

The Marches School and Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123584
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	359470
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Charalambos Loizou HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arthur Walpole
Headteacher	Sarah Longville
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2007
School address	Morda Road Oswestry, Shropshire SY11 2AR
Telephone number	01691 664400
Fax number	01691 671515
Email address	admin@marchesschool.com

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 39 lessons and observed 33 teachers who were teaching at the time of the inspection. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, the arrangements in place to safeguard pupils and looked at its improvement plan and self-evaluation, as well as assessment and tracking data that teachers use to monitor pupils' progress. Questionnaire returns from 114 parents and carers were analysed as well as returns from pupils and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which the school is raising attainment and accelerating the progress of pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3
- the consistency of the teaching and how well it has improved the range of learning experiences for pupils since the last inspection
- the extent to which teachers provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on and assess their own learning
- the extent to which subject leaders and middle managers monitor the performance of pupils to enable all of them to meet challenging targets.

Information about the school

This is a large school which specialises in technology and has Leading Edge and Training School status. The vast majority of pupils are White British and others come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small number of pupils, mainly of Eastern European heritage, join the school speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above that of most schools, with a higher than average percentage having a statement of special educational needs. The school recently changed its policy to fully integrate all pupils with additional needs into mainstream lessons having formerly accommodated a specialist unit for them. The main areas of additional need include pupils with moderate or specific learning or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has extensive links with other schools as part of the North West Shropshire Forum which incorporates a large number of partnerships with schools, businesses, employers and colleges. The school has been accredited with an extensive range of national awards which includes High Performing School and Healthy Schools status, as well as the International School award. The headteacher joined the school in September 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Marches has made good progress since its last inspection and provides an outstanding education for its pupils. The success of the school is largely attributable to highly effective leadership, good teaching and an outstanding curriculum that is enhanced by the school's extensive partnerships with schools, colleges and businesses. As a result, pupils benefit enormously, both in their academic and personal development which prepares them exceptionally well for the future. The school has an excellent track record and has built on its past achievements by improving standards in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve exceptionally well, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and as a result, standards in those subjects are well above average. Overall attainment is above average when other subjects, including the specialist strands of technology are taken into account.

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and senior management team has encouraged staff to accurately assess most aspects of the school's work with a clear and determined focus on improving teaching and learning. Highly effective professional development and training for all staff reflect the school's teacher training and Leading Edge status. Consequently, the vast majority of teaching across the school is at least good with much that is outstanding. Nevertheless, in a few lessons teachers miss opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding. Teachers do not always adapt their teaching to incorporate tasks that provide the right level of challenge for pupils of different abilities. Assessment has improved significantly since the school's last inspection. Teachers are more adept at checking and analysing pupils' performance and progress which is helping them to plan stimulating and productive lessons. However, there are not always enough opportunities for pupils to share ideas, or to reflect on, and assess their own learning. Lessons are engaging and effective although, across the school and in different subjects, pupils are sometimes overly directed and opportunities are missed for them to work independently.

Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and behave exceptionally well, which is also reflected in consistently above average attendance and excellent punctuality. There are positive and cordial relationships between staff and pupils and there was a strong work ethic evident in the lessons visited during the inspection. Pupils feel exceptionally safe and secure in school. They are encouraged, with good success, to contribute to the local and wider community through fundraising and visits to businesses and schools. Pupils are interested in learning and inspired through the vast array of curriculum projects linked to colleges and schools in Europe and Africa. Pupils adopt good, healthy lifestyles through the many opportunities they have to participate in sports and extra-curricular activities and there is a good take-up of healthy school meals. However, some pupils and parents have commented, and inspectors agree, that this aspect could be improved still further and checked more routinely by the school.

