

Marling School

Cainscross Road, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 4HE

Inspection dates 12–13 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Students make excellent progress and their attainment is well above average. The school uses assessment information very well so that all students are fully challenged. Achievement for all groups of students, including the most able and the few supported by additional government pupil premium funding, is outstanding.
- Teaching is outstanding. Students are empowered to learn by the many opportunities they have to work independently and in groups. Lessons are usually well paced and challenging and maintain a strong focus on learning.
- Mature, considerate behaviour is the norm. Students' highly positive approach to their studies ensures classrooms are excellent places to learn. Behaviour out of lessons is also outstanding and bullying of all kinds is virtually unknown.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form is excellent due to the high standards of teaching and care they receive. They are very well prepared for the future and almost all move smoothly on to university education. The sixth form is outstanding.
- The leadership and management of the school have greatly benefited from the headteacher's restructuring of responsibilities. This has empowered a wide range of senior and middle leaders to drive improvement so that leadership and management are outstanding. Regular checks on teaching and progress help maintain very high standards in both areas.
- The governing body makes thorough checks on many aspects of school life. This provides its members with a very clear picture of the school and enables governors to provide both rigorous challenge and warm support in equal measure.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 40 lessons taught by 35 teachers and undertook 25 joint observations with senior staff.
- Inspectors held discussions with students, teachers, the headteacher, senior managers, middle leaders and representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors examined numerous school documents, including policies, assessment information, planning documents and records of all kinds.
- The views of 158 parents and carers were analysed through the Parent View website.

Inspection team

John Carnaghan, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
John Mallone	Additional Inspector
Joseph Skivington	Additional Inspector
Victor Chaffey	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized selective secondary school.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for looked-after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families) is well below the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average. Almost all students speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well below average.
- The school became a stand-alone academy in August 2011. The sixth form is run in partnership with the adjacent girls' grammar school. The school does not use any alternative provision for its students.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by improving the consistency with which students' work is marked so that, in all subjects, they are regularly offered clear guidance on the next steps in their learning and on how to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students consistently reach attainment levels that are above national averages at the end of both Year 11 and Year 13. Amid minor annual fluctuations, there is a clear trend of maintaining and improving on already high standards.
- The proportions of students achieving A* and A grades at GCSE level in 2013 maintained the well above average figures reached in 2012. Attainment in mathematics and English at the end of Year 11 is well above average. The school checks students' learning carefully. This ensures that attainment as indicated in GCSE examinations is above average in almost all subjects and in no subject is it below average.
- Progress made in lessons is often excellent. An underlying reason for this is students' appetite for learning. They are very good listeners and collaborate with one another purposefully in undertaking learning tasks. For example, in an excellent Year 8 geography lesson, students rewarded the teachers' trust as they investigated the recent Philippines typhoon, some through using the internet, coming to mature, considered conclusions about the causes and effects of the disaster.
- The proportions of students meeting and exceeding expectations for progress in English and mathematics in Key Stage 4 in 2012 were well above average. These figures saw a sharp rise in 2013. Achievement is thus exceptionally good in these two subjects, including for the most able students. These and other indicators confirm that achievement throughout the school is outstanding.
- Significant numbers of sixth form students exceed expectations in their progress and attainment and achievement is outstanding. Where subjects have underperformed in the past the issues holding them back have quickly been tackled so there is now close consistency in subject performance.
- Staff use assessment information carefully to develop their understanding of students' learning needs. They then use this to plan and deliver lessons that support and challenge all groups of students in equal measure, including the most able. This also means that the achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is as strong as that of their peers. In this way, the school provides equality of opportunity for all students and ensures that there is no discrimination.
- The school plans the expenditure of additional pupil premium funding with great care. The small group of recipients have benefited from the additional support they have received. As a result, the gap between them and their peers is much smaller than the national gap and closing. Last year this group was one term behind their peers in English and in mathematics. The attainment of this group was better than the national average for all students. The school does not receive Year 7 catch-up funding. It does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is extremely effective; the high quality of teaching over time is evident in the rapid progress students make in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Strong checks made on teaching ensure there is consistently good and better teaching across all subjects and age ranges, including in the sixth form.
- Lessons run at a brisk pace and teachers set high expectations. They use a broad range of strategies to assess students' progress in lessons and show considerable skill in adjusting their plans as required. Teachers adapt the pace of the lesson perceptively, hurrying along when it is clear that students have grasped concepts but pausing to explore any areas where there may be misunderstanding. In this way, staff build learning step by step.
- High quality formal and informal assessments inform teachers' very strong understanding of students' learning needs. Support for students facing difficulties is very effective. This

information is well utilised to offer support where needed but also to keep the most able working at full stretch. For example, a talented Year 8 musician was invited by the teacher to play snatches of music in the blues style to the rest of the class as a demonstration of the particular rhythms of this musical genre.

