overall, is broadly average, although the proportion of high-attaining students is below average.
- Since the academy was established, the proportion of students gaining five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics has risen from average in 2011, to be significantly above average in 2012. Examination grades already gained during the current year indicate that this improvement has continued throughout 2013.
- By Year 11, standards are significantly above average. The proportion gaining the highest grades, A* and A, was particularly impressive in science in 2012. The proportions gaining the higher A* to C grades in science and in English language were also impressive.
- The large majority of students make better progress than that expected nationally across Years 7 to 11. Close scrutiny of published data on students' progress and attainment, backed up by school data and examination results since the school's change of status, show that, whatever students' ability and starting points, the proportion making better than expected progress is above the national average.
- The school makes good use of early entry to GCSE examinations to help students to reach their potential. Usually this approach is very successful. New arrangements in modern foreign languages and humanities have helped remove problems associated with entry in Year 9, and balanced the curriculum much more effectively.
- The school monitors students' progress very rigorously and uses the data it collects to identify the specific needs of each individual. Classes are arranged at the end of the school day to make good any underperformance. This practice is so effective that disabled students and those who have special educational needs often progress more rapidly than their colleagues, narrowing any gap in attainment between groups of students.
- Students educated offsite generally achieve very well in a range of vocational qualifications, including hair and beauty, sport and exercise and catering.
- Funding through the pupil premium enables the school to give a lot of support to eligible students. As a result of one-to-one tuition provided, development of social skills, and a project to improve reading skills, these students now progress much more rapidly than their colleagues, and in some cases overtake them. The gap in attainment in English and mathematics between eligible students and others has greatly narrowed, in some cases from seven terms to only three terms behind.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Overall, teaching is outstanding. Almost all lessons are carefully planned, with tasks designed to help students to learn to think for themselves, and to solve problems. As a result, students became engrossed in their work, and made excellent progress.
- Teachers frequently use discussions with individuals or groups of students to enhance their progress. Just occasionally, they do not make good enough use of these sessions to judge

students' progress accurately and, where necessary, modify the planned learning.

- Nearly all lessons were planned to hold students' interest well, often using a variety of approaches to match the work to students' own aspirations. Mathematics is taught very effectively. In a very successful mathematics lesson, for example, students grappled with the techniques for bisecting an angle by construction. Similarly, in art, the quality of preliminary drawings was very high, showing that students were able to work creatively and independently.
- The school is passionate about the need to support all students to do their best, and teaching resources are well deployed. Teaching assistants make a big contribution to this aspect of the school's work, by ensuring that literacy skills are not a barrier to learning, and by raising students' aspirations for when they leave school.
- Teachers make excellent use of GCSE grade descriptors in nearly all lessons to help students to understand how they can improve. Students know their targets, and use them well to monitor their own learning. Teachers use these techniques skilfully to create an environment in which mutual trust and respect lead to excellent learning.
- Marking also refers to grade descriptors but, just occasionally, guidance about how students' work could be improved is not helpful enough and students are not given enough opportunity to respond.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' attitudes to learning in lessons are exemplary. They arrive on time, and get down to work quickly. In discussion, they show that they are keen to learn, and that they enjoy the activities that teachers prepare for them.
- The online survey, Parent View, shows that almost all parents rightly agree that students are well behaved across the school. Results from the Ofsted survey of staff perceptions show that staff unanimously agree.
- At break and lunch time and at the start and end of the day, when students are largely responsible for managing their own behaviour as they move from place to place, their behaviour is impeccable. They are courteous and considerate towards one another and to staff at all levels, and consistently good humoured.
- A positive climate for learning pervades the school, and a well-established behaviour policy linked to a rewards system is supported by all staff.
- The school works closely with students and their parents to ensure that attendance is as high as possible, including for those educated offsite. Overall attendance has improved since the academy was established and is now above the national average. Where necessary, the school works well with outside agencies to encourage students who are reluctant to come to school to attend regularly.
- The school has an effective policy on bullying and incidents are rare. Students know about different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying and prejudiced based bullying, and confirm that any incidents that do occur are dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- The school maintains close contact with institutions responsible for offsite provision, to ensure

students' regular attendance and positive behaviour so that students make the progress expected of them.

- The school records meticulously any incidents of bullying or poor behaviour and exclusions have remained low over the last two years.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- A culture of high standards and improvement are characteristic of the professional life of the school. Checking and confirming the quality of its work is at the heart of what the school does, and the headteacher and her senior staff maintain excellent records with which they identify where further improvement is needed.
- The idea that each student is an individual is at the heart of the school's work. This highly inclusive approach to its work ensures that all students are supported to give their best, and have equal opportunities to succeed. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The school monitors the quality of teaching as part of the management of teachers' performance. Methods for monitoring teaching and learning are closely aligned to Ofsted's standards. Teachers report that the process is managed sensitively, and provides a good basis for improvement over the coming year. Senior staff and inspectors were unanimous in judging teaching quality following joint observations of lessons.
- The school makes an excellent contribution to the work of trainee teachers and those new to the profession. Discussion with newly qualified teachers shows that this work is greatly appreciated. Some former students have shown their appreciation of what the school had done for them by returning to the school as teachers.
- The range of subjects and topics taught meets the needs and interests of students throughout the school extremely well. Learning is well matched to learning need, so that there is one-to-one support for those who find the work difficult, and the most able are challenged to ensure that they learn to think independently and manage their own learning. Learning opportunities beyond the school timetable include a wide range of sports, and opportunities to participate in cultural activities such as musical performance, dance and artistic activities and business. All these activities are much appreciated by students. Vocational opportunities are well managed, including those that take place offsite.
- The most able are supported in many ways. Older students have opportunities to work with younger ones as members of the school council, and by supporting in the classroom. Visits to universities promote an aspiration to take learning forward into higher education.
- Procedures for safeguarding and child protection are excellent and statutory requirements are met. Parents are confident that their children's safety is secure.
- The academy Trust is supportive and closely oversees the quality of the school's performance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are ambitious for the school. They provide challenge and hold the headteacher to account for improvements in everything the school does, especially in teaching. They know that any underperformance is tackled directly. They have a very good understanding of the quality of teaching and students' achievement. They use reports by senior staff and

discussions with the headteacher to extend their understanding. They play an important part in the management of staff performance and in making sure that pay reflects how well each member of staff performs in enabling students to make progress. The governors ensure that partnerships are promoted, and work for the benefit of the students. These include links with universities, and with major local companies and schools. Governors oversee the school's close working with outside agencies to promote the well-being of its students and their families. Links with parents are actively promoted and contribute significantly to the work of the school. There is astute and rigorous financial management. The allocation of the pupil premium is well thought out, and conspicuously successful in supporting the enhanced progress of eligible 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	136579
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	413310

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Hillman
Headteacher	Karen Kerridge
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2010
Telephone number	01268 794215
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