

The Marches School

Morda Road, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY11 2AR

Inspection dates 10–11 December 2013 and 30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Attainment in mathematics and in science is significantly above average. In mathematics, the proportion of students, from all starting points, making at least expected progress is above average.
- Teaching is good and an increasing proportion is outstanding as a result of rigorous monitoring and very well targeted professional development.
- Students behave well in lessons, have positive attitudes to learning and strive to do well. Outside of lessons, during break and at lunch times, their behaviour is particularly mature and responsible.
- Students say that they feel safe in school.
- Leaders have high expectations of students and are ambitious for the school to do as well as possible. Actions taken to halt the decline in performance in English, indicate leaders' very effective impact.
- It is too early to judge performance in the newly established sixth form, but students have made a strong start.
- A strong curriculum ensures students have a range of excellent opportunities to meet their needs and to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Overall attainment has declined in recent years and, in 2013, attainment and progress of students in too many subjects, including in English, was below average.
- The gap between the achievement of students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are not, although narrowing in the current year, has been too wide over recent years.
- The level of challenge in lessons is not always good enough to ensure all students make excellent progress, and marking and feedback are not consistently excellent.
- The behaviour of a very small proportion of students in some subjects and for some teachers is not of a sufficiently high standard.
- In their self-evaluation of the school, leaders have not taken enough account of the relatively weak performance over time of some aspects of the school's work.

Information about this inspection

- Parts of 50 lessons were observed, including five that were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Two learning walks were undertaken with members of the senior leadership team. These involved brief observations of nine lessons in Key Stage 4 and seven lessons in Key Stage 3. Inspectors walked around the school with students to observe behaviour both in and out of lessons. They observed behaviour at break and lunch times. A scrutiny of students' work in English was carried out.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, pastoral heads and groups of students, members and the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board of Sir John Talbot's Technology College, a school being supported by The Marches School.
- The views of 56 parents and carers who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire, were considered. The results of 93 staff questionnaires were analysed.
- Inspectors analysed published data about the achievement of students, the school's own data on the progress students have made since September 2013 and the school's predictions for the attainment of current Year 11 students. Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including minutes of meetings of the Governing Body, curriculum plans, records relating to safeguarding, and data on behaviour, attendance and exclusions. They looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- As part of Ofsted's quality assurance processes, two of Her Majesty's Inspectors made an additional visit to the school on 30 January 2014, during which additional evidence was gathered.

Inspection team

Inspection in December 2013

Michelle Parker, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Logan	Additional Inspector
Bob Roberts	Additional Inspector
David Hughes	Additional Inspector
Suha Ahmad	Additional Inspector

Inspection in January 2014

Gwen Coates, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
James McNeilie	Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Marches School converted to an academy in August 2011. Prior to this, it was known as The Marches School and Technology College and received its last inspection in September 2010 when it was judged to be outstanding.
- This is a larger than average school.
- The vast majority of students are White British. Other students come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A small number of students, mainly of Eastern European heritage, join the school speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, the additional funding provided by the government for looked after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families, is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is in line with the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The headteacher is a National Leader of Education (NLE) and the school is a National Support School (NSS). Through this work, the school currently supports one school, Sir John Talbot's Technology College.
- A small group of students in Year 10 and Year 11 attend one day a week at Walford and North Shropshire College for a variety of vocational qualifications.
- The school is an International School, working with a number of schools abroad. It has recently been successful in gaining re-designation of the Investors in People award.
- The school opened its own sixth form in September 2013 with 43 students.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement so that it is outstanding. Do this by ensuring that:
 - the attainment and progress of all students, and groups of students, across all subjects, in particular in English, match their strong performance in mathematics and science, and this improvement is sustained over time
 - the gap in attainment and progress between students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are not, continues to close so that all students achieve in line with their ability.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching is outstanding. Do this by focussing strongly on:
 - improving the level of challenge in every lesson, so that students of all abilities, including the most able and the least able, are meeting their potential
 - improving the quality of marking and feedback so that students in every subject and every lesson know precisely what they need to do to improve. Ensure that leaders sharpen their self-evaluation to ensure it reflects more critically on trends in the school's performance over time.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The standards students reach at GCSE in mathematics and science are well above average. However, such high performance is not reflected in other subjects or in attainment overall, which has been falling and is now below the national average. Despite this, the proportion of students gaining one or more GCSEs at A* or A grades has been increasing.
- Students join the school in Year 7 having reached standards that are broadly average. During their time in the school, most students make excellent progress in mathematics and in science and this high performance has been maintained over a number of years. In contrast, the progress they have made in English and in a range of other subjects in recent years, does not show such a positive picture.
- In this school, early entry to English GCSE examinations is a well-thought out approach to raising achievement, to improving students' study skills and their confidence. Predictions, based on rigorous monitoring and accurate in-school assessment, for November 2013 GCSE English examinations, which are taken by almost all students in Year 11, suggested a significant rise in the percentage of students reaching at least a C grade. These predictions were borne out by subsequent results. The school's own data, including that confirmed by the November results indicates that Year 11 students, including boys, those known to be eligible for free school meals and disabled students and those with special educational needs, are now making more rapid progress in English. Inspectors' observations of lessons and scrutiny of students' work in books confirmed that Key Stage 4 students are now making at least good progress in English.
- In the majority of lessons observed, students made good progress in their learning. Most students, including those for whom English is an additional language, concentrated well on tasks set and produced work of a good standard, with many demonstrating high levels of independence and excellent supportive and collaborative skills.
- Mostly, students explained their understanding well both in their written work and in speaking. The emphasis on improving students' writing and spelling is evident in a majority of subjects. In their exercise books, students describe complex ideas effectively using the specialist vocabulary of the subject. Students are keen to improve their work and most respond appropriately to written guidance in marking. Students read widely. They are able to apply their generally excellent grasp of mathematical and scientific ideas and methods across subjects.
- The gap in both attainment and progress between students eligible for pupil premium funding and those who are not, has until recently been too wide. In 2013, for example, in GCSE English, students' attainment was more than half a grade less and in GCSE mathematics it was more than a whole grade less. However, more recently, this gap has narrowed significantly, indicating that funding, and the initiatives it supports, contributes well to accelerating relevant students' progress and reducing differences in their performance with that of their peers.
- The Year 7 catch-up programme identifies accurately, and addresses effectively, gaps in students' learning when they enter the school. It develops their literacy and study skills well so that they are able to make progress in all the subjects they study.
- The achievement of students who attend off-site provision is good. Students in the sixth form are well motivated and study effectively. They made rapid gains in their understanding in the lessons observed.

