



# The Minster College

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 116941  
**LEA** Herefordshire  
**Inspection number** 279956  
**Inspection dates** 1 February 2006 to 2 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Brian Cartwright HMI

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

|                                    |                    |                           |                           |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>              | Comprehensive      | <b>School address</b>     | Castlefields              |
| <b>School category</b>             | Community          |                           | Leominster                |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>         | 11 to 18           |                           | Herefordshire HR6 8JJ     |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>            | Mixed              | <b>Telephone number</b>   | 01568 613221              |
| <b>Number on roll</b>              | 740                | <b>Fax number</b>         | 01568 613622              |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>       | The governing body | <b>Chair of governors</b> | Brigadier Peter Jones CBE |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | 17 January 2000    | <b>Headteacher</b>        | Mr Richard North          |

|                  |                                      |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Age group</b> | <b>Inspection dates</b>              | <b>Inspection number</b> |
| 11 to 18         | 1 February 2006 -<br>2 February 2006 | 279956                   |

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

secondary school in Leominster. It is slightly smaller than most secondary schools. There are some areas of high deprivation locally in addition to the regional rural deprivation. The number of students claiming free school meals is average and increasing, and there are a low number of minority ethnic background students. There are few students for whom English is not their first language. The number of students with statements of Special Educational Need (SEN) is high, although the total number of pupils on the SEN register is average. The College is a partner in a number of educational organisations, including The Marches Initial Teacher Training Consortium, Adult Learning, Sustainable Communities and the Youth Sports Trust. It was designated a Specialist Sports College in 2003, and holds Sportsmark Silver accreditation.

## Key for inspection grades

|         |              |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  |
| Grade 2 | Good         |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   |

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 3**

The Minster College is providing a sound education, and has many good features that contribute to the development of young people in Leominster. Our findings confirm the College's own view that it delivers satisfactory overall effectiveness and value for money. The college is particularly good at fostering the personal development of learners. The progress of students is satisfactory, and standards are broadly similar to National values. It has excellent links with other agencies and a good sixth form curriculum that meets local needs well. Pastoral care is good, with tutors and heads of year using their knowledge of individual pupils to support them well. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but improvements are needed in the consistency of teaching and most particularly in more effective use of assessment to inform learners of their next steps. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Recent senior governance and leadership changes have helped the school to identify priorities. As yet, however, school improvement planning lacks sharpness and challenging targets. There is a positive working ethos, with a dedicated staff who all share a clear commitment to help students achieve their potential. Staff devote many extra hours to help enrich the curriculum through a good range of activities that have been enhanced through the Specialist Sports College status. The school does have the capacity to improve. Behaviour is better than at the previous inspection, and information and communication technology (ICT) is now taught to all students and used widely by staff for teaching.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form is satisfactory as students do make the progress expected of them. Despite the relatively small size, the curriculum is varied enough to address learners' needs at different levels of qualification. As a result, it is serving local students well, and has been very effective at expanding provision to meet rising numbers generated through Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). In turn, students contribute well to the school and local community. Students are effectively supported but would benefit from further improvements in assessment to inform them of how to reach their academic goals. Course completion rates are high. Further education has to compete with low-wage employment opportunities in a relatively disadvantaged area, but the school has been successful in retaining many students, particularly as EMA helps to mitigate this factor.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

