

# Great Marlow School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110535
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	288708
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 May 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Nigel Fletcher HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1181
6th form	152
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr K Goulding
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs G Wilson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 November 2002
<b>School address</b>	Bobmore Lane Marlow SL7 1JE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01628 483752
<b>Fax number</b>	01628 475852

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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

Great Marlow School is a large secondary school in a county where there is a selection . Consequently, the overall attainment of students is slightly below average when they transfer from primary school. The school is near the borders with Berkshire and Oxfordshire. There is a balance of boys and girls although the proportions vary from year to year. Since the last inspection the number of students in the sixth form has grown by about 50%. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is just above average and that of students who have English as an additional language is slightly higher than in most schools. The number of students who have learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. The school accepts students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The number eligible for free school meals is about average. In 2005 the school was awarded specialist status in technology.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Great Marlow School is a good school and standards are above average. Students achieve well and make good progress, with outstanding progress in mathematics. The good quality of leadership and management across the school is a key reason for the school's success. There is a clear vision for the future of the school which is shared and supported by all staff. School leaders have a good understanding of how the school is doing and the means by which it can improve further to ensure that all students reach their full potential. The school recognises that there are still improvements to make, for example, by ensuring that there is consistency across the school in using assessment data to set effective targets for students, and to monitor their progress.

The personal development of students is good overall, and in some aspects outstanding. Parents report favourably on the progress and growing confidence of their children. One parent commented, 'My daughter has thrived since starting Great Marlow. I couldn't be happier with the level of care and teaching'. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary. Students enjoy their education and behave well around the school. They have excellent relationships with adults and with each other and students from different backgrounds mix effortlessly and harmoniously. They feel safe and are confident about the good care and support they receive from staff. Teaching is good overall, but in some lessons insufficient attention is given to individual needs and the more able students are not challenged enough. During the monitoring of lessons, not enough focus is put on the quality of students' learning. The curriculum meets the needs of students well and there are good opportunities for additional sporting, cultural and personal development activities. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and the specialist status in technology is having a good impact on improving learning across the school. The school has a good capacity to continue to improve and provides good value for money.

## Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The school has a well established sixth form which has grown consistently over recent years. The range of courses at GCE advanced level and in vocational subjects meets the needs of most students and the school is planning to extend its provision further. Students make good progress and their results match national averages, although these vary across different subject areas. The school is developing strategies to ensure greater consistency of achievement across all areas. Structured support is given to students who require it. The sixth form is led well and students receive good support from their teachers.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of the use of assessment, tracking and targeting systems across the school.
- Focus on students' learning when monitoring the quality of lessons.
- Raise the achievement of the more able students.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Pupils achieve well and attain standards that are above the national average. Students start the school with standards that are slightly below national averages and the proportion with high attainment on entry is much lower than average. In Years 7 to 9 students make good progress, with attainment broadly in line with the national average. However, more able students make less progress than their peers at this key stage and overall. By the end of Year 11 students perform significantly well, making outstanding progress in mathematics. GCSE results are above the national average, representing good progress compared with similar schools. Boys make better progress by Year 11, particularly the less able boys, although girls reach higher standards. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities perform particularly well. All students pass at least one GCSE at grade A\* to G, with 99% gaining at least five passes. Achievement of the higher levels at GCSE is in line with expectations although there is variation in performance between subjects. In the sixth form students' progress is good. Standards are broadly average although better in the vocational subjects.

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

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The personal development and well being of the students are good with some outstanding features. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Students talk politely and enthusiastically to visitors, and the school has a relaxed and convivial atmosphere. Students from different backgrounds mix easily and effortlessly both in and out of the classroom. One student said, 'Everyone works together here'. Generally students enjoy coming to school and attendance is good. Students have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy. For example, through the highly active school council students made a key contribution to the promotion of healthy eating so that many students choose healthy options at lunchtime. High numbers of students also take part in the variety of sports and other activities that are available.

