

# Marlborough School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117586
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	379447
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 December 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Brooker HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1195
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	221
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jane Walker-Smith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Annie Thomson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 January 2009
<b>School address</b>	Watling Street St Albans AL1 2QA
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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. In total, the inspection team made 42 lesson observations of 41 different teachers, some of which were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at a range of documents including students' work, school self-evaluation, assessment and tracking data and arrangements for safeguarding. Meetings were held with nominated staff, groups of students and with the Chair of the Governing Body. In addition, analysis was undertaken of inspection survey responses from 129 parents and carers, 250 students and 59 staff.

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

- Is teaching sufficiently challenging to promote good progress and secure the highest levels of attainment?
- Are learning and progress at least satisfactory for different groups of students, particularly in mathematics?
- How successfully has the school addressed the issues of disaffection and underachievement of a small number of disengaged students?

## Information about the school

Marlborough School is a large secondary school with specialist science status. Most students are White British, although the proportion from other backgrounds is above the national median, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language; the largest minority is from Bangladeshi heritage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly higher than average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational need is below the national figure. Sixth form provision is offered in collaboration with other local schools and the college in a post-16 consortium. The school has national Healthy School status, Sportsmark Gold and Investor in People Award.

**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****2**

## Main findings

Marlborough School makes good provision for its students and achieves some impressive outcomes, particularly in the personal qualities and skills that students develop during their time at school. Indeed students' personal development is good in every respect and outstanding for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, notwithstanding these commendable strengths, the school's overall effectiveness is as yet no better than satisfactory because attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly average and achievement overall is satisfactory. Since the last inspection significant progress has been made in addressing weaknesses in English and mathematics. Standards in English have risen to above the national level. Results in mathematics are improving, but its weaker performance continues to hinder good achievement for individual students and the school as a whole. All groups of students make at least satisfactory progress. However, a few students face circumstances that present a significant barrier to their academic achievement and personal development. The school works hard to secure the engagement of all students and avert disaffection by targeting support and making suitable adaptations to its curriculum. However, steps to engage the most disaffected students have had only limited success. The poor attendance and engagement of a small number of students has resulted in their significant underachievement which has, in turn, disproportionately affected the school's overall results.

Good provision is driving improvements in achievement and promoting strong outcomes in terms of students' personal development. Care, guidance and support ensure that students attend well, feel completely safe and develop attitudes, attributes and essential skills that prepare them well for later life. Behaviour around the school is often exemplary and students' positive attitudes make a strong contribution to their learning. The broad and balanced curriculum provides suitable pathways for students with different aptitudes and aspirations, and more consistently good teaching is beginning to address residual pockets of underachievement. The sixth form is a notable strength because good provision is already impacting on the results that students achieve.

The school is well led and managed by the headteacher. The school enjoys an affirmative ethos based on tolerance, consideration and mutual respect. Senior leaders are unequivocal about their expectations in this regard. Students value their safe, supportive and cohesive school community and appreciate the strong contribution that they make in maintaining it.

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The school demonstrates good capacity to improve because senior and middle leaders drive improvement well. Since the last inspection weaknesses in teaching have been addressed and outcomes strengthened. Assessment information is very effectively used at a whole-school level to set challenging targets and monitor performance so that senior leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for further improvement.

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?**

- Improve overall achievement by:
  - increasing the proportion of A\*/A grades at GCSE
  - further strengthening results in mathematics and any underperforming GCSE subjects
  - ensuring that students with lower starting points make progress that is at least in line with national figures.
- Take steps to meet more effectively the needs of the small number of students who experience significant barriers to learning and their wider participation by:
  - using available information to identify issues early and to carefully monitor and nurture their engagement
  - evaluating the impact of the school's support in order to strengthen the impact of its work.

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

Students start school with standards that are generally in line with the levels expected and, by the end of Key Stage 4, achieve results that are also broadly average. Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make expected rates of progress. In some respects achievement is good and the school can point convincingly to a clear trajectory of improvement at each key stage, including in the sixth form. In 2011, 59% of students achieved at least five A\*-C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics, a marked improvement on 2010 and slightly above than the national figure. Since the last inspection, results in English have gone from below average to above the national figures. Standards in mathematics have also increased and are broadly average. The school's rigorous assessment data indicate that standards are likely to improve further in 2012. However, despite some high attainment in areas such as art, the school recognises that some aspects of academic achievement need strengthening: students do not yet gain enough higher A\*/A grades, and there remains some under-performance in, for example, geography. There is no significant difference between the progress and

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achievement of students from different backgrounds or of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, in the previous two years the school's results have been disproportionately affected by the very low achievement of a small number of students, mostly boys, with significant barriers to engagement, some of whom faced particular personal issues or learning difficulties.

In a large majority of lessons observed during the inspection, the quality of learning was good or better. Greater consistency in the quality of learning is beginning to accelerate the progress that students make over time. Learning is most secure and progress most rapid when teaching is ambitious and activities engage the whole class. In history for example, carefully planned group work encouraged students to analyse, interpret and then share and present information with the class so that complex arguments were skilfully rehearsed for written work and students developed a breadth of examples to support their ideas. Students respond enthusiastically and work hard when given responsibility for their own learning, for example in science where Year 9 students measured the effects of exercise, when Year 10 students wrote their own success criteria in physical education, and in English where Year 8 students used the 'traffic light' system to evaluate their own progress.

Students' wider personal development is a notable strength. Attendance is above average and most students develop social and interpersonal skills that prepare them very well for later life. They feel safe, understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and are keen to take on additional responsibilities to make a positive contribution to their own school community and beyond. Students appreciate the high quality of the school's food and respond positively to its promotion of physical exercise, even playing table tennis outdoors at break in blustery conditions! Around school the students are welcoming, polite and show genuine consideration for one another. Their good behaviour and attitudes make a strong contribution to the positive climate for learning in lessons. The way that students get on well with each other, readily collaborate and the maturity with which they discuss and reflect on different issues, demonstrates their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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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<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Inspectors' observations of teaching aligned closely with the school's judgements and indicate that the overall quality of teaching is improving steadily and securely.

