

Plume School

Fambridge Road, Maldon, Essex CM9 6AB

Inspection dates

16–17 January 2018

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal and senior leaders have created a culture of high expectations. Parents and carers highlight the difference the new principal has made.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders' actions are linked to long-term, sustainable improvements.
- Pupils' opportunities to follow a curriculum well matched to their interests mean that a very high proportion progress successfully on leaving.
- Staff and governors are very ambitious for pupils. Their high expectations and actions are successfully raising pupils' aspirations.
- Senior leaders' actions, including the implementation of the highly effective training programme, have successfully improved the quality of teaching and learning.
- Attendance has improved; it is above average. Differences in attendance that existed previously for some groups have narrowed significantly.
- The strong relationships between pupils and staff embody the 'respect yourself, respect others and respect the environment' agenda.
- Effective systems track individual pupils' progress accurately. This now gives governors the useful information they need to support and challenge leaders effectively.
- Pupils move around the large but narrow site promptly and sensibly. Staff are highly visible. Pupils behave well at break and lunchtimes.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They know the value of making a good impression. Inspectors saw no incidents of poor behaviour.
- Parents are positive; 95% of those who completed Ofsted's Parent View survey would recommend the school.
- The sixth form is well led. Students attend well, are taught well and make good progress.
- Processes to safeguard pupils are robust. Staff know pupils well and provide good levels of care, including to the most vulnerable pupils.
- Current pupils make good progress. In a few subjects, including mathematics, some could make better progress if teachers matched work to their needs more precisely.
- Disadvantaged pupils make accelerated progress, helping them to catch up with their peers. Leaders are focused on reducing differences further.
- Year 11 pupils' progress was slightly below average last year. Senior leaders have a clear focus on improving outcomes further; some middle leaders are less clear.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers plan work, especially in mathematics, that meets pupils' needs more effectively and allows them to make better progress by:
 - providing more support for less-able pupils
 - enabling most-able pupils to extend their learning.
- Improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils by continuing to provide effective support that allows them to attain as well as their non-disadvantaged peers nationally.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management by developing middle leaders so that they are clearer about the impact of their actions on whole-school improvement priorities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal has galvanised staff. He has brought an increased focus to the school and, together with staff, has raised the benchmark in terms of expectations. Pupils notice the difference and respond to the increased level of challenge. They feel that they can achieve more, as illustrated by one pupil on the flexible learning programme who said, 'This is the start, and I now want a career in engineering.'
- The senior leadership team have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. There is an openness and transparency about where the school is in terms of its strengths and areas for development. The new assessment system gives them a realistic picture of where pupils are doing well and where additional support is required. Behaviour and attendance have improved significantly, as has current pupils' progress.
- Leaders have clear and ambitious plans to improve the school further. This is not predicated on quick wins or fast gains but built solidly on the foundations of accurate assessment, good teaching, effective behaviour management and spending additional funding wisely. Leaders have streamlined their priorities and are focused on developing teaching further to secure improved outcomes for all pupils, but particularly those who are disadvantaged. Their 'closing the gap' strategy and analysis provide evidence of their successes to date, but historical differences still persist for some pupils.
- Flexible learning programmes add breadth to the more traditional curriculum. Pupils have an incredibly wide choice of options. However, staff guide pupils carefully so that they make the right choices, helping them to follow an individual study programme and achieve well. The high proportions of pupils successfully progressing to further education, employment or training compared to national averages highlight the school's success.
- Leaders use training well to support and develop staff. The school's programme for training and supporting trainee or newly qualified teachers is particularly effective. Leaders' 'home-grown' approach to staff development helps to mitigate recruitment problems in some specialised subjects. Staff questionnaires show that the vast majority of staff feel supported, valued and are proud to work at the school. They say that they are treated fairly and are well led.
- Leaders spend additional funding to good effect. The pupil premium grant is used well because leaders are aware of pupils' barriers to learning. Leaders ensure that there is a good balance between pastoral and academic support, enabling disadvantaged pupils across all year groups to catch up because they are matching, and in some years exceeding, the progress of other pupils. The Year 7 catch-up funding is used well, and inspectors noted the improvements made in pupils' reading.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are having their needs well met. They make the same good progress as other pupils. The special educational needs coordinator's increased work with primary schools and the specialist training for support staff have led to a greater understanding of pupils' needs. Staff are now better equipped to meet those needs. The increased focus from leaders and governors ensures that the progress pupils make is continually evaluated and sustained.

