

The Maplesden Noakes School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118873
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291275
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	David Butler HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	964
6th form	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Laraine Jalili-Hodges
Headteacher	Jane Prideaux
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002
School address	Buckland Road Maidstone ME16 0TJ
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Introduction

Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Maplesden Noakes School is located in west Maidstone and predominantly serves the local community. The school accepts students who have either not passed or have elected not to take the Kent selection tests in Year 6. The proportion of students from ethnic minority groups is low. Thirty eight students are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. The on-site hearing impaired unit currently caters for ten students. The school was designated as a specialist business and enterprise school in September 2004. The post-16 provision is part of a local consortium arrangement with other schools and a college of further education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Maplesden Noakes School provides a good education for its students. The school is calm and orderly and students feel safe and well cared for. Students are friendly and welcoming. They make good progress and achieve well by the end of compulsory schooling. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C is above average but it is below average when English and mathematics are included. Students achieve well because teaching is good; they are provided with effective support and a curriculum that meets the full range of needs and interests. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress and are included fully in lessons and other activities. Good progress has been made on most of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report but ensuring that higher attaining students reach their full potential remains an issue.

Most students enjoy their education and this is reflected in their good attendance and positive attitudes to learning. Students are able to express their views through the student council but a significant number feel they are insufficiently engaged in making decisions and helping to run the school. Students' personal development is good. They know how to lead healthy lives and are aware of the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. The programme of business and enterprise activities and careers guidance results in students being well prepared for employment, further education and adult life.

The great majority of parents are supportive of the school but a significant number feel that insufficient account is taken of their views and that there are some shortcomings in the school's communication with them. The school has implemented considerable changes in the last few years and the reasons for making these are not always fully understood by parents. The school works effectively with external agencies to support students' well-being. It has used its specialism to support some successful work in other schools and courses for adults in the local community.

The school is well led and managed and this is reflected in the improvements which have taken place in standards and achievement, with the school achieving its best ever GCSE results in 2006. Managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have demonstrated that they have good capacity to bring about further improvement. Governors provide satisfactory support. They have been instrumental in bringing about major improvements to buildings and to the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) but they have been less effective in monitoring and evaluating how well the school is performing. The school makes efficient use of its funds and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Sixth form provision is satisfactory with some good and improving features. The school's open access policy means that students enter the sixth form with standards below the usual level. Students make satisfactory progress. Examination results are slightly below average but are improving. Good advice and guidance ensure that courses are well matched to students' interests and capabilities and the great majority of students complete their courses. The school provides an adequate range of courses, mainly in applied and vocational subjects at Advanced level. The choice of courses is widened through the consortium arrangement but the take-up is modest. Teachers have a strong knowledge of their subjects and teaching is good. In the past, learning has only been satisfactory but much tighter monitoring of students' attendance, progress and

study habits this year looks likely to result in improved standards in the summer examinations. Students enjoy their sixth form experience and appreciate the strong support and encouragement they receive. Their personal development is good and they are well prepared for higher education and employment. The sixth form is well led and managed and there is good capacity to bring about further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure higher attaining students are fully challenged so they achieve as well as possible.
- Develop more effective communication and consultation procedures with parents.
- Take greater account of students' views and involve them more effectively in the running of the school.
- Develop the governing body's role in monitoring and evaluating the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Across Years 7 to 11, students make good progress and most achieve well. Standards are broadly average. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students enter the school with prior attainment slightly below the national average and with relatively few having higher-level skills. Key Stage 3 tests are taken a year early at the end of Year 8. Results are below average but this represents at least satisfactory achievement for most students. Lesson observations during the inspection confirm this view.

Good teaching enables students to make good progress in Key Stage 4. Achievement is good and, in English, it is outstanding. Standards are rising and, in 2006, the school enjoyed its best ever GCSE results. The proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grades A* to C was well above average but below average if English and mathematics are included. There were, however, significant variations across subjects. Standards were below average in mathematics but were well above average in vocational subjects. Current Year 11 students are on course to achieve their challenging targets. There is some variation in the achievement of different groups of students. Boys achieve well whereas for girls and higher attaining students, achievement is satisfactory. Good support enables students with learning difficulties and disabilities to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are strengths in the main school and in the sixth form. This is a result of the good care, guidance and support they receive. The great majority of students enjoy school and the friendships they make and this is reflected in their good attendance and their positive attitudes to learning. Students are courteous and thoughtful and behave well. Permanent exclusions are rare and fixed-term exclusions are low. Students pay careful attention to their own safety and that of others in lessons and around the school. There is an orderly and friendly atmosphere in the school during break and lunch times. There are few incidents of bullying or other forms of harassment. Students have a good understanding of healthy eating and the benefits of exercise and act accordingly. They are well aware of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. There is a good take-up of sporting and other fitness-related

activities. The strong programme of business and enterprise activities helps students develop good skills for future employment and adult life. Students' social and cultural development is good. They have a keen awareness of right and wrong but have relatively few opportunities for spiritual reflection. Students are heavily involved in raising money for various charities but they have limited involvement in supporting local community activities. Students are able to make their views known through the school council but this does not have a high profile. A significant number of students feel that they are not sufficiently involved in discussions about changes and would like more direct contact with senior managers. Younger students have relatively few opportunities to take on formal responsibilities and contribute to the development of the school community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. Lessons are generally engaging and characterised by positive relationships between staff and students. Students are very appreciative of teachers' commitment to them and the help that is offered beyond lessons. One student commented, 'The teachers expect a lot of us and that makes us want to do well.' Provision for ICT has improved greatly since the previous inspection and students now make effective use of computers to aid their learning. The introduction of interactive whiteboards and other modern technologies helps make lessons lively and motivating. The school's emphasis on improving teaching means that staff are encouraged to reflect upon and share best practice across subjects.

