

# The Marlborough Science Academy

Watling Street, St Albans, AL1 2QA

**Inspection dates** 27–28 March 2014

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Good</b> <b>2</b>     |
| 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.

- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and question students well to deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- The academy provides good support to disabled students and those who have special educational needs. This results in these students making good progress and the closing of gaps in standards between them and other groups of students.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress in AS and A level subjects.
- School leaders have high expectations of staff and students and what the academy can achieve. They know their academy well and use this knowledge to improve achievement and behaviour.
- Students achieve well at the academy as a result of robust tracking and monitoring of their performance and well-planned interventions and support.
- Students supported by the pupil premium make good progress and achieve well.
- Students say they feel safe and well supported. The systems in place to keep students safe are good.
- Relationships between students and staff are highly positive, resulting in students behaving well in class and around the academy and in positive attitudes to learning.
- Governors challenge and support the academy very well to bring about whole school improvement.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Attendance in the sixth form is below average.
- Not all staff follow the academy's behaviour policy consistently.
- Some teachers give tasks to students that are not challenging enough.
- Not all teachers follow the academy's marking policy fully.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 45 lessons, including shorter visits to lessons to assess the quality of learning for students in modern foreign languages. Twelve lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the Headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the governing body and three groups of students. A telephone discussion with a local authority advisor was also carried out.
- Inspectors took account of the 98 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, received by the end of the inspection.
- The inspection team observed the academy’s work, scrutinised the academy’s information about students’ achievement, including those students eligible for pupil premium funding and those who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Inspectors looked at the work in students books.
- Inspectors examined records relating to behaviour, attendance and exclusions, and looked at documents used by leaders and governors to check and evaluate the academy’s work and to keep students safe.
- Inspectors took account of 67 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

|                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Jalil Shaikh, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Simon Blackburn              | Additional Inspector |
| Michael Hiscox               | Additional Inspector |
| Kevin Harrison               | Additional Inspector |
| Margaret Jones               | Additional Inspector |

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Marlborough Science Academy converted to become an academy school in April 2012. When its predecessor school, The Marlborough School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.
- It is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the number of students who speak English as an additional language are lower than found in other schools nationally.
- The proportion of students supported through school action and the proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are both well above the national average.
- The proportion of students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium is below average. The students receiving support in the academy from this additional funding are in the care of the local authority, known to be eligible for free school meals and those with a parent in the armed services.
- The academy provides education or training for a very small number of students away from school using two local organisations. The Links Academy and Chessbrook provide one to one or small group support to students who are currently in Key Stage 3.
- The sixth form operates in a consortium with Loreto College, St Albans Girls School, Townsend School, Samuel Rider Academy and Nicholas Breakspear Roman Catholic School.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy receives funding for Year 7 students to catch up on their reading skills.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement through improving the quality of teaching and learning by:
  - improving the quality of written feedback so that the academy's marking policy is applied consistently and that students always act upon the comments made by teachers
  - increasing the number of A\*-A grades at Key Stage 4, especially in Additional Science, by making sure that tasks given to students are hard enough to move learning on quickly
  - ensuring that all staff apply the behaviour policy in the same way across the academy.
- Improve attendance of students in the sixth form by:
  - refining systems for tracking and monitoring attendance
  - using approaches that have been successful in raising attendance in the main school.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Attainment on entry to the academy in Year 7, while covering a range of different abilities, is slightly above average. Students currently make good progress in their learning in the main school.
- Attainment on entry into the sixth form is slightly below average. However, students make good progress resulting in attainment which is just above what would be expected nationally.
- Improvements in the quality of tracking and monitoring of students' progress have allowed the academy to better understand the progress being made by groups of students in all subjects. This has resulted in effective intervention and improvements to the quality of teaching to tackle the slower progress in mathematics, science, languages, humanities and of White British students who, as a result, are making good progress.
- Current progress made in the main school by most students is good. By the end of Key Stage 4, levels of attainment in most subjects, literacy and mathematics are expected to be above average this year and have been consistently average over the past three years. The academy has previously made good use of early entry to GCSE examinations ensuring that students have the opportunity to improve their grade if they have not reached their target.
- Attainment in English at Key Stage 4 has been well above average over the past three years and continues to be a major strength of the academy. Students participating in a reading programme are making good progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, while making good progress, do not attain quite as well as students from other groups in the academy. This is because they often have much lower starting points and some have complex needs.
- Students supported by the pupil premium are making better progress in all key stages than other similar students nationally, although they are slightly behind other groups of students at the academy. In 2013, those students supported by the pupil premium attained half a grade lower than other students in mathematics and English but these gaps in attainment are closing.
- Planned interventions for students who do not achieve a level 4 in English and mathematics ensure that the additional catch-up funding received for these students is used well and has a positive impact on their achievement. The academy provides additional support to these students during the summer break, accelerated reading and one-to-one tuition by specialist support staff, which has resulted in these students making good progress.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Attainment at A level in year 13 and at AS level in year 12 in most subjects is just above the national picture. However, progress made by students' both at A level and at AS level is above other students nationally, with progress in a number of subjects at AS level being well above other students nationally.
- Although an improving picture, progress of students taking Additional Science, History and Geography at Key Stage 4 is not as strong as other subjects in the academy.
- The percentages of students attaining the A-A\* grades at Key Stage 4 in most subjects are below average. The academy data indicate this is improving as a result of more vigorous