- This is an inclusive school where staff and pupils treat each other with respect and courtesy. Staff model high expectations and give out clear messages of 'respect yourself and respect others'. Pupils were unequivocal; this is a school where it is OK to be different. The school's Stonewall champion status endorses the value the school places on celebrating differences.
- The curriculum is extended effectively by a variety of clubs and after-school activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, an astronomy club and sporting activities. Pupils value the extra-curricular activities and say that they help them to develop a range of skills across different areas.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed very successfully. Pupils' moral perspectives are widened through the 'respect the environment' agenda. The school is a leading force in recycling, being one of the world's leading schools on green power. Equally, the school's charity focus makes pupils think carefully about those less fortunate. For example, this has benefited homeless people this year.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Their monitoring schedule focuses on different teachers at different stages of their development, with increased attention given to staff who need more support. This is effectively raising standards. However, leaders are aware that inconsistencies still exist, such as some teachers not planning work that effectively supports or extends pupils.
- Senior leaders are clear about the impact of their actions on raising pupils' progress. While middle leaders have continued to work hard to drive change and secure improvements over time, especially in terms of the ongoing improvements in the quality of teaching, some need to be clearer on their departmental priorities to become even better.

Governance of the school

- Governors are aware of the school's strengths. They challenge leaders effectively over standards within the school. Governors' minutes show how they question leaders, and how this has improved over time because the information they receive is more accurate. Last year's predicted results were very close to pupils' actual results.
- Governors ensure that the school meets its statutory responsibilities. The link safeguarding governor checks arrangements, including the single central record, regularly. Governors receive valuable training, helping them to understand their responsibilities linked to keeping pupils safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff know pupils well. They have built positive relationships with families and are aware of local issues and what happens outside of school. This knowledge gives staff additional information to help keep children safe when they are in school.
- The school works closely and effectively with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the help and support that they need. Staff follow up referrals tenaciously if support is slow to arrive. Case studies show how staff actions have protected pupils against potentially dangerous situations.

- Pupils feel safe at school. They say that there are no areas within the school where they feel unsafe. The site is quite open, but leaders' effective actions and risk assessments ensure that this does not jeopardise pupils' safety. Overwhelmingly, parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that their children feel safe at school. The school's work to help pupils stay safe is highly effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use the information on what pupils know and can do to plan activities that help pupils to learn well. Where learning is most effective, pupils make strong progress because they listen attentively, are interested in what they are doing and are eager to learn. For example, pupils' understanding of how blood circulates grew rapidly while dissecting a heart in a Year 10 science lesson.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to ask probing questions that make pupils think hard. For example, in English, pupils were able to critically compare poems by Blake and Shelley. Year 8 geographers could accurately highlight some of the problems with afforestation, such as cost, maintenance, space and the fact that 'trees take a long time to grow.'
- Where teachers use a broader range of teaching styles, pupils learn more effectively. This was seen to good effect in performing arts, as the incredibly imaginative Year 9 pupils in a dance lesson moved towards a complete performance of 'Car Man', based on 'Carmen'.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They expect work to be well presented, diagrams to be neat and pupils to use the correct technical vocabulary. Most pupils respond to meet these expectations because they want to do well for themselves and their teachers.
- Teachers treat pupils with respect and consequently build strong and productive relationships. Time in lessons is used well because staff inject humour effectively alongside high-quality discussion. Pupils, especially in English and Spanish, work well in groups to collaborate on ideas. Staff use praise well across all areas, not just purely focusing on pupils' academic achievements, motivating all pupils to aim even higher.
- In a few subjects, some pupils do not make as much progress as they should. This is because the work set is either too easy or too hard. Specifically, some least-able pupils in mathematics are not supported well enough and some most-able pupils are not effectively challenged. When this happens, pupils' concentration wanders and their progress slows.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders use aspirational targets well, alongside use of the Plume Alumni, which inspires current pupils by highlighting former pupils' achievements. This is complemented by using former students to mentor, support and advise current pupils,

again raising aspirations successfully. This helps pupils to develop the resilience to enable them to make even more progress in their learning.