Teaching is good because a large majority of lessons are either good or outstanding. Although some weaknesses remain, most lessons are well planned with appropriate learning objectives, a good range of activities and a suitable balance of teacher-input and independent learning, often in pairs and small groups. Positive relationships between adults and students enable learning to proceed without disruption. The positive climate for learning gives students of all abilities the confidence to express their views and ask as well as answer questions. Teachers use their assessments to set challenging targets, to ensure that work is suitably demanding and to effectively guide students on how to improve their work. The best features of teaching and the use of assessment are shared across the school and are beginning to promote more consistently good progress.

The school provides good care and guidance for students and can point to examples of how it has supported vulnerable individuals and had significant impact on their welfare and achievement. Excellent transition arrangements, including a summer school for new Year 7 students, ensure that students feel welcome, settle quickly and are confident that the school will provide support if they need it.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and has been revised to ensure that it provides suitable pathways for students with different aptitudes and abilities. An excellent range of extra-curricular clubs and enrichment activities, including visits and residential trips, promotes well the students' wider interests and personal development.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

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## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, supported by her senior and middle leaders, has been conspicuously successful in establishing a harmonious school community where students of all ages and from different backgrounds mix easily and show respect for one another. The school's improving performance is evidence of the success of its leadership in embedding ambition at all levels and driving academic improvement. This is apparent in the large majority of lessons, where teachers have high expectations of how students will behave and what they will achieve. Underpinning much of this improvement is the effective use of assessment data, which is used to track the progress of every student and analyse any variation between the performance of different groups. Systematic self-evaluation involves senior and middle leaders and guides improvement planning and support for weaker areas of provision.

The school makes use of a wide range of different partnerships to promote students' academic achievement and their personal development and well-being. It engages effectively with parents and carers, based upon good communication and frequent opportunities for both informal and formal contact. Good procedures are in place to seek and act on the views of parents and carers, for example through a weekly 'think tank'. The school is proactive in developing links with families that might have particular barriers to engagement, including those who do not speak English.

The school's policies for safeguarding meet all current requirements. Governors are rigorous in ensuring that students and staff are safe, and discharge their statutory duties effectively. They are systematically involved in monitoring the school and balance well the need to provide support and challenge.

The promotion of community cohesion is embedded in the school's work and is strongly reflected in the school's social cohesiveness. Equality of opportunity and social cohesiveness are at the heart of the school's ambitions. Assessment information is effectively used to secure improvement in the performance of particular groups. The school is innovative in developing ways to promote student engagement and support families so that children are not disadvantaged in school. However, despite some success, the impact of this work has had mixed success in recent years and evaluation of its impact lacks rigour.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>



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<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Sixth form

Sixth-form students make good and sometimes outstanding progress, notably in art, from their starting points at the end of Key Stage 4 to achieve standards that are above those found nationally. High-quality teaching and very effective advice, guidance and support promote good achievement, impressive success rates and good levels of attendance. The sixth form is well led and managed. Recent improvements at A level demonstrate how effectively provision is evaluated and strengthened. The best teaching is sharply focused and challenging, but also takes care to develop students' critical thinking skills and their independent learning so they are well prepared for higher education and training or employment.

Students feel very well supported, and display mature attitudes to their own and others' well-being. They very much enjoy and value their time in the sixth form and are highly appreciative of what the school provides for them. They make a significant and valued contribution to the school community and beyond, for example through voluntary work and helping in local primary schools.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
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 responses from parents and carers, although small in total, were overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority of parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire are happy with their child's experience at the school. A significant number made additional comments praising aspects of the school, particularly the excellent support and induction for new students. A few responses highlighted the issue of unsatisfactory behaviour in lessons. Inspectors found that students' behave well and their attitudes are often exemplary, but acknowledge that lessons are very occasionally marred by low level disruption.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Marlborough 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 129 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1195 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	73	57	53	41	2	2	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	70	54	54	42	2	2	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	60	47	60	47	7	5	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	43	57	44	10	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	47	36	69	53	7	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	47	55	43	8	6	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	29	79	61	9	7	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)	57	44	54	42	5	4	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	60	47	62	48	4	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	57	44	54	42	6	5	5	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	41	32	75	58	5	4	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	73	57	48	37	3	2	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	79	61	44	34	4	3	2	2

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](http://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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



9 December 2011

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Marlborough School, St Albans, AL1 2QA**

Thank you for your warm welcome and the very positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We appreciated the mature way that you articulated your views about your school. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory because achievement and standards, although rising, are broadly in line with national figures. We recognise the school's many strengths and the improvements made since the last inspection. We were particularly impressed with:

- the personal qualities that you develop, and your positive attitudes to learning, which prepare you well for the next stage of your education and for later life
- the high-quality sixth-form provision and the school's improving A level results
- the improvements in teaching and the curriculum, including some excellent enrichment opportunities, that are strengthening your achievement
- the outstanding contribution that so many of you make to your own school and also in the wider community.

You obviously enjoy the lessons that actively engage you, but you said that some can be rather dull. Many of you achieve well, and your progress is excellent when teaching is lively and challenging, but we think that some of you could make better progress. We have specifically asked the school to:

- accelerate your progress and further raise standards, particularly in mathematics and in any weaker-performing subjects
- take steps to ensure that you are all able to achieve your potential at school and beyond, regardless of any issues or difficulties that you face.

Many of you make a strong contribution to your own progress and achievement, and this is essential if you want to do well. We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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