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The school's outstanding commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities for all is reflected in the recent change and revised policy that resulted in the full integration of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This initiative is in its early stages and the governing body and staff have yet to measure the full impact of this integrated provision on all pupils in order to optimise learning opportunities further. Assessments show that pupils with additional learning needs and those with emotional or behavioural difficulties make excellent progress through the many pathways and courses being offered. Sensitive and highly effective teaching is provided for pupils who join the school learning English as an additional language and, as a result, they quickly settle into school and achieve exceptionally well.

The school is the hub of a large community and is extremely well placed to sustain its outstanding performance and continue to raise standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers regularly check pupils' progress in lessons to ensure that they all reach their targets and sustain the trend towards higher standards by:
 - adjusting their teaching to tailor work more closely to pupils' needs and abilities
 - raising the level of challenge in all lessons to help pupils deepen their understanding.
- Provide more opportunities in lessons for pupils to assess their learning by:
 - incorporating more time for pupils to reflect on their work
 - encouraging pupils to work independently, for example, through open-ended investigative tasks.
- Monitor the impact of the support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in lessons to optimise learning opportunities further following the policy change for the full integration of these pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Throughout their time in school pupils thoroughly enjoy learning, work hard and achieve exceptionally well in both their academic and all round development. The majority of pupils join in Year 7 with skills and abilities that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. By the end of Year 9, they have made rapid progress so that standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Throughout Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to make brisk progress and reach well above average standards at GCSE. Last year's test results improved on previous years, continuing an upward trend. Results in 2010 show that 69% achieved five A* to C, which included English and mathematics and 77% achieved A* to C overall with 20% achieving A* to A. Current Year 11 pupils are well on course to exceed these benchmarks with a significantly higher proportion on target to reach A and A* in English, mathematics and science. Pupils are successful because they are engaged and interested in learning. In most lessons they persevere when challenged and volunteer to ask questions or check their work if unsure. This was evident in an excellent Year 10 English lesson when pupils undertook a character analysis of Lady Macbeth. The pupils shared ideas and wrote perceptive and sophisticated accounts of the character producing very high standards of writing. Pupils are always willing to persevere

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although in a small number of lessons there are too few opportunities for them to probe further independently to deepen their understanding.

There is a strong sense of collective responsibility as pupils contribute to their school, and wider community. This accounts for their very clear understanding of right and wrong and how best to make the correct life choices for the future. Older pupils mentor younger ones and, in addition to elected school councillors, other groups are encouraged to survey pupil views and work alongside staff to improve the school. 'We are encouraged to help and it's the sort of school that listens to us,' commented one pupil. Another confirmed one of many reasons why pupils feel secure and trust that the staff are supportive: 'Bullying is not tolerated here, and it really does get sorted.' Many pupils spoken to were aware of the many opportunities they have to be involved in school and local events and visits, as well as representing the views of others through a range of pupil and leadership forums. Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is nurtured through a programme of well-devised assemblies, visits and creative or cultural events.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

A stimulating, creative and practical curriculum prepares pupils exceptionally well for the future, whether that be in the workplace after Year 11 or in further education. The curriculum makes excellent use of partnerships with other providers, and innovative projects, such as the recent introduction of the 'Growing Minds' curriculum for Year 7

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pupils, which combines subjects to broaden pupils' learning experiences. The school has adapted courses and projects for pupils of all aptitudes and abilities, providing an excellent range of pathways and outstanding opportunities to gain appropriate qualifications, for example, through early entry courses. The vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4 prepares pupils exceptionally well for progression onto higher level courses.