evaluation of the quality of teaching and correct diagnosis of the areas that need improvement. However, there is still some work needed to ensure the impact made in this area is in all subjects such as Additional Science.

### **The quality of teaching** is good

- Effective teaching results in good progress and good levels of attainment through all phases of the academy.
- Assessments of student progress and attainment are carried out regularly and are accurate. They are used extremely well in order to identify any gaps in students' learning and to guide teaching in all subjects. Well-planned interventions result in previously underperforming students achieving well.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and great enthusiasm for their subjects, which they use effectively to engage and challenge students' in their learning and deepen their understanding through well planned activities and genuine debate.
- Students commented that they enjoy the variety of different tasks and activities they are asked to do in lessons and this broadens their knowledge and enriches their learning experiences. For example students in a Year 11 Physics class commented that the recent change to subject specialist teachers in science has increased their enjoyment, understanding and competency in the subject, as well as supporting their mathematical needs.
- Skilled questioning and quality verbal feedback ensures progress in learning is good and sometimes rapid. Students' are clear about the next steps they need to take and what they need to do to further their learning in order to meet and exceed the targets they have been set.
- Highly positive relationships between teachers, support staff and students, along with high levels of expectation mean that students' are encouraged to explore their ideas and do well.
- The needs of students' supported by the pupil premium and those who are disabled or with special educational needs are planned for and met well. Support staff are used well and have a positive impact on the achievement of these students. Students supported off site do as well as the other students.
- Although some good quality marking and written feedback was observed, this is not yet consistently applied through all key stages, year groups and lessons. In a small number of cases students' work is not marked often enough for the process to be useful. In other instances the written comments made do not give students sufficiently helpful advice that will contribute to their continued progress. In some instances students do not respond to targets or questions set by teachers.
- In a small number of lessons activities are too easy for the most able students, and their progress slows.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Relationships are a real strength of this academy. Staff form highly positive relationships with students, which in turn has a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning in the classroom, their improving attendance and punctuality to lessons and

how they respond to instructions given to them by staff.

