

Mount Grace School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117583
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358164
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Lindsay Hebditch HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
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	963
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Daniel
Headteacher	Peter Baker
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2007
School address	Church Road Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN16 1EZ
Telephone number	01707 655512
Fax number	01707 663725
Email address	admin@mountgrace.herts.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
Inspection number	358164

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 46 lessons and observed 39 teachers. They held meetings with groups of students, staff and governors. They observed the school's work and looked at a selection of documentation including students' books, assessment and tracking information, procedures for safeguarding students and a range of policies. Inspectors considered questionnaire responses from 196 parents and carers, 125 students and 56 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Inspectors evaluated the attainment and progress of students in Key Stage 4 in English and mathematics.
- They explored how well the quality of provision in the sixth form supports achievement.
- They investigated whether leadership and management have been effective in reducing the inconsistencies between standards in different subjects.

Information about the school

Mount Grace is an average-sized secondary school, with high performing specialist status in applied learning and business and enterprise. The number of students on roll has increased year on year since the previous inspection. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both below the national average. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average although the proportion of those with a statement of special educational needs is below average. Their needs include specific learning, moderate learning, and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Mount Grace is a popular school which provides a satisfactory quality of education. Students of all abilities and backgrounds learn in a caring and supportive environment and there are no groups who are making significantly different progress than their peers in terms of either academic or personal development.

Attainment is average and academic progress is satisfactory, although students make more rapid progress in some subjects than others. Students have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy, and their behaviour is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons students make good progress because they develop good independent learning skills and work at their own pace. However, less successful lessons are dominated by the teacher and students have insufficient opportunities to think for themselves. Students develop good oral and performance skills but in a significant minority of lessons, including in the sixth form, students are not given sufficient opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy. This slows their progress in these subjects, and makes it harder for them to achieve higher levels. Teachers and teaching assistants do not always identify and meet successfully the learning needs of their students, and have had insufficient training in this respect. Assessment practices are fair but the quality of marking does not always provide students with sufficient information about how their work could be improved. The curriculum is satisfactory. The vast majority of students are able to follow their preferred subject choices but the school does not reflect its business and enterprise specialism sufficiently in curriculum planning. Care, guidance and support are good. The school has excellent links with external agencies, which enable students to overcome personal barriers to learning. Pastoral care is good. Attendance is monitored carefully and is now above average.

The headteacher, governing body and senior leaders have been successful in establishing a strong community identity for the school. Parents and carers understand and appreciate the good efforts the school makes to promote inclusion and there are satisfactory systems to ensure that students stay safe. However, academic standards within the school have not improved as much as expected since the last inspection and self-evaluation although generally accurate, has not identified some of the areas requiring improvement. The school provides satisfactory value for money and its capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help students make better progress by:

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

- giving a higher priority to the development of literacy and numeracy both through curriculum planning and in individual lessons
- ensuring that marking in all subjects gives students a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the quality of learning by:
 - extending strategies to improve students' independent learning skills
 - providing teachers and teaching assistants with further training on how to identify and meet the specific learning needs of individual students.
- Further develop the school's specialism by raising the profile of business and enterprise in curriculum planning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students join the school with prior attainment that is slightly below average but improving. They make satisfactory progress and by the time they complete Key Stage 4 their attainment is broadly average. The percentage of students who gain five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, has improved since the last inspection and is now close to the national average. The progress that students make varies within and between subjects. In English, students make satisfactory progress overall but students in the higher sets make good progress. In mathematics, whilst progress is satisfactory overall, a range of students of different abilities make slow progress towards achieving their targets. Students of minority ethnic heritages and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to that of their peers. Students' progress in lessons is satisfactory. They are keen to develop new skills but often lack confidence in knowing how they can use what they learn to improve the quality of their work.

Students enjoy school and this is reflected in their attendance, which has improved since the previous inspection. Students feel safe at school. Incidents of bullying are rare but if they do occur are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students understand what is expected of them but do not always take sufficient responsibility for their own behaviour. The vast majority of students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and appreciate the school's good efforts to help them achieve it. Lunchtime meals provide healthy options and there is a wide range of very well-attended sporting and performance activities available at lunchtime and after school.

The house system plays a significant role in developing students' sense of community but there are insufficient opportunities for students to undertake leadership roles in the school, for example in clubs, societies or through ambassadorial activities, and to have their contributions formally accredited. Students are quick to involve themselves with fund raising activities and at the time of the inspection were preparing enthusiastically for 'Red Nose Day'. The school provides a wide range of activities to support students' future economic well-being and there are good opportunities for them to undertake work experience. However, work-related activities are not integrated sufficiently with literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, thus reducing the opportunities for students to make direct links between what they are learning in class and their future careers and personal development.

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

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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?

In the best lessons teachers' knowledge of their subjects and enthusiasm for learning help capture and maintain students' interest. Learning activities are chosen well and provide all students with good opportunities to participate and achieve. Teachers use questions skilfully both to develop students' understanding and to check that learning is taking place. In less successful lessons work is not planned sufficiently carefully to address the needs of individuals and teachers provide students with too much direction. Students find these lessons less stimulating and their progress in them is at best satisfactory. Learning support in class is satisfactory but teachers and teaching assistants require additional training if they are to help students who find learning difficult learn independently rather than providing them with extra help to complete tasks. Assessment practices are reliable but the school's marking policy is not implemented consistently, with examples of cursory marking and insufficient guidance for students on how to improve the work.

The curriculum is well organised and provides the majority of students with sufficient choice and a wide range of out-of-school activities. The school has yet to consider fully how best to integrate its specialism in business and enterprise into its curriculum plans. Literacy and numeracy are sometimes taught well but standards and expectations are not applied consistently across different subjects and opportunities to reinforce the development of good literacy and numeracy skills are often missed. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to develop oral and performance skills.

