

Philip Morant School and College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115320
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	290205
Inspection dates	13–14 December 2006
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1621
6th form	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Lydon Johnson
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Cowans
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001
School address	Rembrandt Way Colchester Essex CO3 4QS
Telephone number	01206 545222
Fax number	01206 244000

Age group	11–19
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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

Philip Morant School and College is a large comprehensive school located in the Prettygate ward of Colchester. The majority of students come from socially and economically advantaged areas of the town. Most students are White British and almost all speak English as their first language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. Whilst the proportion of students who have statements of Special Educational Need is considerably lower than the national figure, a resource centre for the deaf provides specialist support for students with particular learning disabilities.

The school has been a specialist Technology college since 1994, focussing on design technology, mathematics, and science, and was awarded Leading Edge status in 2003.

After managing the school on an acting basis for eighteen months, the headteacher was appointed permanently to lead the school in January 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Philip Morant is a satisfactory school with some good features, for example in the contributions to the community made by the students.

When students join the school in Year 7, standards are above average as they are when they reach the end of Year 11 and this represents satisfactory progress. GCSE results of 16 year old students are generally good but students do less well in national tests at the age of 14. In particular, students are not making sufficient progress in English at Key Stage 3, especially the most able. So although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, its performance in Key Stage 3 English is inadequate. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that has been made to remedy this weakness. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

The personal development and well-being of students, and the care, guidance and support that they receive from the school, is satisfactory with some good features. Students make a very positive contribution to the community. They enjoy the responsibilities that they are given in their tutor groups, houses, or across the whole school. Students make great efforts to help others by raising funds for various charities. The work of the school's resource base for the deaf is very good and was described by one parent as, 'A truly inspirational example of how dedicated teachers can make a real difference to the education of children with special needs.'

The curriculum is satisfactory. There are strengths in the curriculum and there are courses to meet the needs of all students, whatever their ability. For example, some students are able to study triple science and additional statistics at GCSE, whilst others are able to take vocational options. However, the curriculum does not provide enough formal opportunities for personal, social and health education for all students, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and the school does not meet the statutory requirements for teaching religious education in Year 11.

Whilst teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and use this to plan lessons well, teaching is only satisfactory overall because lessons do not always challenge students sufficiently or involve them enough in their own learning. This sometimes leads to inappropriate student behaviour. The quality of marking is inconsistent and does not always help students to understand how they can improve their work. Information technology is used well by teachers in classrooms and by students, particularly with their independent homework.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Led by the headteacher, the senior team has re-evaluated its priorities and has identified what it needs to do to improve further. Whilst the school is involved in many initiatives, its priorities do not focus sharply enough on the achievement of students at Philip Morant School and College.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Overall, sixth form provision is satisfactory. Students are well supported by their tutors and they make satisfactory progress during their time in the sixth form. Students receive good quality personal development and good care, guidance and support. This, and the wide curriculum offered, attract students to the college and help to make the sixth form provision distinctive. Retention on courses is good which shows that students have selected their courses correctly and that they enjoy their learning. Links with universities and further education colleges ensure that students are well equipped for their future careers. The sixth form is led

efficiently and students enjoy being part of the campus community. There is a strong student commitment to the College Association, which organises a variety of social and charitable events. Students are enthusiastic, mature, and co-operative and make a strong contribution to the school and sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in Key Stage 3 English, particularly for higher-attaining students.
- Broaden the range of teaching strategies used by all teachers to challenge all students, and better develop students' thinking skills and understanding.
- Ensure that all teachers are well-equipped and supported to manage behaviour in all lessons.
- Sharpen school improvement processes with the central focus of raising and sustaining achievement for all students at Philip Morant School.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

When students arrive in at the start of Year 7, they have already achieved standards that are generally above average. Their results in GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 are also above average, so overall progress is satisfactory. Throughout the school, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

There are some subjects where students perform consistently well at GCSE including media studies, music, and drama; geography and history results were also good in 2006. The most able students do well in the three separate sciences, and in mathematics and statistics. GCSE religious education is taken early in Year 10 by all students with great success. Information and communication technology (ICT) results were very low in 2006 and the school has already taken action on this by revising the entry policy and course structures for all students.

Whilst progress in mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 is broadly satisfactory, their progress in English is inadequate, particularly for the more able pupils and, for two years running, standards have been average. The school has identified this as a key area for improvement and has sought help from the local authority, but the impact of this intervention has yet to be seen.

Students join the sixth form from Philip Morant School and from a number of other nearby schools. When they start Year 12, overall standards are in line with the national average. Examination results are average, and so progress in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal and social development and well-being are satisfactory overall with a number of strengths. The great majority of students like coming to school. This is reflected in their positive attitudes and their good attendance rates. Younger students feel safe because of the effective mentoring and support from their older friends, particularly the bullying mentors and house leaders. Many students take up opportunities to be involved in the running of the school. They demonstrate social and moral responsibility through many charitable activities, including those concerning third world countries. They are actively involved in school and house councils.

Whilst these are strengths, further opportunities for students' development are missed because of the timetable arrangements in Key Stage 4.

Students are developing a good understanding of how to live healthily. Their healthy lifestyle working group has played an important part in improving the school meal and snack options and students have welcomed the changes. The provision of smart and secure bicycle sheds has encouraged many students to adopt healthy and environmentally friendly modes of transport to school.

Students' behaviour as they move around the school and in most lessons is good, and is very good in formal situations such as assemblies. This reflects the responsible attitude held by most students. However, a small minority of the parents who responded to the inspection survey expressed concern about behaviour in lessons. This reflects their high expectations. Older students and staff spoke positively about improvements in behaviour that have taken place over the past year, but it is true that when teaching is not as strong as it could be, some students' behaviour is unsatisfactory.