Raise the quality of teaching and learning through more consistent application of effective teaching strategies by all staff. • Refine assessment practice to ensure students and all staff know how well students are progressing in their learning, and precisely what they should do to reach aspirational targets. • Set challenging academic targets, and develop plans to reach them that have sharp success criteria, a budget, time limits and procedures for evaluation.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory, and the inspection confirms the evaluation of the school in this respect. Students join the school with about average or, in some years, just below average attainment. In 2005 Key Stage 3 standards were significantly but not exceptionally below average, and have been similar in recent years. English results have improved to match the national average, but mathematics and science standards have generally been lower than average. Progress measures, however, are consistently showing that students are achieving in line with national expectations overall for schools in similar settings, with boys doing relatively better than girls. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results in 2005 were lower than the national average, by a larger margin than in 2004. The headline five A\* to C percentage of 42.5% was lower than previous years, but changes in curriculum account for some of these differences. Nevertheless the academic progress that students made remained more or less in line with students from similar settings nationally. Overall, all the different groups of learners do make satisfactory progress, and students with SEN achieve slightly better than their peers. Subject performance is variable, with science doing significantly less well than others, and ICT achieving better results. English and mathematics GCSE results show better than expected progress. Sixth form standards are well below national sixth form averages but this is consistent with the attainment of students on entry being below average compared to other sixth forms. About two thirds of students follow A-level qualifications, while the rest study AVCE, GNVQ and BTEC courses. The school's own added value data shows progress to be as expected, and as a result achievement in the sixth form is judged to be satisfactory. The school has met its performance targets, but these have not been ambitious enough to raise standards beyond routine expectations.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development is good. They show their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding in assemblies and lessons. This aspect is not systematically planned or monitored across the school and relies on the initiative of individual departments. In art, pupils show exceptional understanding of the influence of different cultures. Although formal opportunities for a daily act of collective worship exist in assemblies and tutor times, they are not consistently experienced by all students. However, pupils enjoy religious education, and all years demonstrate good spiritual and moral development in these lessons. Attendance is 1% below the national average, but unauthorised absence has decreased significantly recently as a result of a wide range of successful strategies. Behaviour is good. Positive incentives and rewards for good behaviour are having a significant impact on this improvement since the last inspection. Students generally act responsibly at break-times and between lessons, with well-ordered dining arrangements. Students enjoy school, notably the many extra-curricular opportunities they have, particularly in sport. Students feel safe in school and report that the rare incidences of bullying are quickly and effectively dealt

with. Students routinely adopt safe practices in laboratories and workshops. Students have a good understanding of the need to keep fit and many take advantage of sports clubs to put this into practice. Specialist sports status has benefited students in this respect. Students also understand the need for a healthy lifestyle, but do not always reflect this in their choice of food. Students make a good contribution to the community. A variety of charities is very well supported. There are many opportunities to help around school and in the local community. Both year and school councils meet regularly but as yet have not had significant impact on school life, as far as students are aware. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is outstanding. All students undertake a work experience and mini-enterprises. High quality careers advice and workplace interviews give students a clear grasp of their future options. The improvement in ICT since the last inspection has improved students' basic skills.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The College evaluates its teaching as predominantly satisfactory and inspectors agree with this view. The most effective learning was characterised by breathtaking pace and energy that both inspired and encouraged students to play an active part in some outstanding lessons. In a French lesson, for example, students put aside their initial embarrassment and enthusiastically tried out unfamiliar words and pronunciation in front of their peers. Learning was also very effective in English. Here the choice of texts stimulated students' interest and the skilful use of group work and question and answer deepened their understanding and made the challenging work fun. In both lessons expectations were high and students responded very positively by taking a full and active part in their learning. Attitudes and behaviour were excellent. In contrast, moments of weaker teaching often allowed too few opportunities for student participation, leading to students becoming bored and inattentive. Teachers spent too long talking to the class, opportunities to elicit whole-class responses were missed, and the tasks themselves were not challenging enough, for example, when students were asked to copy from the board. In these lessons there was insufficient progress. Students' work is often marked very well with a good balance of praise and points for improvement. In some books, however, work of poor quality is praised. In many books, students have insufficient explicit information on how to make improvements.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is satisfactory in the main school. In the sixth form the school has actively sought to build a good curriculum that meets the widely differing needs of the students. There exists a balanced range of academic and vocational courses, supported by additional activities run inside and outside the school day. In the main

