

Monks Walk School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117536
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379437
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Keith Brown

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	1252
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Squires
Headteacher	Kate Smith
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2009
School address	Knightsfield Welwyn Garden City AL8 7NL
Telephone number	01707 322846
Fax number	01707 375080
Email address	admin@monkswalk.herts.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 33 lessons and 33 teachers. Meetings were held with students, the headteacher, teachers, representatives of the governing body, support staff and the School Improvement Partner. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at safeguarding arrangements, as well as other information including development planning, policies, procedures and a range of students' books. A total of 814 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised, together with 70 from staff and 150 from students.

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

- How effective are middle leaders in developing curriculum provision and classroom practice in order to improve outcomes for students?
- Do all students know how well they are doing in their learning, and how to improve further?
- How accurate are the school's assessments of the progress made by students?

Information about the school

This large secondary school serves the north west of Welwyn Garden City and surrounding villages. The school is a Specialist Science College. Most students are White British. The remaining students are from a range of different minority ethnic groups, although the numbers in each group are small and few students are learning English as an additional language. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free schools meals is well below average. The proportion of students who are identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. The school has a formal partnership with the adjacent special school for deaf students. The proportion of students who join or leave the school at other than the expected times is about average. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2011.

Among its awards, the school has Investors in People, International School and National Healthy School status, Sportsmark and it is a Green Flag Eco School.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Monks Walk is a good school, and its leadership team is strong and purposeful. The school provides a supportive and very caring environment for its students and is an important part of the local community. Attendance is high. The achievement of most students is good and progress in English, mathematics and science is now accelerating rapidly. GCSE results are above the national average and show a strong upward trend. Students lead active lives and are clear about how to live a healthy lifestyle. They mix well socially and have a good understanding of what is right and wrong.

Students behave well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and co-operative with one another. The overwhelming majority of students responding to the questionnaire felt that they were safe in school and this was confirmed by the vast majority of parents and carers. Students know who to turn to for help and are very confident that any concerns they have will be taken seriously and dealt with very effectively. There is good support for those students who enter the school partway through their education and for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Deaf students from the adjacent special school are integrated well into lessons. As a Specialist Science College, the school is focusing successfully on environmental issues, conservation projects and sustainability. The curriculum is imaginative and matched well to students' learning needs. However, students do not always have opportunities to use their numeracy skills as well as they could in all the subjects they study.

The sixth form, which is part of the large Welwyn Hatfield 14-19 consortium, is good and improving. The leadership and management of the sixth form are strong. There has been a well-focused, successful drive to reduce the differences in results between sixth form subjects.

The school's leaders and the governing body have a clear understanding of the most important areas for improvement and have drawn up appropriate plans to address them. The school has rightly focused on the quality of teaching which is now good overall and improving. In the good and outstanding teaching seen, expectations were high and students experienced rich and challenging tasks that fully engaged their interest and quickly developed their understanding. Students received regular oral and written feedback on how to improve their work. In those classes where teaching was satisfactory, these features were less evident. Teachers explained concepts clearly and planned activities for students, but did not always use

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assessment information to set work that was closely matched to students' abilities and needs.

The school has made good progress since it was last inspected, demonstrating good capacity for sustained improvement. Most school leaders carefully and accurately monitor the progress of all groups of students and this contributes to the clear, upward pattern of improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress made by students and raise attainment by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - have high expectations of what students can achieve and communicate this to them by regular oral and written feedback
 - use assessment information to set work that is closely matched to students' abilities and needs
 - make sure all parts of a lesson engage and challenge students.
- Develop the curriculum to meet the needs of all the students by expanding the opportunities to apply their numeracy skills across all subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly average. They make good progress and achieve well. The school's overall GCSE performance has been above the national average in the last two years. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C (including English and mathematics) has shown a sharp increase this year. Boys have performed less well than girls in the past but the school has put in place strategies that narrowed the gender gap in GCSE examination results in 2011. In the school's specialist subject, GCSE science results have been strong in the last two years.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including deaf students from the nearby special school, make good progress. Students from minority ethnic heritages and those with English as an additional language also make good progress. This is because tasks are closely matched to students' prior attainment. Teaching assistants are deployed well and help students by providing appropriate challenge and encouragement, teaching specialist vocabulary and demonstrating skills precisely.

The learning observed in lessons was good. Students enjoy the topics and concentrate well at the start of lessons. They work together constructively, effectively pooling their thoughts and developing ideas with the rest of their group. However, in a few lessons, students' interest wanes and the pace of learning slows when parts of the lesson are too teacher directed. Where learning is best, for example in an outstanding history lesson in Year 11, the students assessed each

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other’s work on public health issues at a deep level and received excellent feedback from the teacher. As a result, they were able to change their work to meet more fully the assessment requirements. Any misunderstandings were quickly corrected.

Students have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and believe that the school environment is very safe. They develop a good knowledge of the world of work and of their future economic role in society by the time they reach Year 11. Most students adopt healthy lifestyles and this is reflected in the school having National Healthy School status. Students make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Tutorials and assemblies promote a strong sense of pride in the school community. This contributes well to students’ good understanding of their rights and responsibilities and they are keenly aware of how their actions can affect others. Students enjoy taking on extra responsibility, for example by joining the school council. They are becoming increasingly influential in sustainability issues that affect the wider local area, and they made a major contribution to the recent planting of numerous trees in St Albans.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The good and sometimes exceptional teaching observed was underpinned by teachers’ high expectations and detailed planning. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to meet students’ needs, including those who find learning difficult or who have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. The good working relationships established between staff and students

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

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build confidence and contribute to students positive attitudes to learning. In the best lessons, pace and challenge are well matched to students’ abilities and the range of activities ensures that they make rapid progress.

Teachers assess students' progress accurately and their use of assessment to enhance learning is good overall. In some lessons, teachers do not use assessment information as well as they should to match work to the needs of different groups of students. Work is marked regularly and the best practice provides clear, formative comments that help students to make further progress.

The good curriculum builds on students’ previous learning and prepares them well for the next stages in their education. Students say that they enjoy the themed days and weeks which are a regular feature of the curriculum. For example, an extended learning day helped Year 10 students to learn much more about how research is undertaken in science. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well in many lessons to engage students’ interest. Opportunities for students to use their literacy and information and communication technology skills across the curriculum are good. However, they have fewer opportunities to use their numeracy skills across subjects. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides a wide range of courses to meet students’ needs and allows for a valuable degree of personalisation. Good partnerships with local providers enable the school to offer a well-focused range of vocational courses. The curriculum is extended by a variety of sporting, art and musical activities, visits and visitors. The school’s specialism is reflected in the well attended after-school science lectures, delivered by experts from higher education and industry.

‘It’s the supportive atmosphere and the relationships that make this school so good’, were the words of one student and they sum up the strong provision for care, guidance and support. This extends from the detailed monitoring of the progress of each student through to the close liaison with external agencies to meet the needs of students whose circumstances make them most vulnerable and potentially disaffected. The school can point to clear examples of where it has helped students to manage their own behaviour better, so that their progress in lessons has improved.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is ably supported by the deputy headteachers, assistant

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headteachers and other leaders. Together, they have taken effective action to enhance provision and so raise attainment for all groups of students. The school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination well and is tracking each student’s progress towards challenging targets. The headteacher and other leaders effectively monitor the quality of lessons, review teachers’ planning and scrutinise students’ work. The headteacher’s informative reports, together with other relevant information, enable governors to effectively monitor and challenge the school’s leaders. The governing body provides good strategic direction. Financial management is effective and the school offers good value for money.

The school works closely with parents and carers, whose views are regularly sought and acted upon. They are kept well informed, for example, through regular newsletters which keep them abreast of activities in the school, and the school’s website is accessible and friendly in tone. Strong links and partnerships with other agencies ensure good support for students who have specific needs.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are outstanding. They are reviewed regularly, so that adults and students have an excellent understanding of safety issues. Risk assessments are exceptionally thorough and considered by the local authority to be a model of excellent practice. Very careful checks are made of the suitability of adults to work with children. Community cohesion is promoted well, following a thorough audit. Students have a good understanding of people from different backgrounds. Strong links have also been established around the world, and this has resulted in the school’s award of International School status.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

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

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Monks Walk is linked with four other secondary schools to form the Welwyn Hatfield 14-19 consortium. The curriculum is very flexible and enables students to follow the most appropriate pathway for them. Students make good progress from their varying starting points, with many exceeding challenging targets in 2011. Teaching is good overall and the use of assessment is rigorous. Students take responsibility for monitoring their own progress against personal targets and collaborate well in helping each other to achieve. They comment positively about the prompt marking and feedback that helps them to make good progress. Students speak highly of the academic support and guidance they receive, and the willingness of their teachers to provide individual help.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The school is rigorously addressing the variation in the performance of some subject areas. Actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning have had a positive impact on improving standards, particularly at AS level. Students in the sixth form have good opportunities to contribute to the school, for example as sports leaders, mentors to lower school students or as house leaders. The sixth form centre is utilised well, providing students with a high quality environment and a sense of identity.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

There was a much higher than usual level of response to the parental questionnaire. The very large majority of responses were positive about most areas of the school’s work.

A few parents and carers expressed concern that the school did not take account of their suggestions and concerns and that the school did not help their child to have a healthy lifestyle. The inspection findings indicate that the school works closely with parents and carers and seeks their views. For example, homework and reporting arrangements were modified in response to parents’ and carers’ suggestions. Inspection evidence indicates that most students adopt healthy lifestyles. The school has achieved Sportsmark status and school council representatives meet regularly with the catering manager to review provision.

A very small minority of parents and carers expressed written concerns, but there was no common theme to these.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Monks Walk 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 inspector received 814 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1252 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	314	39	455	56	29	4	10	1
The school keeps my child safe	321	39	472	58	17	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	245	30	495	61	52	6	4	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	238	29	517	64	35	4	4	0
The teaching is good at this school	233	29	537	66	24	3	2	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	194	24	510	63	86	11	3	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	156	19	526	65	112	14	3	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)	238	29	490	60	31	4	1	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	227	28	523	64	36	4	4	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	235	29	455	56	74	9	13	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	170	21	492	60	69	8	6	1
The school is led and managed effectively	222	27	531	65	11	1	6	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	314	39	470	58	21	3	2	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



7 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Monks Walk School, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7NL

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I thank you for making us feel welcome and for your helpfulness towards us. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out your views of your school, which have contributed to our judgements.

The school is providing a good education for you. Teaching is good and leads to you making good progress and reaching above-average standards. Your attendance rate is much higher than in most schools. Well done and please keep it up. You are happy and feel exceptionally safe at school. Most students behaved well in the lessons we visited. You are gaining a wide range of skills that are preparing you well for the future. At the same time, you are developing into mature and aware citizens.

Your headteacher, staff and the governing body are determined for the school to become better. We have asked your teachers to use their knowledge of how well you are doing to give you work that makes you think and is just at the right level of difficulty. We have also asked them to give you the chance to use your numeracy skills more in lessons and to ensure that all parts of every lesson engage and challenge you.

You can help by continuing to check your work carefully and by telling your teachers if you need them to explain some of the work in more detail.

I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Brown
Lead inspector

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