- Open-ended and probing questioning is a feature of many lessons. Teachers often provide great freedom and exciting opportunities, such as when students are given the freedom to plan their own learning activities to meet the objective set by the teacher.
- Students show a great appetite for learning and often display admirable independence. They enjoy working in pairs and groups, collaborate with their peers enthusiastically and are confident in sharing what they have found out. Teachers capitalise on the collaborative atmosphere in classrooms, providing interesting tasks backed by good resources so students can get on with reaching their goals.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and their infectious enthusiasm makes learning fun. They provide good role models and foster positive relationships.
- While almost all teaching is good or outstanding, marking is less consistent. Some marking is regular, very clear and offers valuable advice. At other times, marking is not frequent enough, pays too little regard to students' targets and is insufficiently analytical. While students invariably receive good verbal feedback, the inconsistency of written comments means that, at times, they are unclear about the next steps in their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour in lessons is exemplary and there are highly positive, constructive relationships between students and between staff and students. The consideration students show their teachers and each other creates a harmonious atmosphere that supports the social and academic progress of all. As a result, students work well independently, and collectively. This facilitates an environment where teachers can be adventurous in planning active learning activities in lessons.
- Behaviour in and around the school at break, lunch and lesson change times is excellent. Students make their way from one place to another on this large site in an orderly and mature fashion at all times.
- Students consistently report that they feel very safe in the school. They are well briefed on everyday safety, including on the internet and the adjacent railway line. They assert strongly that there are minimal amounts of bullying of all kinds, including homophobic bullying. Students are fully confident that staff are alert to any possible incidents of victimisation and quickly nip these in the bud before they can develop. One student commented, 'Teachers are hot on this'.
- This positive picture is supported by the very small number of fixed-term and internal exclusions; these continue to reduce year on year. Attendance is above average and has steadily improved in the last three years.
- The school's behaviour management systems are pivotal in ensuring excellent behaviour. Computerised behaviour recording systems (recording both positive and negative behaviour) are not only communicated to the heads of year on a daily basis but also to parents and carers, thus ensuring issues are quickly and effectively dealt with. This is combined with a clear behaviour policy, which outlines sanctions that will be applied should poor behaviour be ongoing.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher has empowered staff to play a full part in leading and managing the school. They are answerable to him for the quality of their work. This has enabled senior and middle leaders to act when there are issues to be addressed and their collective efforts have improved many aspects of the school, including teaching.
- This academy receives effective support in statutory areas from the local authority. School

development plans are clear and well focused and provide a good template for the future; the school has the capacity for continuing improvement.

- Rigorous checks on students' progress and the quality of teaching help leaders and managers understand how well the school is functioning. There is a shared willingness to tackle under-performance in both areas. Students' needs and aptitudes are very well known and, when required, teachers adjust what they provide for individuals to ensure that each student meets his full potential. This ensures strong consistency in students' achievement.
- Checks on teaching enable weaknesses to be followed up and eliminated; hence almost all teaching is good or outstanding. Staff are fully held to account for the progress of their classes but also feel well supported in their quest to improve. Many report that the performance management process is valuable and they appreciate the additional training opportunities that are offered as a result. These robust practices are equally evident in the sixth form and also lead to high quality teaching and excellent progress at this age range.
- The mixture of subjects offered provides a broad and balanced range of learning experiences, particularly in a sixth form that benefits from its partnership with the local girls' grammar school. Students receive very detailed advice and guidance as they approach the end of each key stage so can make well-informed choices about their future learning pathways. For example, the Year 9 event includes inputs from a careers service, local employers and local educational institutions.
- A wide variety of lunchtime and after-school activities enriches students' experiences. A good range of sporting activities is complemented by opportunities in the arts such as drama and music, including participation in the Cheltenham Jazz Festival. Links provide other opportunities; in association with an aircraft manufacturer and with two other schools (led by Marling) students have built a fully functioning light aircraft that has flown and been displayed at a local air show.
- The school has a coherent programme to develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, especially through assemblies, tutor-time activities and life-skills lessons. Quizzes related to topical events encourage open discussion and consideration of spiritual and moral issues, such as the plight of those suffering the effects of a recent hurricane. There are many opportunities for students to take on additional responsibilities, promoting their social development. Numerous international trips and links broaden students' horizons and promote their cultural understanding.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Checks made by the governing body are detailed and highly informative. Governors are well trained and bring a wide range of relevant skills to their work. This means that they have a firm grasp of students' achievement and where it stands in relation to national averages. They are well aware of the school's strengths in teaching, play their part in tackling weaknesses if required and know about the links between teachers' performance and their pay progression. They understand how pupil premium funding is spent and know that it provides good value for money. The systematic seeking out of student, staff, parent and carer views through the governors' 'voice' activities provides them with fresh perspectives on school life and enables them to challenge leaders most effectively. Rigorous checks on safety help to ensure that the school fully meets all its safeguarding obligations.
- The school enjoys a close sixth form partnership with the adjacent girls' grammar school. This allows a greater breadth of studies to be offered. Joint checks with leaders of the girls' school ensure that teaching and other aspects of the sixth form are consistent. There are numerous links with local and other engineering companies that help provide interesting educational opportunities in this area.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137123
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	426862

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

Type of school	Grammar selective
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	865
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	257
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Gilbert
Headteacher	Stuart Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01453 762251
Fax number	01453 756011
Email address	adminoffice@marling.gloucs.sch.uk

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