- The school provides a welcoming environment where pupils feel safe and secure. This helps them to develop their self-esteem and grow in confidence. Pupils respect the school. The displays are incredibly neat and tidy and showcase pupils' work, including that of some gifted artists.
- Pupils like and are proud of their school. They move from lesson to lesson in an orderly way. Staff model expected behaviours and pupils respect staff and their expectations. Pupils are polite and courteous. They greet visitors warmly, they are friendly and hold open doors for each other.
- The school is a highly inclusive place to learn. Pupils treat each other with courtesy and respect. They engage in high-quality discussions, sometime dealing with sensitive topics, showing that they are considerate of the thoughts and feelings of others and respect others' viewpoints.
- Records show that incidents of bullying have greatly reduced. Pupils say that bullying is rare. They are confident that if they had a problem, staff would deal with it quickly and effectively.
- The comprehensive careers advice and guidance programme helps pupils effectively navigate the many different options available to them. Pupils' learning prepares them well for when they leave the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- All staff, including senior leaders, are highly visible around the school. They engage with pupils, ask them how they are and chivvy the few along that move too slowly. During lessons, the corridors are quiet and behaviour in classrooms is purposeful, and inspectors witnessed very few incidents of poor behaviour throughout.
- Leaders' systematic recording of behavioural issues, alongside early interventions, has led to significant improvement in pupils' behaviour compared with previous years.
- Most staff consistently apply the school's policies for managing pupils' behaviour to notable effect. In some classes, little behaviour management is required because pupils regulate their own behaviour and take responsibility for their learning.
- Leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully, and the attendance figure for all pupils last year was slightly above average. In fact, since 2015, attendance has shown an improving picture, with the overall figure either in line with or above that nationally.
- The actions taken to improve the attendance of some groups have been effective. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved from last year and is approaching the national figure for all pupils. Similar improvement has been seen with regard to persistent absenteeism; this is also now better than the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school's information across all year groups shows that the progress of current pupils is improving. The difference between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils' progress still exists. However, it has narrowed significantly, and in some year groups, against an improving picture for all pupils, those who are disadvantaged are now outperforming their non-disadvantaged peers.
- Progress measures for English from last year were broadly in line with the national average. These have improved, and the information on current pupils indicates that Year 11 pupils' progress will be significantly higher. Inspection evidence gathered through observations, work scrutiny and talking to pupils supported this.
- Evidence gathered through a work scrutiny across English, mathematics and science showed that the progress of disadvantaged pupils matches, or exceeds, that of other pupils with similar starting points.
- Pupils are encouraged to read throughout the curriculum. Pupils with weak reading skills have benefited from the catch-up programme. They are able to read more fluently and can sound out and blend unfamiliar words. Their improved reading ages are backed up by their improved pronunciation, accuracy and comprehension of text.
- The wide range of opportunities available to pupils allow them to pursue their interests by following a curriculum tailored to their needs. The flexible learning programme is well supported by alternative provision that helps to engage pupils, keep them in education and prepare them well for the next stage of their lives. Staff monitor the attendance, behaviour and progress of these pupils well, and keep in close contact with providers and parents. The number of pupils who successfully progress into education, employment or training highlights the success of leaders' arrangements.
- The progress of current pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving. The effective work of staff in identifying and addressing their needs enables pupils to make comparable progress to their peers.
- Some most-able pupils are not achieving as highly as they should. This is because there is a lack of extension activities in some subjects. Pupils' views reflected this picture. The school's own information confirms this, and leaders acknowledge that some teachers need to plan work that stretches and challenges pupils more effectively.
- The progress that current pupils make in mathematics is improving. Last year's results were below average. The current Year 11 are forecast to do much better. However, pupils' progress still lags behind that in English. This is because not all teachers set work that adequately meets the needs of all pupils. Leaders are aware of this issue and have acted quickly to address matters.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form benefits from good leadership. The senior leader with responsibility for the college is aware of the strengths and has acted quickly to improve areas that required further development. She continues to monitor standards closely, alongside a vice-principal, to ensure that improvements are maintained.