Pupils respond positively to their learning because most of the teaching is good and, increasingly, a significant proportion is outstanding. There is, however, some variation, particularly on those occasions when opportunities are missed for pupils to consolidate or assess their learning through open-ended investigative and independent work. Despite this, pupils make excellent progress, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, due largely to the practical engagement encouraged by staff, and the sensitive and excellent support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Assessment and target setting are good and pupils' work is regularly checked, although in some lessons tasks are not adapted enough to meet the specific needs of pupils across the ability range. The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for pupils, particularly for the most vulnerable individuals, and this has had significant impact on their welfare and achievements. Teachers are very good at explaining to pupils the relevant pathways and learning outcomes necessary to achieve their target levels.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's outstanding performance is due largely to the success of its leadership in embedding ambition at all levels and driving improvement. Staff morale is high and the headteacher has inculcated a climate of collective responsibility and shared ownership for the achievement and welfare of all pupils. Robust assessment and communication systems enable the staff to continually evaluate the school's performance at all levels. There is a systematic process of audit and review undertaken at departmental, subject and classroom level. Senior leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and pupils. The school has, in the main, accurately assessed most aspects of its performance, with some modest evaluations reflecting the high expectations the staff set for themselves. The leadership team has very well defined responsibilities that were introduced by the headteacher to broaden the scope and impact of management on classroom practice. This has been very effective as assistant headteachers, subject leaders and teachers are accountable for the performance targets set for pupils. The governing body is committed and supportive and use the information and reports from staff to pose

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questions and challenge the school, although it is not fully involved in self-evaluation at the same strategic level as the staff.

The school is successful in creating a cohesive community, and pupils are encouraged to develop a wider understanding of different communities beyond the immediate locality. There is a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all and this underpins the school's engagement with its pupils. The staff are increasingly assessing the performance of pupils from different groups, including those learning English as an additional language, which is having a very positive impact on adapting the teaching and support required to meet their specific learning needs. The governing body and senior staff are starting the process of evaluating the impact of integrated provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although this has not yet been extended to include its impact on other pupils. At the time of the inspection, all safeguarding requirements were extremely well met. There are excellent arrangements in place to ensure that only suitable adults come into contact with pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Although only around 10% of parents and carers returned inspection questionnaires, the large majority of these express mainly positive views of the school. Parents believe that this is a caring and supportive school and are pleased with the teaching and progress that their children are making. Inspection findings support these positive views. A small number of concerns were raised about the extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and this was mirrored to a similar extent by the pupil survey. Inspectors agree that, whilst there is a good understanding amongst pupils on this subject, the school could embed this aspect more in its work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Marches School and Technology College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 114 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1204 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	36	66	59	5	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	33	29	75	67	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	30	27	71	63	3	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	32	63	56	1	1	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	24	21	81	72	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	13	81	72	11	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	11	82	73	12	11	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	27	24	73	65	3	3	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	18	82	73	2	2	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	29	26	65	58	4	4	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	13	72	64	8	7	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	28	25	73	65	4	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	36	65	58	3	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Friday 17 September 2010

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of The Marches School and Technology College, Oswestry,
SY11 2AR**

Thank you for the positive contribution you made to our recent inspection and the welcome you gave the inspectors. The inspectors appreciated your excellent behaviour and the consideration you gave us as visitors. Please pass on our thanks to your parents and carers as the responses to the surveys some of you and parents completed were very helpful. Inspectors have judged that you go to an outstanding school. Your exceptional achievements in English, mathematics and science, including very good progress in many other subjects, are evidence of the excellent curriculum and good teaching that you receive. You are making excellent progress and standards are well above average and improving very well as a result. You have told us or written in questionnaires that your work is interesting because of the opportunities you have to go on to higher levels or achieve learning targets and qualifications. The staff are exceptionally committed and supportive. They are very attentive to and genuinely interested in your welfare and achievements.

The headteacher and senior leadership team are doing exceptionally well and continually strive to improve the school. To help continue improvements, inspectors have asked your teachers to:

- adapt their teaching more during lessons to provide work that is always matched to your aptitudes and abilities
- provide more opportunities in lessons for you to reflect, assess and consolidate your learning by sharing ideas and working independently
- monitor the impact on all pupils of the support provided in lessons for those who find learning difficult or need additional support.

You can all help too by continuing to try hard and keeping up your good attendance and perseverance with your studies. The inspectors thought that you were really mature and are willing to help your school and the wider community. I wish you the very best and am so pleased to have met you all.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou

Her Majesty's Inspector

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