



Marlborough School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117586
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280123
Inspection dates 25 January 2006 to 26 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. David Jones LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Watling Street
School category	Foundation		AL1 2QA
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01727856874
Number on roll	1155	Fax number	01727855285
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr.Phil Murray
Date of previous inspection	22 January 2001	Headteacher	Mrs. Anne Thomson

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	25 January 2006 - 26 January 2006	280123

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Marlborough School, a specialist Science College, is a mixed 11-18 comprehensive with 1,155 pupils. It is located on the southern side of St Albans, Hertfordshire, and is larger than most secondary schools. The school is increasingly popular with parents and many pupils come from outside the local area. The socio-economic background of the pupils is favourable compared to the national picture. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average having improved in the last two years. Currently, there are 8% more boys than girls on the school roll. Pupils are predominately of white British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is just below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is average, however, the number with a statement of special educational needs is below average. Pupil mobility is low. This specialist school operates as part of a Sixth Form consortium with two other schools and a local college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school judges all aspects of provision to be satisfactory. Overall, inspectors agree but note good and outstanding performance in some areas. Leadership and management are good, self-evaluation is outstanding and the monitoring and evaluation of teaching are rigorous and very effective. Good use is made of assessment information to inform management discussions and the school pastoral support system is good. The support provided for pupils with a statement of educational need and the progress these pupils make are outstanding. Specialist status in science has enriched the 14 to 19 curriculum, provided modern classroom facilities across the school and supported very good outreach work in primary schools. Attendance is in line with national figures and pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community. Teaching is satisfactory overall with a core that is good or better. The pupils' attitudes to learning are good, and effective teaching was seen in all subject areas. Standards of attainment are satisfactory overall but show notable variations in each Key Stage, pupil achievement is improving in all year groups. Although assessment information is used effectively to inform strategic decisions, it is not used consistently to inform teaching and learning. Difficulties with staff recruitment have forced the school to reduce provision in information and communication technology (ICT). The school gives good value for money because of the strengths noted in self-evaluation and the action taken. The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards have improved after a dip in performance and the school's capacity to improve is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the effectiveness and efficiency of its sixth form are satisfactory, with some good features. Standards vary significantly between subject areas but are generally close to expectations. Some subjects, notably art, reach above-average standards. School leaders are addressing underachievement in a few subjects and they are improving the monitoring of departmental performance. Good systems are in place but outcomes, in terms of improved standards, are not yet showing clearly. A two-day induction in July has helped Year 12 pupils to acclimatise to advanced level work. Teaching is broadly satisfactory in meeting the pupils' academic needs and good in respect of the guidance and support provided for the acquisition of independent learning skills. The pupils appreciate the support of teachers and pastoral staff and speak well of their efforts. A broad range of subjects is available via the consortium and plans for the extension of vocational provision are well advanced. Pupils enjoy their time in the sixth form. They appreciate the integration of the two year-groups and find the atmosphere conducive to learning. Many sixth formers make outstanding contributions to the school community by helping staff and younger pupils in a variety of imaginative roles. Almost all pupils who choose to study advanced level subjects complete their course. Careers and higher education advice are good. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that the school's extensive range of assessment information is used consistently by all teachers - continue to raise standards by focusing on learning outcomes - focus on achieving standards in all sixth form courses to match those of the most successful - continue to increase the proportion of good teaching by using the core of outstanding teaching available to inform and inspire - develop the curriculum provision for ICT to provide pupils with key skills and utilise opportunities to extend the use of computer-aided learning across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Attainment on entry to the school has improved and is broadly average. The unvalidated 2005 Key Stage 3 results show notable variations. Pupil progress was below average in English, close to expectations in science and above average in mathematics. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher grade in mathematics was well above the national figures. The percentage of pupils who gain five or more higher GCSE grades is close to the national average. However, the figure for those who achieve five or more such passes that include English and mathematics is disappointing. The proportion of pupils who gain five or more A* - D grade passes is well above average. Almost all pupils attained at least one GCSE level pass. Results in science, technology, food and art were significantly above the national figures. In the sixth form, standards have improved recently and are broadly average; the pupils make satisfactory progress. There were strong performances in art, general studies and textiles at advanced level, however, results in some subjects were below expectations. Most subjects and courses produce satisfactory results. Pupils in all year groups are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding at a satisfactory rate after a period when their progress was disrupted. In nearly two out of three lessons the pupils made above average, progress as a result of effective teaching that provided tasks well-matched to the pupils' learning needs. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make outstanding progress as a result of the very effective support available.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils enjoy their education a great deal and demonstrate good attitudes to learning. Attendance is close to the average for secondary schools and is improving. Pupils arrive punctually to school but some move slowly between subject areas. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good, pupils respect the use of the focus room as a sanction and the number of exclusions is being reduced. Pupils feel safe within the school and comment that bullying is dealt with effectively. The range of healthy foods and snacks available is increasing and advice on health issues is good. A significant number of pupils engage in extra-curricular sport. Very effective links with primary schools ensure effective support at the time of transfer; much of this has been developed within the context of the school's science Specialist College role.