Most teachers know their subjects well. Lessons are well planned and include a range of activities and questioning techniques to ensure that everyone in the class is involved. Students are generally clear about what they are meant to be learning. Support for students with additional educational needs is effective and helps them to make good progress. In some lessons the most capable students do not always achieve as well as they should because they are not sufficiently challenged by the tasks set. Students receive helpful oral feedback on their work but written comments do not always signal clearly how improvements can be made. A number of classes are taken by more than one teacher and, in some cases, this impedes the continuity of work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum in the main school is good and relevant to students' needs. It is satisfactory in the sixth form. Radical changes have been made in the past three years. Students take the national Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations a year earlier than normal. The aim of this ambitious move is to provide more personalised programmes for all students in Year 11, including taking different subjects and embarking on Advanced-level courses. The first cohort of students to experience this curriculum is currently in Year 10 so it is too early to evaluate its effect on students' achievement. All Year 9 students are able to access a wide range of vocational courses and there is a strong work-based curriculum, designed to meet the needs of particular students. Effective use is made of the school's specialism to enhance provision in subjects, particularly

in mathematics and ICT. The curriculum is enriched through regular 'focus days' when the normal timetable is suspended. These days are generally valued and enjoyed by students and include aspects of health and careers education, the development of business and enterprise skills and cultural visits. Parents and students are right to be concerned about the current restricted access to library facilities and the lack of a professional librarian.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students throughout the school receive good care, guidance and support. The school makes effective provision, such as the use of special rooms for students whose behaviour has been unacceptable or for those who are vulnerable. Their use is well understood and valued by students. Procedures for health and safety and for child protection are robust and there are staff trained in first aid to deal with emergencies. Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is good and students with hearing impairment are able to participate fully in lessons. Students are provided with good guidance in making their option choices and in making decisions about further education and employment. Students' academic progress is carefully monitored and remedial action taken when they appear to be underperforming. Students are generally aware of their target grades but younger students are not always familiar with their personal learning goals and what they need to do to improve. Support staff generally make a valuable contribution to students' learning in lessons but sometimes their impact is reduced because their role is not specific enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership and management of the school, including the sixth form, are good. A shared vision focuses on raising achievement, developing the skills students need in adult life and encouraging innovation in teaching and learning. Managers make effective use of their evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses to identify appropriate priorities and bring about improvement. This is based on good analysis of data, lesson observations, questionnaires completed by parents and students and external evaluations.

Good progress has been made on the areas identified for improvement in the last inspection. Effective use is being made of the very considerable investment in ICT to support teaching and learning. Better line management arrangements support the work of subject leaders. More robust systems have been established to monitor and track students' progress. The accuracy of assessment has been improved. Less progress has been made on ensuring that higher attaining students are sufficiently challenged and this remains an issue for improvement. Subject leaders are making better use of data from assessment and the evidence they gather from lesson observations to bring about improvement but this is not yet consistently good in all areas of the curriculum.

The school canvasses the views of parents through questionnaires and other means but a significant number feel that they are not consulted sufficiently and not enough account is taken of their concerns. In some cases this is because the reasoning behind particular decisions

is not fully understood by parents. A considerable number of parents also feel that communication with them is not good enough. Their concerns include information on the school's website being out of date and an alleged lack of response to their communications with the school.

The governing body provides satisfactory support and meets statutory requirements, apart from ensuring that there is a daily act of collective worship for all students. Since the last inspection governors have been instrumental in bringing about major improvements to the accommodation and to the provision of ICT. Recent difficulties have resulted in the governing body not being as effective as it might be, particularly in carrying out its role in monitoring and evaluating how well the school is performing.

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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>	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?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
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

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	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 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?	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	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

18 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Maplesden Noakes School, Maidstone, ME16 0TJ

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for helping us during the recent inspection of your school. I would like to share some of our findings with you.

We think The Maplesden Noakes School is a good school because you achieve well and your personal development is good. Many of you told us that you enjoy school, find it friendly and feel safe and well supported. We agree with these views. We also think that you are well taught and that teachers are very committed to doing their best for you. Most of you attend well and have good attitudes to learning. The school is calm and orderly and your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. You normally get on well with each other and with your teachers. You generally value the 'focus' days and feel they are helping you to understand how to live healthy lifestyles and develop the skills you will need in adult life. We feel you are given good support in making decisions about options, further education and employment. You are provided with a wide choice of subjects in Year 9 and many of you participate in lunchtime and after-school activities, particularly sport. We feel the school is well managed and that it is making good use of its business and enterprise specialist status.

We have suggested some improvements to make your school even better:

- Many of you told us that you do not feel enough account is taken of your views and that you would like to be more involved in the running of the school. We agree with you and have asked the school to seek ways of doing this.
- We have asked the school to improve consultation and communication with your parents.
- We feel that the higher attaining students amongst you need to be challenged more so that they achieve the best they can.
- While governors have helped to bring about many improvements, we feel they should do more to monitor and evaluate how well your school is performing.

We hope you will play your part in helping to make these improvements and wish you every success in the future.

David Butler Her Majesty's Inspector