

Maharishi Free School

Cobbs Brow Lane, Lathom, Ormskirk, Lancashire L40 6JJ

Inspection dates

8–9 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The current headteacher took up post in September 2016. At that time, outcomes had deteriorated and the Department for Education considered the school to be coasting. The headteacher's outstanding contribution has driven rapid and considerable improvement.
- Staff and school governors acknowledge that the headteacher has achieved this improvement in academic outcomes while maintaining the school's ethos and the pupils' excellent personal and spiritual development. Pupils are considerate, confident and socialise very well. They are interested in other people's points of view. They communicate well. Pupils are very well prepared for their next stages in education.
- A considerable number of teachers have joined the school over very recent years. They have brought experience and fresh ideas. Teachers and teaching assistants have supported the headteacher well in bringing about school improvement. Morale is high.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. However, underdeveloped outdoor provision limits their opportunities.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. They are very keen to learn, they listen well and are able to express their carefully considered views respectfully. Pupils care for each other and make a major contribution to ensuring that their school is cohesive, safe and orderly. Pupils are happy and content.
- Outcomes in 2016 were the poorest in the school's history. Achievement in Year 6 mathematics was inadequate. The quality of mathematics teaching improved quickly over the following year, and in 2017, results in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 improved considerably. However, not all teachers teach mathematics skilfully and confidently.
- There is some good teaching practice across the school. However, not all teachers plan learning activities based on a secure knowledge of their pupils' prior understanding. Some teachers use questioning well, but not all. Although teachers' expectations of their pupils are rising, some teachers do not routinely challenge their pupils to think more deeply and work at a higher level.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and academic outcomes for pupils by:
 - further developing teachers' skills in accurately assessing what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - ensuring that all teachers use questioning well to encourage pupils to think more deeply and to help teachers understand quickly how well pupils have grasped new concepts
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve and use their knowledge of pupils' capabilities to plan learning that matches their needs more closely.
- Ensure that the recent improving trend in the quality of teaching mathematics is maintained and all who teach the subject demonstrate this good practice.
- Develop further the school's outdoor provision for children in the early years so they can improve their learning through imaginative and independent play.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors and senior leaders are committed to their vision of developing the whole child through inner growth and personal development. In the past, pupils' academic development had not been as strong. However, the current headteacher has made an outstanding contribution to ensuring that this aspect of pupils' learning is improving quickly.
- In very recent years this school has seen considerable change in the teaching personnel. The new headteacher has managed change extremely well, maintaining all that was very good about the school, while improving weaker aspects. Academic outcomes for pupils, the quality of teaching, safeguarding and pupils' attendance are all improving significantly and quickly.
- While other leaders and managers make a good contribution, much responsibility still rests with one person – the headteacher. However, this too is improving, as the headteacher is skilfully developing the leadership capacity of other leaders within the school.
- Governors and other school leaders were slow to respond to declining standards. Consequently, in July 2016, the school was considered by the Department for Education to be coasting because of weak achievement in the primary phase. Throughout this period, however, pupils were still benefiting from very strong spiritual and personal development.
- There are few pupils currently in Year 9 to Year 11 that joined the school in the primary phase. Many have started at the school after struggling to succeed in other schools. Secondary pupils were keen to tell inspectors how grateful they are to be given what they see as 'a second chance'. Typical comments from pupils include: 'My mum now has some hope for me.' These pupils value the opportunities this school is offering them and they work hard to learn and succeed.
- Leaders have created a culture where every pupil feels valued, successful, safe and happy. Pupils place great trust in adults in the school to do the right thing for them and offer them good advice. This trust is fully justified.
- In the secondary phase, the core academic curriculum is supplemented by an offer of four additional GCSEs that can be studied outside the normal school day. These are: computer science, photography, dance and a second modern foreign language.
- Central to the school's ethos is 'consciousness-based education', which has the practice of transcendental meditation at its heart. Transcendental meditation aims to develop the whole child and to develop the pupils' mental potential and learning ability. Consciousness-based interdisciplinary studies is included within the curriculum. It helps pupils to link various aspects of learning to each other very effectively. It also links to the pupils' own experiences and enables them to consider other people's points of view.
- Leaders have recently further strengthened the curriculum by the introduction of a daily tutor session and a weekly personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lesson. This provides a good structure for pupils' learning and developing a wide range of life skills.