Students' preparation for later working life and economic awareness is good because of the school's strong work related education provision. This is reflected in their substantial involvement in work experience, mini-enterprise activities, and industry links.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Whilst all teachers use the school's common framework for lesson planning, and subject knowledge is good, teacher presentation dominates in too many lessons. This means that there are not enough opportunities for students to develop their thinking skills and creative responses in these lessons. The quality of marking is variable. Some subject areas give helpful written advice, but others do not provide students with enough guidance about how they can improve their work.

In the lessons where teaching and learning is better, teachers are precise and confident in their delivery. Effective questioning encourages students to contribute to discussions. There is good use of homework tasks, particularly online learning through the school portal, to develop students' independent learning skills and set challenging tasks for students of all abilities.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified at an early stage. Effective strategies provide them with teaching to match their needs, especially for those who have hearing impairment. Some of these initiatives have encouraged other students to learn signing. This encourages them to communicate effectively and work collaboratively with their friends in lessons. Support staff and teaching assistants are being increasingly integrated into the work of the school and are used effectively in the classroom.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum in the main school is satisfactory. The Key Stage 3 programme meets statutory requirements. There are three learning pathways in Key Stage 4, including provision to enable a small group of students to follow vocational courses at college for one day each week.

Specialist status in technology has a considerable impact on the curriculum and mathematics, science, and design technology have all benefited. However, time constraints in Years 10 and 11 make it very difficult to cover the PSHE and citizenship programme in sufficient depth. Religious education is not timetabled in Year 11 and the school recognises that this does not meet statutory requirements, although all students take the GCSE course in Year 10.

Throughout the school, students enjoy many opportunities provided by a range of extra-curricular activities including drama, music, and sport. The 'signing choir' has a national reputation and is further evidence of the way that hearing impaired provision is integrated into school life. A Key Stage 3 activities week in the summer term offers a diversity of experiences on and off the school site.

The sixth form curriculum is good. Students select from an extensive and varied range of academic and vocational courses and this has helped to maintain the numbers of students in the college. There are also opportunities to re-take or upgrade GCSE English, mathematics and science. Sixth form students say that, 'We get a good deal here.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall with some good features. Support for students who have special educational needs and hearing impairment is very good because it focuses on the needs of the individual. Links with external agencies are well developed and enrich this quality of care and support even further. All safeguarding arrangements are securely in place. Within a large school site, pupils work in a safe environment. For example, safety procedures are particularly well-emphasised in science lessons. The school has taken steps to increase site security.

The house structure is used effectively to organise the school into manageable units where tutors can get to know students better. Formal procedures for tracking student progress are detailed, robust, and accessible to staff. Pupils are aware of how well they are doing and of their targets for improvement, but they are confused about their significance and how these are related to National Curriculum levels. Information provided about future options and careers is helpful to students.

The school makes very effective use of its website to provide up-to-date information for parents, support for learning, and summaries of student's self assessment. Parents are consulted regularly through questionnaires and at meetings. A few parents who responded to the inspection survey do not feel that the school always responds quickly enough to their enquiries or concerns.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

Over the past year, the leadership team has created a sense of common purpose among staff and has built good collaborative working relationships with governors, and has begun to respond to where and how standards of teaching, learning, and student behaviour could be improved. However, the impact of this action has yet to be seen in all areas and will need time to be fully realised.

The school's self-evaluation is honest and accurate but judgements are over-generous. The school improvement plan is detailed but includes too many initiatives that do not focus sufficiently on the raising of students' achievement. Joint lesson observations undertaken during inspection showed that whilst school leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well, they sometimes grade the quality of teaching and learning higher than it is.

The day-to-day organisation of this large and complex school is good and ensures that everything runs smoothly. The student school improvement group works effectively to support the school leadership group. The chair of governors has a clear understanding of the schools' strengths and areas for development.

Principles of best value are applied thoughtfully to the purchase of services and use of the specialist school grant has enhanced many areas of the curriculum. The school's financial management is secure and value for money is satisfactory.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
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	2	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	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	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	2	
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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

15 December 2006

Dear Students

Philip Morant School, Rembrandt Way, Colchester, CO3 4QS.

You may remember that we visited your school just before the Christmas holiday. I am writing to you now to let you know the findings of our inspection visit.

Firstly, can I say how much we enjoyed talking with you in our meetings and around the school. One of the things that impressed us most was the contribution that you make to the school and local communities. Many of you enjoy the responsibilities that you are given, and the efforts that you make to help others through charity fundraising are commendable. We were also very impressed with the work of the resource base for the deaf and the way that you all support that work with, for example, the signing choir.

There are some good opportunities for you at Philip Morant School. You are able to choose from a wide range of subjects in Key Stage 4 including triple science, statistics, and vocational options and in the sixth form there is a good and varied choice of courses and activities.

Your work and results show us that the school gives you a satisfactory standard of education. To help make the school better than this, there are four priorities that we have asked Mrs Cowans and the staff to work on and, as you will see, you have your part to play too.

- Results in Year 9 English tests must be improved. This is important, so we may come back to the school to check on this.
- Your teachers should make sure that all their lessons are interesting and challenging.
- Your behaviour in every lesson must be of the same good standard that we saw in the majority of lessons during the inspection.
- The central focus of the school must be directed towards your achievement.

To achieve these goals, Mrs Cowans and the staff will have to work together with you and your parents, as a team. As I say, everyone will have their part to play. Thank you once again for the important part that you played in this inspection, and good luck with your future studies and career plans.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector