

John Mason School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123256
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	380630
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2011
Reporting inspector	James Sage HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
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	831
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	128
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Brooks
Headteacher	Di Mashiter
Date of previous school inspection	29 January 2009
School address	Wootton Road Abingdon OX14 1JB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 47 lessons taught by 39 teachers; 14 of these were joint observations undertaken with members of the school's senior leadership team. Meetings were held with four groups of students, some individual students, a wide range of staff and three members of the school's governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, policy documents, analysis of the quality of teaching and data about students' attainment and progress. Inspectors also took account of the questionnaires completed by 173 parents and carers, 140 students and 39 staff.

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

- How well all groups of students achieve, including those in the sixth form.
- The improvements made in the care, guidance and support, provided by the school, to ensure that those students with low levels of literacy and those who face behavioural, social and emotional difficulties make at least good progress.
- The quality of the monitoring of students' progress and the effectiveness of the use made of these data at all levels.
- Improvements made in the quality of teaching and the use of assessment since the previous inspection.
- The capacity of senior and middle leaders and the school's governing body to secure and sustain the improvements required.

Information about the school

John Mason School is smaller than the average secondary school. It serves a community which is mixed, both socially and economically. The school is a specialist visual and performing arts college, specialising in creativity through art and design, design and technology (particularly in graphics) and music. The school population reflects the local area and students are overwhelmingly from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but rising; their main needs are low literacy skills and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Sixth form provision is through the Abingdon Consortium, a partnership with two other local secondary schools and a general further education college. The Consortium is also used to broaden the curriculum available for a small number of students in Key Stage 4.

The school is registered as an Arts Award Centre, is a Partnership Development School, a FA Charter Standard College and has awards for Investor in People and Healthy Schools.

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

John Mason is a good and improving school which cares for its students exceptionally well. The school has an extremely positive ethos which permeates all aspects of its work. This is considerably enhanced by students' outstanding contribution to the life of the school and to the local community. The impact of this ethos is clear in the extent to which students feel safe in the school and by their extremely positive attitudes; the overwhelming majority enjoy coming to school. Teaching and other staff are proud to be part of the school. The school has made significant improvements over the last three years as a result of the hard work of the headteacher, other senior leaders and the governing body, and the support of other staff.

Students enter the school with attainment that is in line with the national average. They make good progress throughout the school so that their attainment at the end of Year 11 is above average. Similarly, students in the sixth form make good progress overall. Students' achievement has improved significantly since the last inspection. In particular, the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is significantly better than at the time of the last inspection. The achievement of boys has also improved significantly to be in line with that of girls. Achievement is good in the main school and in the sixth form because the large majority of teaching is at least good and the school provides a curriculum that meets students' needs and aspirations well. The progress made by students in a small minority of lessons, however, is no more than satisfactory. In these lessons, teachers do not monitor the progress of students well enough to ensure that the pace and level of challenge of the work match the pace of learning. While the school has given a great deal of attention to developing students' skills in literacy and independence across the curriculum, these skills are not developed well in all lessons. Improvements in students' achievement in a small number of subjects lag behind those in many, especially the good progress evident in English, mathematics and science.

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support, which contribute significantly to the improvements in students' achievements, attendance and punctuality, the extent to which they feel safe and their enjoyment of school. The care and support for the most vulnerable students and those at risk of underachieving is exceptional and contribute to the marked improvements in their achievements. The school makes excellent use of partnerships and external agencies to support those students who face challenging circumstances.

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The school makes excellent use of its specialism and the partnerships it has developed in the visual arts. Art and design is very strong and the quality of students' work is exceptional. The high quality leadership and teaching in art are now being used very well to develop music and design and technology, particularly in graphics, further. In addition, developing creativity and the use of visual learning permeates much of the work of the school and contributes to improvements in students' achievements.

The school has rigorous procedures for monitoring students' progress and the quality of teaching across the school. The outcomes are used well to inform self-evaluation which is accurate and highly evaluative and analytical. Senior leaders and the governing body are clear about the priorities for further improvement and the actions required. Middle leaders are held to account well and good practice is widespread, although there are still some curriculum areas where further improvement is required. The governing body is very well informed and holds the headteacher and senior leaders, and more recently middle leaders, to account well. As a result, the school's capacity to make further improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of lessons where students' learning and progress are consistently at least good, including in the sixth form, to 80% by the end of the current school year, 2011/12, through:
 - ensuring that teachers monitor students' progress in lessons better
 - using this monitoring to intervene to ensure that the progress of individuals and groups of students is at least good, to match the pace of teaching to the pace of learning and to change the approach used when required
 - making more effective use of questioning to help with this monitoring and to deepen students' understanding
 - ensuring that the high quality of most lesson planning is used more effectively to meet the needs of individual students
 - making full use of all opportunities to develop students' skills in literacy and to help them to become more independent learners.
- Raise students' achievement, both in the main school and the sixth form, in the subjects where it lags behind, through targeting support to improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment in these subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment is above average in all key areas. Attainment on entry to the school is in line with the national average, so progress overall is good, as is students' achievement. The proportions of students making at least the progress expected are high in English, mathematics and science. The school undertakes a very careful