- Teaching in the sixth form is characterised by effective planning and a range of teaching styles and activities that help students make good progress. Inspectors particularly noted teachers' good subject knowledge, their in-depth understanding of exam boards' assessment criteria, and the high-quality discussion work.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress and attain well because they quickly develop the skills required to become fully independent learners. Teachers are then able to guide and facilitate learning. The enrichment programme helps them develop social, teamwork and employability skills, as well as building their character and resilience. This prepares students well for future life.
- Students enjoy being part of the sixth form. They are well cared for and well looked after. Students respond by being mature, responsible and valuable role models for younger pupils.
- Leaders have set up effective transition programmes that help students adjust to the increased demands of post-16 study. Good advice ensures that the right students are on the right courses. This means that retention figures are good, and information on current pupils show that many are on track to exceed their target grades. Where pupils fall behind, support programmes are in place and effectively help them to catch up.
- Students are well prepared for their next stage. They benefit from carefully tailored careers advice, linked to either university, apprenticeships, employment or, increasingly, a gap year. All students complete a work placement over the summer holiday, linked to their chosen career path. Additionally, some students complete a work-shadowing placement as well. This helps them secure sustained destinations when they leave. Over a three-year period, the proportion of students successfully progressing from post-16 study is either in line with or above the national average. Students are supported well to attend the highly rated Russell Group universities and Oxford and Cambridge.
- Academic outcomes for students last year were in line with national expectations. Students studying law have achieved consistently well over a number of years. Other subjects, including chemistry, history, fine art, media and physical education, achieved above-average value added scores. Some of these showed a significant improvement from the previous year.
- A few students join the sixth form without having secured GCSEs in English and mathematics at grade 4 or C or higher. These students receive timetabled lessons in English and/or mathematics, and their success rates for achieving grade 4 or C or higher are above average.
- In 2017, the overall progress made by students following vocational subjects dipped slightly. However, of the six courses taken, four recorded value added scores that would place them in the top 10% of schools nationally. Interactive media results were not as strong, and this influenced the overall progress figure.
- Safeguarding is effective in the sixth form. Students understand how to keep themselves safe and how to live healthy lifestyles. Additional programmes include topics such as mental health, and other safeguarding issues are covered, including drugs, alcohol and safe driving.

School details

Unique reference number	137790
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10041808

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,643
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	210
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Joan Binder
Principal	Carl Wakefield
Telephone number	01621 854681
Website	www.plume.essex.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@plume.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 January 2014

Information about this school

- The Plume School converted to become an academy school in January 2012.
- The last full inspection took place in January 2014 and the school was judged to be good across all areas. A new principal was appointed in September 2015.
- The school also received a section 8 no formal designation inspection in July 2014 to examine behaviour and safeguarding. This also judged behaviour and safeguarding as good.
- The academy is a larger-than-average secondary school with a sixth form.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British.

- The proportions of pupils who speak English as an additional language or who are from ethnic minorities are both well below the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is broadly average, as is the proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, although for those with an education, health and care plan the proportion is slightly above the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards for pupils' achievement in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 4.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out 76 observations, some of which were joint observations with senior leaders, across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects. They also visited learning group sessions and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors looked carefully at pupils' work, both in lessons and as part of a formal work scrutiny process, and listened to pupils read. They talked to four different groups of pupils from different year groups to discuss their experience of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the principal, the two vice-principals, senior and middle leaders, newly qualified teachers and trainees, trustees including the chair, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation including safeguarding records, case studies, attendance and behaviour records, self-evaluation summaries, the school improvement plan, trustees' minutes and current assessment information.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 123 members of staff who completed the questionnaire. They also considered the responses, including free-texts, from 243 parents via Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

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David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Sally Nutman	Ofsted Inspector
Vanessa Love	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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