- Adults also provide opportunities for pupils to broaden their cultural and social skills through educational visits and activities. Many pupils in Years 8 to 11 recently took part in a residential visit to London, where they visited museums and cultural landmarks. They experienced stage fighting, and also tried their hand at video editing while visiting the offices of a national newspaper.
- The combination of academic studies, additional GCSEs, consciousness-based education, PSHE lessons, tutor time and other enriching activities provides a curriculum that matches pupils' needs well.
- The headteacher currently leads on the improvement of the quality of teaching. She is very perceptive. Her judgements with regard to the quality of teaching across the school are accurate. Teaching staff describe a very good range of training that is helping them improve their practice. The role of teaching assistants is changing from being mainly a helper in the classroom to one where they have responsibility for teaching individuals or small groups to help them improve in English and mathematics. This development has been well managed and teaching assistants say that they have had very good support in adapting to their new roles. Performance management is effective and this has contributed to improvements in teaching. The headteacher is currently developing the skills of other leaders to promote better teaching more effectively.
- Staff are highly successful in helping a small number of pupils who sometimes struggle to behave well. Staff support these pupils to help them understand how they can choose to react differently to events and emotions. Enabling pupils to manage their own behaviour successfully contributes to the overall outstanding standards of behaviour within the school.
- The school's ethos, culture and curriculum ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- Additional funds that the school receives to support pupils who are disadvantaged, for Year 7 catch-up funding and for funding to promote physical education in the primary phase are spent well. Teachers and school leaders are quickly developing an understanding of the barriers that individual disadvantaged pupils have to their learning. When they can, teachers and leaders use funding to mitigate the effects of pupils' disadvantage. For example, leaders spend additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities very effectively. These pupils make particularly strong progress.
- Over the past four terms, leaders have taken highly effective action to improve pupil attendance rapidly and significantly, so that it is now broadly average.

Governance of the school

- This level of school leadership consists of a board of members whose core responsibility is to ensure that the school's ethos is maintained. A board of governors ensures the smooth and efficient running of the school. All bodies undertake their responsibilities effectively.
- The governing body consists of well qualified and experienced professionals from a wide range of employment backgrounds. They are not complacent and have recently undertaken an audit of their skills to identify the qualities required of prospective members to fill any gaps.

- The governing body hold the current headteacher rigorously to account for her role in both managing and improving the school. They also ensure that the school complies with regulations and requirements. Governors ensure that performance management procedures are effective.

Safeguarding

- The headteacher and the governor responsible for safeguarding undertook a review of practice earlier this year. It revealed some aspects that were not good enough. Typically, the headteacher's response was rapid and robust. Consequently, the arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that staff are well trained in responding to concerns they may have about pupils' welfare, including safeguarding. Systems and responsibilities are simple, clear, easily understood and effective. Staff are confident in promoting a strong culture of safeguarding.
- The school actively promotes good inter-agency working. Leaders and teachers also work well with parents, particularly those parents who need help in providing their children with a stable, safe and secure environment outside school.
- Pupils are taught how to be safe in many situations, including when using social media, in their communities and wider afield.
- Particularly noteworthy are the open and trusting relationship between adults and pupils. Pupils say that they would confidently discuss any concerns they might have with staff and know that they will receive good care and advice.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is improving quickly because the headteacher has raised the expectations of what teachers should achieve. She is skilfully supporting them to meet these much higher standards.
- The quality of teaching across the school is broadly good. There is some very strong practice, although this is not consistent across all teachers and subjects. Two great strengths of the school are the excellent relationships between pupils and staff, and the exceptional understanding that staff have about the pupils as individuals. However, staff do not have the same comprehensive understanding of what their pupils have already learned or can do. This is because some teachers do not assess the pupils' understanding with sufficient precision. Some staff gain a great deal of understanding from marking pupils' work or simply asking good questions during lessons, but not all do. Some staff do not assess as well as others and do not plan learning activities well enough. This can sometimes result in the needs of middle-ability pupils not being met. Another consequence is that high-attaining pupils are periodically not given sufficient challenge and low-attaining pupils sometimes do not fully understand what they are trying to learn.
- Currently, teachers mark pupils' work according to the school's policy. The headteacher has recognised weaknesses in recent practice and has produced a new policy which requires teachers to give clearer guidance to pupils on how to improve their work. It is too early for the school to evaluate the impact of this new strategy on pupils' learning.