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analysis of the progress of individuals and different groups of students, and gaps in achievement have narrowed greatly. The analysis of the school's current tracking data indicates that achievement is improving across all subjects as a result of the interventions made by senior and middle leaders. However, the pace of improvement is slower in some, such as in modern foreign languages. Students' learning and progress in language lessons are not as good as in many other subjects.

In lessons, the large majority of students, including all groups, make at least good progress and their attainment is mostly in line with their targets. The progress made in about one in 10 lessons is outstanding. The progress made by boys and by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is much improved since the previous inspection and is good. Students are clear about their targets and the next steps in their learning and about what they need to do to improve. They are keen to do well and maintain good standards of behaviour in lessons, except in a small number of cases where there is some low-level disruption because the teaching is not good enough.

All aspects of students' personal development and well-being are at least good. The extent to which they feel safe, adopt safe working practices and their contributions to the school and wider community are outstanding. Behaviour is at least good, and often better than this around the school. The proportion of students who say they enjoy coming to school is exceptionally high, backed up by the views of their parents and carers. As a result of extensive work by the school, attendance has improved to be above average, punctuality to school and to lessons is good and persistent absence has fallen significantly. The extent of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has improved and is good in all aspects; students have a good understanding of diversity and of their place in the wider world.

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	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will	2

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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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good overall and outstanding in around one in 10 lessons. In these good and better lessons, the steps in learning are clear and developed well. Lessons have good pace to ensure productive learning, to provide good levels of challenge and to maintain the interest of students. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and use their subject knowledge well to provide a variety of creative approaches and interesting activities. Students' progress is monitored carefully to ensure that the work matches the pace of learning. High-level skills in questioning are used well to develop students' understanding and to monitor their learning. Where teaching is satisfactory, this careful monitoring of learning does not take place as effectively and questioning is often at a low level. Teachers have access to detailed information about students' targets and current achievement, and this is clear in their planning. The profiles for each student with a specific need are excellent. However, this good planning is not used well in satisfactory lessons to meet the needs of individual students. High-level teaching assistants are used very effectively in English and mathematics to support good learning. In satisfactory lessons, teaching assistants are often underused or not deployed effectively.

The curriculum meets students' needs and aspirations well. The move from 'schemes of work' to 'schemes of learning' has contributed to improvements in teaching. The school correctly identified that the weaker achievement of some students, including many boys, was because the curriculum did not meet their needs well; this has improved greatly, for example, by now providing a much more appropriate curriculum in design and technology. Developments across the curriculum have also led to improvements in students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Considerable effort has been given to developing students' skills in literacy, with significant impact. However, in some satisfactory lessons, opportunities to develop their literacy skills and to help them become more independent learners are missed. These teachers are unaware of the levels of literacy of the students they teach, or the levels required for the tasks they set. This means that teachers do not develop the skills required through their subject teaching. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities. However, the number of students participating, other than in those relating to the school's specialist subjects, is sometimes low; for example, in the proportion of students involved in activities relating to keeping fit and healthy, although the school is justifiably proud of the achievements of the sports teams representing the school.

The impact of the outstanding care and support given to all students on raising achievement, improving attendance and on other outcomes is clear. Students are provided with high-quality advice and guidance to support their personal and

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academic development. The role of heads of year as 'achievement leaders' and the use of 'raising achievement panels' for each year group support the progress of many students very well. The support for students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable is especially strong, with excellent use made of external agencies when required. The quality and impact of this support are very closely monitored. The school's '4REAL centre' is an extremely supportive haven of tranquillity for those who need this most. Students, and their parents and carers, are full of praise for the quality of the arrangements for the transition from primary school.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other senior leaders have good capacity to secure and sustain the further improvements the school requires; this is clear from the significant improvements already achieved and from the strong, continuing trend of improvement. They form a strong and cohesive team, with an excellent balance of skills and expertise. They are supported well by the governing body, which provides a good balance of support and challenge to hold the senior leaders to account. Very good use is made of detailed data about the progress of individuals and different groups of students to monitor the effectiveness of the provision and to target interventions to support students. This is combined well with rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching to target the support and professional development of teachers where it is most needed. The accuracy of senior leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching was confirmed by the joint observations undertaken with inspectors. Their monitoring is enhanced well by the use of student 'learning detectives'. Students are involved well in decision-making in the school, not least through the school council.