Behaviour around the school is good. In lessons students are generally well behaved although a small minority sometimes disrupts the learning of others. However when this occurs it is managed well by staff. The school encourages a strong ethos of mutual respect and students feel part of a caring community. Students feel safe in school and say that bullying is rare. Any instances that occur are dealt with effectively and quickly. Students feel confident to talk to teachers about problems as they arise, knowing that they will be dealt with promptly. The contribution that students make to the school and wider community is outstanding, for example through charity fund raising. Work experience, lessons on citizenship, and the careers programme prepare students well for life after school.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning in the main school and the sixth form is good. In most lessons students make good progress and their personal development is strong. There are good relationships between students and teachers. Students' attitudes to learning are good but where the pace of learning is slow and the lesson content uninspiring, students lose concentration and their progress is restricted. The use of assessment to plan lessons and activities for the needs of individual students is inconsistent. In the best lessons teachers involve students in evaluating their own, and each other's, learning and provide clear direction in the use of assessment criteria. Where this occurs, students are aware of the standards they achieve and know what to do to improve. Many teachers ask probing questions and provide good opportunities for discussion and for independent learning. This leads to enthusiasm, interest and fast learning. Through the school's specialist status, information and communication technology (ICT) resources have improved considerably and are used well to support learning. Consequently, teachers adopt more adventurous teaching styles, promoting better understanding and enjoyment as is seen in mathematics and science. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive very good support for their learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum and other activities are good. The school has a clear focus on helping students reach their full potential academically and personally and evaluates the curriculum regularly. Drama is taught by specialist teachers as a discrete subject at Key Stage 3 and over the last four years this has strengthened the confidence and communication skills of students in the school. In Years 10 and 11 there are appropriate pathways and flexible choices to help students develop and pursue their interests. However, there is insufficient vocational provision to cater for all students' needs. In the sixth form there is a balance of vocational and non-vocational options. With a growing number of students applying to enter the sixth form, the school is expanding the range of subjects to respond to their needs. The good extra provision for students with learning difficulties enables them to progress as well as their peers. The school provides a wide range of additional activities such as clubs, trips and visits. For example, there are regular intensive study trips to Spain to support the learning of the language and team building activities for students entering Year 10. The school excels in rowing in particular and has gained many national awards in competitions.

### **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The school is committed to encouraging both enjoyment and achievement, and students recognise and value this. The school has effective systems and good links with outside agencies to ensure the students' welfare. Child

protection procedures are well established and all statutory checks are in place. Students are well prepared for coming to this school by a thoughtful induction programme which involves the support of older students and extra learning support staff.

Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well and make good progress in a caring environment. Students in need of support with basic literacy and numeracy skills are identified early and good strategies ensure their progress. Exemplary support for lower attaining mathematics groups has had a beneficial impact on standards in this subject. Similarly, support for weaker readers, involving input from sixth formers, is showing good impact. There is an established careers and advice programme allowing students to make informed choices about options for GCSEs and post-16. There are good systems in place to monitor and support academic progress but the school recognises the need to ensure greater consistency across school in target setting and tracking at course level.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership. She sets a clear direction and has created a positive and supportive ethos in the leadership group, with a strong commitment to shared objectives. The senior leadership team works well with a committed staff to promote a clear focus on inclusion and to create the conditions in which students thrive and make good progress. Improvements have been made in many areas since the last inspection and the school has good capacity to continue to improve. Parents have confidence in the school although they would like their views taken into account more often.

The school's approach to self-evaluation is thorough and based on strong analysis of data. It has an accurate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. It acknowledges that it requires further development in its evaluation of teaching and learning. For example, in the monitoring of lessons there is insufficient emphasis on the assessment of students' learning. There is a very good range of opportunities and imaginative approaches to staff development. This is especially apparent in the training that middle managers have undertaken in recent years which has raised skills, strengthened their sense of accountability, and had a significant impact on the quality of education in the school.

Through the school's technology specialist status ICT resources have improved significantly since the last inspection. Students have much better access to computers to assist with their learning. The governing body understands its role well. Governors develop their knowledge of the school through regular visits, bringing a wide range of expertise. They are supportive and challenge school leaders appropriately. The school manages its finances well, balancing its budget while finding resources to plan much needed improvements to accommodation. In the sixth form good leadership has been effective in improving achievement and providing more curricular opportunities for the growing number of students.

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## Annex A

## 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>
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### 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>	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### 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	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
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

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

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

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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

16 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Great Marlow School, Marlow, SL7 1JE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff and visiting lessons. Many of you and your parents told us how the good relationships between you and the staff meant that you enjoyed school and felt you were progressing.

You told us that your school provided a good education. We fully agree with this view and are satisfied that the school leaders have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school has many strengths and we were particularly impressed by:

- your attitude to learning and healthy living, and the way you treat each other with respect
- the way the school is led by senior staff and the commitment of its staff
- the support the school provides for those students having difficulties in learning
- the courses and other activities that the school provides to ensure that you make good progress both academically and socially.

To make your school even better we have recommended that it:

- ensures that the setting of challenging targets with you, and monitoring your progress, is consistent across the school
- raises the achievement of the more able students
- focuses on what you are learning when monitoring the quality of lessons.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you behave well and work hard in lessons and help the school put in place these plans, then standards will rise further.

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Nigel Fletcher HMI