- Some teachers ask very good questions. Through questioning, the strongest teachers provoke discussion and help pupils to think deeply about their learning. These teachers can also gauge how well pupils are grasping a concept. Furthermore, they are able to confidently adapt the course of the lesson to ensure that pupils learn what they need to. Again, however, these important skills are not highly developed among all staff.
- Teachers are given good guidance on how to meet the needs of individual pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Teachers use this guidance well. Teaching assistants play an important role in supporting these pupils and others who just need a bit of extra help. Good teaching and a highly positive school culture ensure that these pupils learn well and make good progress.
- Leaders are beginning to exploit the benefits of an all-through school. Teachers with expertise in teaching mathematics, English, science and modern foreign languages are starting to develop schemes of work and assessment over the school's whole age range. This is enabling learning to be built on more systematically year on year.
- Primary school pupils take great care in presenting work carefully and accurately. Some secondary phase teachers do not do enough to ensure that the presentation of their pupils' work meets the school's expectations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual and personal development is at the core of what this school does so well. Maharishi Free School pupils are good thinkers. They reflect on their world and try to see the world through other people's eyes. This enables pupils to better understand their own experiences and those of others. Pupils are tolerant, considerate and empathetic. They are able to consider the impact of their actions on other people and on nature. They are ambitious, articulate, confident and engage very well with adults.
- Pupils know how to look after themselves physically, mentally and emotionally. Although not immune to stress, these pupils generally cope well with it because they are taught to understand the effect that circumstances have on them and on other people. Pupils are taught how to manage difficult situations.
- Pupils say that they are happy in school and this view is endorsed by parents and teachers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are shown how to behave well by adults in the school, who model what they expect of pupils. Pupils and staff are respectful, considerate and caring. The school's consciousness-based interdisciplinary studies help pupils to understand themselves very well and also the points of view of others. This helps pupils show levels of empathy and understanding beyond their age. Pupils' excellent attitudes to behaviour

ensure that the harmonious and cohesive culture pervades all parts of the school. Within the pupil body there are many pupils who come from a diverse range of social and cultural backgrounds. Older pupils are becoming aware of their own sexual orientation. All pupils say that they are safe and happy in the school. Pupils that inspectors spoke to said that there was no bullying within the school. Inspectors found that this would be entirely consistent with the school's culture.

- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are also excellent. They focus well in class and show enthusiasm. They cooperate very well in pairs and in groups. When required to, pupils work independently and concentrate well. There is no disruption to learning in class. Pupils are both very proud of, and pleased to be part of, the Maharishi Free School community.
- Until September 2016, rates of attendance were poor. Last year, however, the headteacher drove excellent improvement in attendance. Strategies to improve attendance included: working much more closely with parents, reporting to parents on attendance, rewards for pupils who attended well and emphasising the impact that poor attendance has on achievement. Attendance has continued to improve this year and is now broadly in line with the national average.
- The school has a very low threshold for triggering a concern about a pupil's behaviour. Leaders monitor, record and analyse patterns of behaviour. This analysis shows a very impressive reduction in incidents of poor behaviour. Almost all of the very small number of pupils whose behaviour does not match the excellent standards set have complex needs. Similarly, a high proportion of the small number of pupils who do not attend well have medical conditions or have experienced recent domestic turmoil.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Over many years, the effective teaching of phonics has helped pupils learn to read well from an early age. Throughout the school, teachers promote reading effectively. In the primary phase pupils read for pleasure frequently. In the secondary phase, pupils read and analyse information from the internet at a much more sophisticated level than normally seen in other pupils of their age. Year 6 reading results have been consistently good over many years.
- The development of writing has been more variable than reading and this has been reflected in historical Year 6 results. However, in 2017, these standards were good because the teaching of writing has improved. There is now a greater focus on pupils learning how to spell well and use punctuation and grammar effectively. Pupils are now much clearer about what makes a piece of writing good. Pupils currently in the school write well.
- The teaching of English in the secondary phase has received a boost with the appointment of a new English teacher. She brings experience and a strong track record of teaching English well. Pupils' English books in the secondary phase reveal that pupils of all abilities are motivated to do well, work hard and make good progress.
- The teaching of mathematics was weak in the primary phase for some years. Teachers not adapting to changes in the mathematics curriculum well enough exacerbated the effect of ineffective teaching. However, a concerted effort to improve the teaching of

mathematics transformed inadequate Year 6 attainment in 2016 to broadly good attainment for the 2017 Year 6 cohort. As with English, a new member of staff is helping the teaching of mathematics to improve. The headteacher is fully aware that last year's focus was to target examination groups only. There is still work to be done to raise mathematics achievement across all classes.