school the added flexibility has been used very constructively to match the needs of a small number of students for whom the traditional curriculum has proved inappropriate. In Key Stage 4, the students we spoke to were satisfied with the curriculum options they had chosen to follow. The range of, and participation in, extra-curricular activities are very good. Opportunities for sport, foreign travel, work experience and cultural activities are particularly strong in some subjects. Sports College resources have strongly reinforced much of this provision, which is instrumental in improving student motivation.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support, with good day-to-day welfare for students. Students are set targets to achieve and the school checks their progress towards them each term. If progress falters the school takes appropriate remedial action. However, the academic targets are not challenging enough to raise standards significantly. While in some lessons students are given specific advice on how to improve their work, this is not consistent across the school. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants in small classes. Their progress is marginally better than that of their peers. Individual education plans are reviewed annually but the procedures for interim monitoring of progress are not sufficiently rigorous. The school provides good guidance about careers and future options. Links with further education colleges and universities are good. Good links with primary schools help Year 7 students to settle in quickly. These links are being further strengthened through Sports College activities led by Minster College staff. All staff are well informed about child protection procedures, which conform to relevant guidance. Appropriate health and safety checks are regularly undertaken.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The College has responded successfully to issues raised in the previous inspection, for example, in ICT, which is now a strength of the school in Key Stage 4. The recently appointed principal and assistant principal have begun to improve the rigour of monitoring and evaluation, and a new chair of governors is supporting a more proactive approach by the governing body to determine the quality of school provision. All leaders recognise the importance of raising expectations amongst staff, and raising the aspirations of learners and the wider community. Self-evaluation is satisfactory, and accounts for performance trends well. School improvement planning, however, lacks success criteria, a budget, clear timelines and an evaluation procedure. Targets are not challenging enough to raise standards higher and so overcome barriers to achievement. The school periodically formally surveys parents, and also seeks responses at parents' evenings. About 15% of all parents returned the Ofsted inspection survey, and over 80% of these responses said that provision was good or better. Inclusion of all learners is good and reflects the priority it takes with governors. As a result, vulnerable learners succeed as well as

others, and the school provides every possible opportunity to encourage their further education beyond 16 and 18. The school overall receives a broadly typical level of funding for similar schools in similar settings, and is making sound use of these resources, particularly in delivering sixth form learning to local students.

Accommodation quality varies but there remain some out-dated poor quality learning environments that hamper progress. The complexities and condition of the site lead to disproportionately high maintenance costs. Governors are adding to their good day-to-day working knowledge of the school by more systematic reviews of departments, which will improve their ability to track explicit developments as they roll out. They have recently responded effectively to shortfalls identified in earlier local authority audits.



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## Inspection judgements

|  |                       |              |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | <b>School Overall</b> | <b>16-19</b> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 3   | 3   |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 1   | 1   |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage  | NA  | NA  |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 3   | 3   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | Yes | Yes |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes | Yes |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 3 | 3 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 3 | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress                              | 3 |   |

### Personal development and well-being

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                           | 2 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 2 |   |
| The behaviour of learners   | 2 |   |
| The attendance of learners  | 3 |   |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 2 |   |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 |   |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 3 |   |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |   |

### The quality of provision

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 3 | 3 |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 3 | 2 |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>   | 3 | 3 |

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 3   | 3   |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3   |     |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review      | 3   |     |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can                     | 3   |     |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money  | 3   |     |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 3   |     |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected  | Yes | Yes |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>  |     |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily  | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise  | Yes |
| Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse   | Yes |
| Learners are educated about sexual health   | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>   |     |
| Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements                                   | Yes |
| Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place  | Yes |
| Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism                                | Yes |
| Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them   | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>  |     |
| Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships   | Yes |
| Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them                   | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>                           |     |
| There is provision to promote learners' basic skills  | Yes |
| Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams                                  | Yes |
| Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form          | Yes |
| Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy               | Yes |

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Students Thank you for your consideration and helpful conversations during our visit to inspect your school. We took your views seriously, and appreciate your honesty and commitment to your College. Your school is successfully teaching you through a wide range of subjects, and also providing a rich programme of clubs and activities that are enriched by Sports College status, and thanks to the dedication of your teachers. They do put in a lot of their own time on your behalf, because they do want you to achieve your best. Thanks to them you are making sound academic progress, and are developing a good understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. We think sixth formers are particularly well served by a range of qualifications that fit well into the local community. Your own work on behalf of that community and for charity is another great feature, so overall we think you are being exceptionally well prepared for your future well-being. We found all the students we met to be polite, and consider that you behave well, as long as lessons are interesting! We agree with you that many lessons are enjoyable, and involve you in discussion and activity that help you to learn well. But some lessons have too much of the teacher talking without giving you all enough chance to contribute. We have asked the school to try to make all lessons as good as the best ones. Some teachers give you clear advice on how to improve your work, and we hope all marking will improve to match this. You do have exam targets, which we think you should view as a bare minimum, then try to have a go at a higher grade. Your new principal and his team are checking carefully on the quality of the school. They know what needs to be done, but we have asked them to improve the way the school plans to achieve higher standards. Best wishes for your future,  
Yours sincerely Brian Cartwright HMI Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools Alexandra House 33 Kingsway London WC2B 6SE T 0207 421 6800 F 0207 421 6707 [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)