Senior pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school community, taking responsibility for the effective school council and the organisation of charitable events. The ethos being created in the school is good and focuses on the personal development of the pupils. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good overall, with particular strengths in social and cultural enrichment. Weekly reflection themes raise awareness of festivals from other cultures but opportunities for spiritual development are not as extensive as other major issues. The pupils' relationships with their peers, teachers and other adults are good and reflect the school's commitment to racial harmony and responsibility to others. The school works with many external agencies to support pupils and to prepare them for later opportunities and careers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The overall quality of teaching and learning is at least satisfactory, however, it was good or better in nearly two out of three lessons. Outstanding teaching was seen in a number of subject areas. Where teaching is weak, steps are being taken to address this through supportive intervention by senior leaders. The level of support offered to individual teachers with identified areas for improvement is impressive. The best teaching is well-planned, with aims and expectations made very clear from the outset. The lessons move at a crisp pace, tasks are provided to challenge the pupils' different learning styles, and strategies are employed to involve the pupils as active participants. Where teaching is only satisfactory, opportunities to enhance the focus and pace of the lesson were overlooked. In these lessons the school's extensive range of student data was not always used to its best advantage. Inadequate lessons lacked clear objectives and failed to engage the pupils' attention. In some lessons the most able pupils are insufficiently challenged. Senior managers have identified those subjects where the number of students attaining the highest standards is below expectations and have analysed the causes of these weaknesses in teaching methodology. The school's excellent Teaching and Learning Handbook includes an effective marking policy which is generally used to good effect by teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Curriculum provision is satisfactory; it is appropriate and forward looking. Opportunities for academic or vocational studies are available, particularly in science, business, ICT, and engineering. The curriculum provision is influenced and supported by the sixth form consortium arrangements. GCSE choices are structured to meet student needs and an increasing range of vocational courses is available, including a well-managed Certificate in Personal Effectiveness. Science College status is having a significant impact and funding has been used to refurbish laboratories, develop a field study centre and provide new ICT hardware. It has inspired effective links with local primary

schools. Careers guidance is good. Students undertake work-shadowing, attend an insight to industry conference and take part in well-managed work experience. Many subject areas highlight vocational aspects of their courses and make a significant contribution to the pupils' future economic well-being. Careful planning has ensured that citizenship is covered effectively in tutorials, daily procedures and lessons. Staff shortages in ICT have required a reduction in provision but sensible action has been taken to reduce the impact of these problems. However, more use could be made of new classroom technology and related courses to develop teaching styles and extend the pupils' understanding of computer-aided learning. The curriculum is enhanced through a good range of clubs, including sports, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, hobbies and school subjects. An extensive range of visits is organised each year in the UK and abroad to theatres, activity centres and conferences. Some students took part in a World Challenge event in Mongolia in 2005.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school believes it provides good care for its pupils, and inspectors agree. All child protection and safety requirements are in place. Staff are alert to any symptoms of distress and provide effective support and guidance. The needs of all pupils, both educational and social, are identified when they arrive at school and appropriate support is provided. Those pupils who are initially disaffected or vulnerable are well integrated, enabling them to develop socially and learn effectively. The school counsellor and outside agencies provide effective care and guidance. Support for pupils who arrive in school with a limited knowledge of English is good. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities benefit from partnerships with external groups to help them to learn. The manner in which such pupils are included in all activities is outstanding, as is the progress they make. Pupils and parents are becoming increasingly involved in the review and target-setting processes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. A strong leadership team has recently been appointed; their energy and commitment have helped to secure a sense of purpose and community among the staff. The headteacher's vision for the school is clear to all. Outstanding self-evaluation takes into account the views of all major stakeholders; senior managers have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have a very good track record of making improvements. The monitoring and evaluation of performance are outstanding; a rigorous programme of lesson observation and support is systematically enhancing the quality of teaching. The school has developed an extensive database of assessment information which is used effectively to inform decision making but is not used consistently by all departments. The school's specialist science provision is well managed. Teaching and learning in this area is good and standards are rising. Managers at all levels direct improvement and promote the well-being of learners through high quality care and education. Equality

of opportunity is secure and discrimination tackled so that all learners make satisfactory progress. Good links exist with parents and outside agencies. There are appropriately qualified staff in almost all areas, although recruitment difficulties remain in ICT. The governing body are well informed and governance is good. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and resources are well used. In relation to the improvements secured since the appointment of the headteacher and the progress since the last inspection, the school gives good value for money. The leadership of the school is clearly focused on raising standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of learners. The impact is seen in the satisfactory progress made by all pupils, in their sense of security and well-being, and in its deservedly good reputation locally. The leadership and management provide the school with a good capacity to improve.

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
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

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
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	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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

Thank you for contributing to the inspection. It was good to meet you during my recent visit. I was impressed by your behaviour, how positive you are about your school and your good attitude to learning. I was particularly impressed by the way you enjoy lessons that challenge and involve you in your own learning. The skills we saw demonstrated in art, design technology and mathematics were impressive. I was pleased to receive the letters from your parents and have tried to answer their questions in the report, so please give them my thanks. As I have just said, I believe there are many good things about your school to be celebrated but there are also ways in which it can improve. The headteacher and the governors agree with my view that there needs to be more focus on ensuring you make good progress in all lessons. The school can further improve the use of assessment to help you learn. Senior managers will explain to the school council your role in this development. Further opportunities are needed for you to use ICT to enhance your learning. As pupils you can make a significant contribution to these developments by developing the debate in the school council. I look forward to hearing about your future successes.