- Standards attained by secondary pupils have been good, and continue to be good for current pupils. Pupils attain well in science, many of whom take the double award. Leaders know, however, that for many of their pupils, good is not good enough. With improved teaching, many pupils could achieve much more highly.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities achieve particularly well and at least as well as their peers in this school. Historically, disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as others in the school, or nationally. However, this difference has been diminishing. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school make similar progress to others because there is now a greater focus on how the school can help individual disadvantaged pupils.
- In the past, pupils with average levels of prior attainment made greater progress than those with lower or higher levels of prior attainment. The school's own analysis shows that for current pupils this aspect is improving and pupils from all ability groups are making good progress.
- The combination of good achievement, excellent personal development and highly positive attitudes ensure that pupils of the Maharishi Free School are very well prepared for their next steps in education and life.

Early years provision

Good

- Generally, children start Reception with levels of development which are typical for their age. They make good progress throughout their Reception Year and are well prepared for their move into Year 1. Additional funding is used well to help disadvantaged children and they have also made good progress in past years.
- Systems and procedures to ensure a smooth transition into Reception are good. Most children make three visits in the summer term before making their move into Reception. Parents say that they, and their children, feel well supported throughout this process.
- Teachers and teaching assistants make a good contribution to the children's development. Adults are well trained and prepare indoor learning activities which the children find interesting and engaging. Adults ensure that children experience a wide variety of learning opportunities, which broadens their experience.
- Questioning to stimulate children and deepen their understanding is used with variable effect. Children build very good foundations from which they develop strong reading skills. They take reading books home and the school works well with parents to ensure that they can help their children learn well. Opportunities to encourage children to develop their independence and decision-making are sometimes missed.
- Children are well looked after. They are taught how to be safe and healthy, and about the benefits of physical exercise. Safeguarding is rigorous and staff meet requirements for providing paediatric first aid.

- Children behave well and show respect for each other. They understand about taking turns and helping when a classmate is struggling or upset.
- Leadership is effective and many improvements are currently being introduced. Staff are developing new systems to assess children's development and to record assessments. Reception leaders are aware that the outdoor learning area is not developed to its full potential. This is because it does not currently provide sufficient opportunities for children to develop their imagination.

School details

Unique reference number	137498
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10037750

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Birnbaum
Headteacher	Lisa Edwards
Telephone number	01695 729912
Website	www.maharishischool.com
Email address	ledwards@maharishischool.com
Date of previous inspection	3–4 July 2013

Information about this school

- Maharishi Free School opened in September 2011, designated as an all-ability non-selective school. It is a non-religious, non-denominational school for pupils aged 4 to 16 years, situated on the outskirts of Skelmersdale. The school includes 'consciousness-based education' and transcendental meditation within its curriculum.
- The school is owned by the Maharishi School Trust. There are three layers of management oversight. The board of governors (who are also trustees and directors) is responsible for the strategic direction and governance of the school. The board of members comprises the nominal shareholders of the organisation. They are responsible for the maintenance of the school's ethos and educational objectives. A finance committee is responsible for finance and staffing matters and reports to the board of governors.
- The current headteacher took up her post on 1 September 2016. The school has seen a great deal of change to teaching personnel over the last two years.

- The proportion of pupils on roll who have SEN and/or disabilities has been increasing over recent years and this is now much larger than average. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is also increasing and is also larger than average.
- The school does not use alternative provision or have any off-site provision run in conjunction with other schools.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders and managers. The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, one of whom is also the chair of the board of members.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and talked to pupils during their social times.
- Inspectors met with groups of teachers and also spoke to individual teachers.
- School documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding checks, information about pupils' achievement and records of checks on the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors considered a report from the Department for Education and two external reviews of the quality of safeguarding.
- Inspectors visited classrooms with leaders to speak with pupils, look at their books and observe their learning.
- The headteacher and other senior leaders were party to many of the inspection activities.
- Inspectors took account of 122 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They considered the views of 67 parents who texted their comments. The lead inspector spoke to one parent by phone and also received one letter from a parent. Inspectors took account of pupil surveys completed by the school.

Inspection team

Neil Mackenzie, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Woodhouse

Ofsted Inspector

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