The ability of middle leaders to hold teachers in their department fully to account is much improved and has contributed to raising achievement. The strongest middle leaders are used very effectively to support others and to take on wider leadership roles where necessary. While there is widespread good practice, this high quality is not yet fully embedded across all curriculum areas. The more recent involvement of the governing body with middle leaders is already having a positive impact.

The ability of senior leaders to promote equality of opportunity is best illustrated by the significant narrowing of gaps in students' achievements and the impact of the improved curriculum. The creation of the extremely positive ethos in the school

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means that there are no reported incidents of discrimination. Safeguarding procedures, including the role of the governing body, are good; risk assessments are thorough and students feel extremely safe and are guided well to adopt safe working practices. The promotion of community cohesion is good. The school is clear about those areas of the curriculum that make contributions and the action plan for further development is clear. The resulting improvements have contributed to students' better understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. The school and the governing body make good and largely successful attempts to fully involve parents and carers in the life of the school. A very high proportion of parents and carers say that they are informed well of the progress of their children.

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	2
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

Students enter the sixth form with attainment broadly in line with the national average, although the effects of higher attainment at the end of Year 11 are beginning to work through. As a result of mainly good teaching, students make good progress in the large majority of subjects and achieve well overall. However, students' learning, progress and achievement vary across subjects, although this is not consistent from year to year. All other outcomes for sixth form students are in line with those in the main school. Sixth form students play a significant role in the life of the school and the local community; for example, through providing support for younger students in lessons and the 20 hours of voluntary work in the community they undertake each year.

The school uses its place within the Abingdon Consortium to provide a curriculum which meets the needs and aspirations of students well. Students are provided with high-quality guidance about sixth form courses and progression beyond the sixth

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form. The school's depth of understanding of each student is used extremely well to ensure that their overall personal development is supported fully and that they have a good chance of success.

Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths in the sixth form and of the improvements required to raise achievement further and to tackle the variations across subjects. They provide clear leadership and liaise well with curriculum leaders to monitor and support students' achievement.

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

The response rate to the inspection questionnaire was broadly average. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school with an exceptionally high proportion saying how much their children enjoy coming to school and how safe they feel. Parents and carers are pleased with the quality of teaching and with the feedback they receive on how well their children are doing. They feel that the school is led well and they fully acknowledge the improvements that have been made. A very small number are critical of the way the school encourages their children to adopt healthy lifestyles; some of these have been addressed through the new arrangements for catering. A very small proportion also comment that unacceptable behaviour is not dealt with effectively. Analysis of the school's own frequent surveys of the views of parents and carers indicates that much of this relates to what happened in the past and that the views of parents about behaviour are now much more positive; a view that is supported by evidence from the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at John Mason 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 173 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 831 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	81	47	88	51	1	1	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	73	42	94	54	2	1	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	67	39	92	53	4	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	61	35	96	55	5	3	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	52	30	109	63	3	2	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	35	20	115	66	10	6	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	16	118	68	13	8	2	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)	61	35	94	54	1	1	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	53	31	104	60	3	2	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	29	89	51	14	8	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	21	100	58	10	6	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	65	38	84	49	5	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	89	51	71	41	4	2	2	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	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:	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. ■ 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 November 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of John Mason School, Abingdon OX14 1JB

Following our visit to your school, I should like to thank you for your extremely friendly welcome. You told us that you really enjoy being at school and that you feel extremely safe. We were impressed by your very positive attitudes, your politeness and how willingly you talked to us. We judge the school, including the sixth form, to be good overall and improving. These are the strengths in the school.

- The school has an extremely positive ethos which supports your excellent approach to all aspects of school life; you make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school and the local community.
- Teachers and other adults care exceptionally well for all of you.
- You make good progress and your achievement is good.
- The school carries out frequent checks on your progress and keeps you well informed.
- The good curriculum in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form meets your needs and aspirations well.

Much teaching in the school is at least good, but a small minority is satisfactory and you make less progress in these lessons. We have asked the school to make even more of your lessons at least good. We have asked that they do this by ensuring that teachers monitor carefully how well you are learning and make sure that all of you have work that is challenging and helps you to make as much progress as you can. You can help by asking for help whenever you are unsure about what you need to do. We have asked the school's senior leaders to make sure that the progress you make in all subjects is as good as the best.

The leaders in your school have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to continue to improve; they clearly have your best interests at heart. They are working very hard to make the school an even better place for you to learn.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector

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