

# Earl Mortimer College and Sixth Form Centre

South Street, Leominster, HR6 8JJ

**Inspection dates** 15–16 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- The Principal, senior leaders and governors share a vision, ambition and drive to inspire students. They have considerable capacity to continue to improve through their clear understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses.
- Rigorous checking of lessons by senior leaders, has rapidly improved the quality of teaching throughout the school.
- From low starting points, students are now attaining standards that are improving and getting closer to that seen in most schools.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs receive effective, specialist support which enables them to make good progress.
- Students' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning help them to make good progress. They are courteous, polite and welcoming.
- Students respond very well to the high expectations of the college. Their attendance has improved and this reflects students' enjoyment of college.
- The sixth form is good and students make good progress from their starting points. Students benefit greatly from strong and effective links with local educational partners.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A few students are not given hard enough work; teachers do not always give students sufficient guidance about, or the chance to reflect upon, the quality of their work.
- Although students make good progress, they have too few opportunities to improve their literacy skills across all subjects and reach the highest standards in English.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons taught by 35 teachers of which four were shared with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made shorter visits to lessons to determine how well the needs of individual students were planned for, to look at the quality of marking and the guidance offered to improve work. Inspectors observed a college assembly and listened to students read.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, the principal, other members of the leadership team, subject leaders and members of the governing body. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with an adviser from the Department for Education who has acted as the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors scrutinised examples of students' past and present work and looked at various school documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and planning, information on students' academic progress and records relating to their behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Inspectors also reviewed documentation relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- The views of 56 parents who responded to the online questionnaire Parent View were taken into account. Inspectors also considered the views of 51 college staff questionnaires and one letter from a parent.

## Inspection team

Huw Bishop, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Rosemary Barnfield

Additional Inspector

Robert Steed

Additional Inspector

Gwendoline Onyon

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students' eligible for the pupil premium, which provides support for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and others through additional funding, is above average.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are below average.
- A high number of in-year transfers of students from other schools occur each year, particularly during Year 11.
- A very small minority of students are educated off site at The Aconbury Centre, The Priory and Brookfields School.
- The college is a key school for Herefordshire in a strong sixth form collaboration with other small sixth forms across Herefordshire.
- The school meets the current floor standards set by the government, which determine the minimum standards for attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by making sure that:
    - all students are given work that is sufficiently challenging
    - teachers give students the opportunity to reflect upon their work so that they are actively involved in improving their learning.
  - By the end of the current academic year raise standards in GCSEs to at least the national average, especially in English, by:
    - ensuring every teacher marks students' work with a view to improving literacy
    - providing students with more opportunities to write at length from the start of Year 7 and extending their vocabulary in all subjects across the curriculum.
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## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement is good and is improving across the school since the last inspection. This is a direct result of action that has been taken by leaders to improve the quality of teaching.
- Students who join the school during Year 11 receive intensive support which enables them to make rapid progress to achieve five passes at GCSE. The proportion of students gaining five A\*-C grades, including English and mathematics, is improving. Although this remains below the national average, this represents good achievement for this group of students.
- The learning and progress of different groups of students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are good. Their achievement is increasing faster than that of their peers because of the effective, specialist support which they receive.
- Students in Year 7 who are eligible for the catch-up premium (for those below the expected standard in English and mathematics on entry) are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The college has accurate tracking systems which are used well to successfully provide specific, specialist support for this group of pupils.
- The college considers the needs of individual students before making the decision whether to enter them early for particular examinations. They do so in mathematics and this is proving helpful, particularly for the most able, so they improve even further and their potential is not limited.
- Standards are improving in Key Stages 3 and 4, where new approaches to teaching, setting targets and providing students with individual support is boosting their current achievement and preparing them well for the future. Most students make good progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The tracking of students' progress during Key Stage 3 is rigorous. Students at risk of under-achieving are quickly identified and receive effective support to immediately improve their achievement.
- Most of those parents and carers who responded to Parent View agree that their children make good progress at the college.
- Students' literacy skills are being developed well through a 'rapid reading' project with all participating students making measured marked progress. 'It's helping me a lot; it's helping me with spelling and I now understand what the story means when I'm reading. I volunteer to read in class because it's helped to build up my confidence,' was the opinion of a Year 7 student. Not all students have enough opportunities to improve their literacy skills across all subjects and this prevents them from extending their vocabulary sufficiently in their writing.
- The progress of students known to be eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium is increasing at a faster rate than that of their peers. This group of students receives highly effective intervention and support which has successfully narrowed the gap in their performance when compared to other students. For example, they are now less than one term behind their peers, having been three terms behind them in 2012.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and results are improving. By the end of their courses,

results are close to, and often, above average. Students' progress is monitored rigorously and they are all guided successfully towards the next stage of their education. Almost half of the students leave the sixth form to go on to university courses.