The quality of teaching is good

- The Assistant Head Teacher in charge of curriculum has introduced a strong focus on improving students' literacy across all subjects. Consequently, more teachers ensure students' writing has high levels of accuracy in spelling and punctuation because students are now required to check their work regularly and make corrections where necessary. However, a scrutiny of students' work in English, suggests that basic spelling and punctuation errors are not being consistently corrected. This work scrutiny noted regular marking and valuable feedback but also noted that students did not consistently respond to the feedback given. Work in the books scrutinised, indicated that students were making good progress overall, but that work was not always sufficiently matched to individual students' ability and thus was not always appropriately challenging.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They are highly committed and give freely of their time in supporting students. Students acknowledge and appreciate this.
- In the best lessons, teachers followed the school's expectations and encouraged students to work together in small groups, sharing their knowledge and helping to fill gaps in each other's understanding. In these lessons, pace was excellent, students were highly motivated to learn and were proactive in wanting to be fully involved in the lesson. Teachers used excellent questioning that probed and challenged students to think hard and give extended responses.
- Most teachers check students' learning using skilful questioning techniques and are able to reshape activities to address any misconceptions. However, sometimes when teachers pose questions to their classes, they only look to students who are willing to volunteer an answer. This means that teachers are not challenging others to think hard or being able to check whether all students understand fully. In a few lessons, the pace was too slow and work was not sufficiently challenging for all ability groups. As a result, students did not make the progress expected of them. Not every teacher applied the school's behaviour management policy rigorously and as a result not every student was fully engaged.
- In mathematics in particular, students enjoy using interactive computer programmes to improve their learning. This allows them to learn at their own pace and to revisit ideas and concepts they find hard in order to build their confidence.
- Teaching assistants are used well in lessons to support learning. They know students well and help to maintain students' full engagement in the classroom.
- Sixth form teaching encourages students to lead their own learning. For example, in media studies, students had collaborated in producing a video for the first time. Good preparation from the teacher enabled students to have a framework for analysing the production and finish of their work and to discuss how they could develop their ideas both artistically and technically.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. They move sensibly and purposefully to lessons and arrive punctually despite sometimes travelling considerable distances between teaching rooms. Mostly, students behave exceptionally maturely and respectfully towards each other at break and lunch times.
- Students exercise good self-control and are polite towards each other, to staff and to visitors. They enjoy group and paired work and listen respectfully to different viewpoints. This enables

staff to tackle sensitive topics in lesson and tutor times.