- During break and lunchtimes, students of different cultural backgrounds mix well together. Despite large numbers of students, behaviour is orderly at all times as students enjoy their free time. Some students participate in sports and clubs.
- This is a friendly academy where students enjoy their learning. Students are polite and welcoming. During the inspection, students opened doors for inspectors and extended greetings.
- Effective monitoring and intervention has resulted in attendance improving steadily over the last three years which is now above national averages. Leaders are effectively maintaining this position and are focusing on families who struggle to get their children to school, making clear the effect absence has on their children's progress and attainment.
- Fixed-term exclusions have been consistently below national averages historically and continue to decrease as a sanction for poor behaviour.
- The academy has clear systems and sanctions to challenge and support students who find good behaviour difficult sometimes. As a result of treating students as individuals, and the strong moral and social ethos of the academy, staff strive hard to understand why issues may arise, and deal with incidents with sensitivity.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. All students spoken to by inspectors during formal meetings and around the school feel safe at the academy. This was also overwhelmingly supported by responses of parents received during the inspection to the online questionnaire.
- Bullying and racial incidents are rare. Pupils have a growing awareness of the different types of bullying such as cyber bullying.
- Parents, teachers and students are highly positive about the behaviour around the academy. The academy has good records of incidents, which allows them to take positive steps towards improving undesirable behaviour. Students understand the academy's behaviour policy and respond well and are confident with the academy's ability to resolve any issues.
- In a small number of cases low-level disruption is not always managed consistently according to the academy's behaviour policy, which slows the amount of progress being made by students. This is why behaviour is not yet outstanding.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The headteacher and senior management team have developed good relationships between students and teachers. This is why behaviour and students' attitudes to learning are consistently positive. Since becoming an academy, the headteacher and academy leaders have ensured that significant improvements in the quality of teaching and students' achievement have been made.
- Leaders at all levels have high expectations of both staff and students. They are highly ambitious and work together well to secure whole academy improvement. Robust and thorough analysis of teacher's professional development needs and insistence on the modelling of high standards by all staff has resulted in the quality of teaching being consistently good and sometimes outstanding.

- The academy's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity is demonstrated by their improved systems for the tracking and monitoring of student progress and behaviour. These systems allow leaders at all levels to have an accurate understanding of the different groups within the academy and where improvements are needed. The academy self evaluation highlights clear areas for improvement which are further developed in more detail at individual department level. These areas of development are continuously monitored to ensure the right interventions are being made and that all students' achievement is consistently good.
- The academy has strong subject leaders who are supported well by the senior team. These leaders ensure teachers are held to account by monitoring students' progress regularly and that appropriate steps are taken by staff to improve the achievement of students. This has resulted in strong improvements in achievement. Staff at the academy welcome the support they receive from leaders at all levels.
- The academy promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of its students exceptionally well. There are clear plans indicating how this has been integrated into the curriculum, which is broad and balanced and meets the changing needs of the students attending the academy. This ensures that any discrimination is tackled and has resulted in improved achievement, behaviour and a fully cohesive school community where students can learn well.
- The academy has effective strategies for care and guidance. For example students at the academy receive independent careers advice from Year 7 and throughout their time at the academy, which results in them being able to make good decisions about their future career choices.
- The parents and carers of students receiving the pupil premium and those who are disabled or have special educational needs are engaged well in raising the achievement of their children. This has resulted in significantly increased attendance to meetings organised by the academy to support these parents and carers and has had a positive impact on the achievement of these students.
- The academy has used the services of various outside agencies including a local authority school improvement partner to help diagnose areas for development and improve the quality of provision and outcomes for its students.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have a wide range of skills which benefit the academy and undertake training to allow them to challenge more effectively. They understand the strengths and areas of development of the academy by collecting first-hand evidence and information, questioning subject leaders and scrutinising academy performance data. They use this information to provide high levels of challenge to the academy in all areas of its work. This has had a significant impact on raising standards at the academy. The governors participate vigorously in the performance management of all staff including the headteacher, which has had a highly positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning and on the achievement of students' at the academy. The academy's budget is managed well and spending decisions including the use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding are made with students at the forefront of their thinking. Governors take their responsibility to safeguard students very seriously and these arrangements meet statutory requirements.

## 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

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 138042        |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Hertfordshire |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 425339        |

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

|   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                         | Secondary                     |
| <b>School category</b>                        | Academy converter             |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                    | 11–18                         |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                       | Mixed                         |
| <b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>     | Mixed                         |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>    | 1200                          |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b> | 220                           |
| <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>     | 7 December 2011               |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                       | 01727 856874                  |
| <b>Fax number</b>                             | 01727 855285                  |
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