### **The quality of teaching is good**

- Since the last inspection, strategies to improve the quality of teaching have successfully enabled teachers to improve their subject expertise and more accurately assess students, to enable them to make more rapid progress. Leaders are rigorous in identifying and eradicating teaching which is less than good and this is making a significant difference to the good progress that students make in lessons.
- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers combine their excellent subject knowledge with a clear understanding of how students learn. Teachers plan these lessons well to improve students' knowledge and build their self confidence. Teachers are skilful and effective in adapting work to match the needs of individuals and their careful questioning enables students to make rapid progress in these lessons.
- During a Year 10 mathematics lesson, students improved their knowledge, understanding and use of complex fractions by solving problems which had been carefully matched to their different abilities. The task effectively engaged and challenged students to apply their mathematical skills to realistic problems so that they made outstanding progress.
- In the few lessons where teaching is not so strong, there is a lack of challenge and sometimes teachers do not give students sufficient time to reflect on their work in order to improve it. Students' do not always concentrate fully in these lessons and make less progress than they are capable of.
- The college has an effective marking and assessment system which is used consistently well by most staff. However, not all teachers mark with a view to improving students' literacy. Students know their targets but are not always given tasks which are hard enough to enable them to reach the highest standards.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work together effectively and targeted support is matched well to individual students' needs. The support students receive through attending alternative provision is very effective and well managed.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and enables students to make good progress which is reviewed each half term. A broad and effective curriculum meets students' needs and new subjects have recently been added through on line 'long distance' learning modules.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- There is a positive climate for learning within the college and students' own attitudes to learning help them to make good progress. Students' good behaviour in lessons and around the college has a positive impact on their learning and their personal development.
- Attendance has improved since the time of the last inspection. The college analyses and responds effectively to all behaviour issues and exclusions have reduced considerably because students respect and adhere to the behaviour policy.
- Students say that there is a strong anti-bullying culture in the college. They also say that on the

rare occasion when incidents occur, the college deals with it quickly and effectively. Students are well informed about the different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, including internet safety. Students agree that their school is a safe place to be and they can identify staff they would turn to if they had a particular need.

- Behaviour and safety are not outstanding because there are still occasions when students lose concentration in lessons which do not fully engage them. This prevents them from making rapid progress to reach their full potential in these lessons.
- Students in the sixth form enjoy the opportunities they are given by the college and regard it as an enjoyable place to learn. They particularly enjoy the many opportunities they have to take on additional responsibilities and to contribute to the life of the college.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- Governors and senior leaders have a shared aspiration for their students and are highly ambitious for the college to become outstanding. Leaders are raising standards and are giving students a wide range of experiences and opportunities to achieve academic success and further their personal development. It is not yet outstanding because the highest levels of attainment have not yet been reached.
- The Principal has high expectations of all students and staff. He has successfully gained the respect of the school community and provides determined leadership which focuses clearly on continuous improvement. College leaders are clear about what the school needs to do next and they have considerable capacity to make it happen.
- The leadership of teaching is strong and the school is accurate in its assessment of the quality of teaching. Leaders have developed high expectations of all teachers and increasingly effective strategies to support students' learning. There is a close link between teachers' performance and pay progression, with demanding targets linked to student achievement. The Principal is not afraid to make difficult decisions in order to secure improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.
- The analysis of students' progress is detailed and it provides teachers and the governing body with a clear understanding of the school's performance and the priorities for improvement. The benefits are evident in the improvements which have been made since the previous inspection but more needs to be done to ensure that all students reach the highest standards in their external examinations.
- Staff morale is strong and those who responded to the staff questionnaire were very positive about the college. One member of staff commented, 'The college has made fantastic progress, standards have improved in all aspects and continue to do so. There is no complacency'.
- The curriculum is appropriate to the needs and interests of students and is reviewed regularly to make sure it meets their needs. There is a wide variety of academic and work-related subjects for students to study at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students receive informative, independent guidance and support to enable them to make appropriate choices about the next steps in their learning and life.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and evident in lessons, displays around the school and within an extensive range of activities which enrich formal learning in lessons. This also helps to tackle any instances of discrimination

effectively and ensure that different groups of students have an equal chance to succeed.

- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The new sixth form management team continues to drive improvement forward and this is seen in the better results being achieved by students at the end of their courses.
- Subject leaders are well supported and are monitored carefully by senior staff. Regular checks are made on the effectiveness of subject leaders' work. They contribute well to the extended senior team which helps to develop their skills for any future leadership roles. Their work has had a significant impact on improving teaching.
- The college works successfully with parents. One parent felt so strongly about this that she wanted inspectors to know that college staff display a strong sense of team work, dedicated to supporting all students and achieving better opportunities for them. 'It is very important to us that our children are happy in an environment where they will learn so much' she said.
- The college's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements, including checks on the attendance, care and safety of students at the alternative provision.
- The college's capacity to improve is assisted effectively through a range of partnerships which include the local authority, a sixth form national adviser and a school improvement partner. This support has been well targeted to contribute to the improvement in the quality of teaching across the college.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have a good understanding of how well the college is doing and the quality of teaching and learning. They know the college's strengths and weaknesses and check on its performance through analysis of examination results and reports from the Principal and other senior leaders. Governors ensure that the additional funding from the pupil premium is targeted at the right students and ensure that it is closing the gap in the performance of different groups of students. Governors manage the performance of staff effectively to make sure that salary progression is based on improvements in students' progress and achievement. Governors know what the college is doing to tackle underperformance. They are effective in holding the Principal and all staff to account for the schools' continued improvement and success.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	116941
<b>Local authority</b>	Herefordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	427041
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	589
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	50
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gina Harris
<b>Headteacher</b>	Adrian Long
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	December 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01568 613221
<b>Fax number</b>	01568 613622
<b>Email address</b>	admin@emc.hereford.sch.uk

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