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

The school cares well for its students. Transition from primary school is well-organised and effective and there are excellent links with external agencies which help individual students overcome barriers to learning or provide additional help to students who require specialist care and support. Academic support and monitoring are good. The majority of students are aware of their personal learning targets but are sometimes unclear about how to achieve them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, governing body and senior leadership team work together well. They provide a clear strategic vision for the school based on the role it plays in the local community and reflect this vision clearly in the school's policies and plans. However, the school has not made as much progress in raising standards consistently and improvements in students' outcomes have been satisfactory since the previous inspection. The governing body knows the school well. Governors fulfil their statutory duties conscientiously but have not held senior leaders fully to account for the slow progress in developing the school's business and enterprise specialism. The school has reliable procedures for assessing the quality of teaching and learning in lessons but does not always give sufficient attention to how different subject areas implement core policies, including those for literacy, numeracy and information communication technology. This results in some significant and persistent differences in the quality of learning between subjects.

The school's strong links with parents and carers are underpinned by good communication. As a result, parents and carers feel confident about approaching the school to discuss their children's academic and personal progress. Many partnerships are extremely effective and the consortium arrangements with other local schools are beginning to provide a broader range of learning opportunities for students. The school plays a major role in promoting community cohesion, has a high profile in the local community and has a strong track record of successfully overcoming barriers to learning. The school is inclusive and equality and diversity are promoted well through stimulating multicultural activities and the selection of learning materials in lessons which celebrate diversity. There are effective arrangements to ensure that students who experience difficulty in their lives continue in learning. The school collects and analyses data on the performance of different groups of students according to their ethnic heritage, gender and ability and has successfully closed gaps in performance so that there are no significant differences in the progress made by different groups of students. Attendance is equally good. The safety and well-being of students is given a high priority in the school and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Closed-circuit television and significant staff

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

presence around the school keep students safe at break times and when they move from building to building. Site maintenance and security are satisfactory. Resources are deployed effectively and value for money is satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form is unusual in that the majority of students follow vocational courses or a mix of vocational subjects and GCE AS or A levels. Students enter the sixth form with below average attainment and make good progress in vocational subjects. Progress in AS-level and A-level subjects has been much slower and in the majority of subjects pass rates and the proportion of high grades achieved have been low. The school acknowledges that it has not always placed students on the most appropriate course in the past and has taken steps this year to ensure that students are better matched to their intended programme of study. Students' progress is currently satisfactory. The sixth form is a harmonious community in which students take their responsibilities very seriously and act as good mentors and role models for their younger peers. Students develop good workplace skills through their vocational studies and are at the forefront of many of the school's community initiatives.

Teachers provide a good range of learning activities in their lessons and students say how much they enjoy them. However, many students' require more support with literacy and numeracy than they currently receive and this reduces their ability to develop as effective independent learners. Teachers of AS-level and A-level subjects sometimes find it difficult to meet the learning needs of all students in their groups because of the wide variations in students' literacy, numeracy and study skills. Assessment is thorough and fair; students are clear about the level at which they are working and what they need to do to improve. The curriculum is broad for a sixth form of its size and the developing consortium

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

arrangements are providing students with a good choice of subjects. There are also plenty of opportunities to do sport but students say, and inspectors agree, that there should be a greater variety of enrichment activities. Care, guidance and support are good. The personal mentoring system works well and students are provided with appropriate advice about their next steps in education. Leadership and management have been effective in ensuring that students have an enjoyable and enriching experience in the sixth form but outcomes have not improved significantly since the previous inspection.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires was above the national response rate for secondary schools. Responses were positive, and particularly so in respect of children's enjoyment of school. Almost every statement on the questionnaire met with above average agreement from parents and carers, although a minority were concerned about behaviour. The inspection confirmed that all aspects of the school are at least satisfactory. The few concerns of parents and carers were discussed with the school while preserving their anonymity and taken into account when coming to conclusions.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mount Grace School 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 196 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 963 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	88	45	100	51	6	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	84	43	104	53	6	3	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	82	42	107	55	6	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	67	34	117	60	10	5	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	58	30	125	64	10	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	52	27	133	68	11	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	45	23	125	64	19	10	1	1
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)	71	36	110	56	8	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	63	32	117	60	11	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	82	42	87	44	24	12	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	23	126	64	16	8	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	114	58	75	38	5	3	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	111	57	75	38	6	3	1	1

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



18 March 2011

Dear Students,

Inspection of Mount Grace School, Potters Bar EN16 1EZ

Thank you for the friendly welcome that you gave my colleagues and me when we inspected your school this week. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views about school life. Please also pass on our thanks to your parents and carers for taking the trouble to complete our questionnaire.

We believe that Mount Grace is a satisfactory school where teaching is satisfactory and you make satisfactory progress. It is a harmonious place where everyone gets on well together and every individual really matters. The headteacher and all of the staff are dedicated to making sure that everyone has the opportunity to do their best and you respond to this well, for example through your improving attendance. We think that the curriculum you follow is satisfactory and the care, guidance and support you receive are good.

The headteacher and senior leaders want to make sure that the school keeps improving and we worked with them to identify the following things to make the school even better.

Help you to make good progress by making sure that you are given enough support with literacy and numeracy. The quality of marking and the feedback you receive could be improved in a few areas too.

Make your learning better by giving you more responsibility to direct your own learning. We also think your teachers and teaching assistants might welcome some additional training so that they can plan activities which enable you to do this.

Give business and enterprise a higher priority in the school and provide more activities connected with it.

You can all help your school to improve further by always doing your best and continuing to respect the fact that everybody is different.

We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lindsay Hebditch

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.