- Sometimes students' behaviour is passive or compliant in lessons because teachers do not inspire or promote an enthusiasm for learning. As a result, their progress is not always as rapid as it might be. The behaviour of a very small proportion of students in some subjects and for some teachers is not of a sufficiently high standard. For example, students explained to inspectors that behaviour in some lessons taught by supply teachers is not good.
- Students stated that they felt safe at school and understood the need to be safe when using modern technology and social media. Students told inspectors that bullying and homophobic, transsexual and racist comments were rare. They also explained that they could be 'themselves'.
- The school's highly effective management of behaviour is having a positive impact on improving attendance, reducing exclusions and improving behaviour. Attendance overall has been improving steadily over recent years and is now higher than the national average. The previous wide gap in the attendance of students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are not eligible, has narrowed considerably. Similarly, in relation to exclusions, the wide gap between these groups of students has also narrowed. Fixed term exclusions of disabled students and those with special educational needs have declined. The school works determinedly with the small minority of students who have very complex needs, providing excellent support to keep them engaged in learning and to enable them to achieve success.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, senior and middle leaders and governors are ambitious for the school and have high expectations of students. Staff are proud to work in the school and share their leaders' values.
- Leaders at all levels are committed to ensuring that students' achievement improves. Previous staffing problems in English have now been resolved and the improving performance in English reflects this. However, this follows a period of consistently declining attainment overall, and below average attainment and progress in English.
- Systems to quality assure the school's performance, to monitor the quality of teaching and to track students' progress are rigorous. An ambitious programme of professional development is tailored to the needs of individual staff. The effectiveness of this programme is evident in the examples of teachers who have improved the quality of their teaching from requires improvement to good, or from good to outstanding. Highly effective systems to track students' progress are in place, and, where under-performance is identified, prompt and effective interventions are introduced.
- The school's performance management system is robust and sharply linked to targets in the school's development plan. The school's monitoring and progress checks enable leaders to hold teachers to account for the progress students make. Teachers who have not met their targets do not receive pay increases. This process extends to all leaders in the school, including the headteacher - all are held rigorously to account for meeting the targets they are set.
- Self-evaluation and improvement planning take place regularly and involve a comprehensive system, linked to quality assurance reviews and external and internal performance data. The school's current evaluation of its performance, although highly accurate in many respects, focuses too heavily on the most recent in-school data about performance without reflecting the weaker picture provided by trends in the school's performance over time.

- Middle leaders are fully involved in the evaluation and improvement process. They regularly and effectively monitor the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility to ensure it promotes good achievement and high quality pastoral care for all students. Regular meetings of senior leaders and academic and pastoral middle leaders ensure that the progress and well-being of every student is monitored effectively.
- The curriculum is imaginative, flexible, and adapted well to the changing needs of students. It provides rich experiences that enhance the spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding of all students, as well as contributing to their positive attitudes to learning. Linked to this, as an International School, there is a strong focus on broadening students' horizons and improving their awareness of global issues and cultural diversity. Much innovative curriculum work goes on in this school. Off-site provision involves a range of vocational courses that enable all students to gain success. The impact of the school's drive to improve literacy is evident in the improved reading scores of students in Years 7 and 8 and in the greater attention given to promoting good literacy skills across the curriculum.
- The sixth form is well led. The study programme provides students with good opportunities and good support to gain relevant academic qualifications, to develop their work-related learning skills and to receive high quality information, advice and guidance about their future options. Careful monitoring of students' progress and attendance ensures they are on track to succeed. Applications to the sixth form for 2014 have already more than doubled from the number recruited in September 2013.
- The school has been successfully running a project with Cambridge University to raise aspirations of more-able Year 6 primary school pupils and to encourage its own students to visit, and attend courses at, Cambridge University. The school has good systems to ensure students' views inform key decisions. As a National Support School, high quality support has been provided to another secondary school in Shropshire, Sir John Talbot's Technology College.
- The school's systems to ensure the safety of all of its students meet all statutory requirements.
- Although only a very small proportion of all parents and carers responded to Parent Voice, these responses and the responses from in-school surveys of parents' views, indicate that most parents and carers are very positive about the school and the education it provides for their children.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors take a keen and active role in school life. They use their professional skills to challenge school leaders in many areas of the work of the school. However, they have not been sufficiently critical of the school's self-evaluation and the extent to which it should have taken more account of the school's performance over time.
 - Governors understand how performance management is used to tackle underperformance and to reward those achieving their targets. They ensure the system is applied rigorously to all teachers and all leaders.
 - Governors carefully monitor how funding is spent to ensure maximum benefit for those students eligible for pupil premium funding and are aware of its impact on attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour.

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	136979
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	427255

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1243
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arthur Walpole
Headteacher	Sarah Longville
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2010
Telephone number	01691 664400
Fax number	01691 671515
Email address	admin@marchesschool.net

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