

Mascalls School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118911
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291285
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1294
6th form	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alastair Simpson
Headteacher	Vanessa Everett
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2002
School address	Maidstone Road Paddock Wood Tonbridge TN12 6LT
Telephone number	01892 835366
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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

This large school is expanding rapidly. The school has achieved specialist status in visual arts and is a centre for training teachers. Other schools in the area operate a policy of selection. Whilst the number of students taking up free school meals is below average, the school serves communities where there is significant disadvantage.

There are few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and fewer still with English as an additional language.

The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. Of these a few have a statement of special educational need.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school with some outstanding features. It is a purposeful place where everyone's right to work, learn and develop as an individual is respected. Consequently, students make good progress to achieve above average standards.

The introduction of mixed-age 'advisory groups' of students that meet regularly during the week is contributing powerfully to the development of positive attitudes and students' self-belief. Students are encouraged to express opinions about their school and be aware of the part they play in its improvement. Students, and many parents, rightly feel the school is improving and take pride and pleasure in its achievements. Good care, guidance and support, combined with good personal development, ensure that most students mature as responsible young people able to make informed choices about their lives.

Students appreciate and enjoy the rich range of opportunities available to them. The good curriculum meets students' needs and is flexible in accommodating their choices. The school's specialism in visual arts has extended the opportunities available and generated a culture of creativity that helps students develop confidence and a sense of their own identity. A good variety of extra activities also encourages students to explore and develop their potential.

Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. The systems for monitoring teaching and learning are excellent. Learning is carefully evaluated and if students are in danger of not meeting the challenging targets set for them, staff intervene with tailored support to rectify matters. The school recognises the need to develop the independence of learners so they are able to apply and refine their learning skills throughout their lives.

Overall, leadership and management are good. The headteacher's excellent leadership is strongly focused on continuous improvement and raising standards of achievement. Her clear vision and unflagging commitment ensure the school is always moving forward. She is well supported by a talented senior leadership team and an astute governing body. Together, they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and have identified appropriate priorities for improvement, such as subject leadership. There is a good training programme in place to boost the effectiveness of leadership at all levels. The school knows where it is going and how to get there. Its capacity to improve is excellent because it examines its performance carefully and takes action to make things better.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The leadership, effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Areas for improvement are accurately identified and appropriate steps taken to address them. Standards in the sixth form are above average, and students' achievement is good. Teaching overall is good, with some outstanding features. Teachers are enthusiastic, and use their subject knowledge well to capture students' curiosity and prepare them for examinations. Good personal development ensures sixth formers are positive role models for other students. They contribute well to the life of the school, particularly in mentoring younger students through the mixed-age advisory groups. They receive good advice and guidance which enable them to make informed choices about further study and employment. The school offers an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses at advanced level, and works well with other local providers to ensure that students of all abilities can access courses at other levels. Students are well supported: the

school carefully monitors their progress and intervenes effectively when there is cause for concern. Students are very positive about their experiences in the sixth form. They feel they are valued as individuals and gain skills which will stand them in good stead in later life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the effectiveness of leadership at all levels but particularly subject leadership.
- Develop methods of teaching and learning that help students apply and refine their learning skills independently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students make good progress in relation to their starting points to reach standards above the national average by the end of Years 9, 11 and 13. The school sets appropriately challenging targets that are mostly met and sometimes exceeded.

Whilst the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE is above the national average, staffing difficulties in mathematics slowed students' progress in Years 10 and 11. However, the school has responded to this issue quickly and effectively. The excellent systems for tracking the performance of students indicate that standards will rise in the subject with a substantial increase in the number of students gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics.

Vulnerable students, for example those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well, owing to the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy coming to school and want to achieve well. Attendance is above the national average. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The 'advisory' pastoral system has succeeded in improving students' attitudes and strengthening relationships between younger and senior students.

Students enjoy participating in activities and understand the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. They contribute well to the life of the school, frequently taking the initiative in organising activities, raising money for charity and participating in an active student council. The personal, social and health education programme equips students with an understanding of issues and skills relevant to their future lives.

Students say they feel safe at school and are confident in seeking guidance and support from each other and from their personal advisor. Their behaviour is good around the school and in most lessons. The number of fixed-term exclusions in the past year was high, but the school has been successful in substantially reducing the figure this year. A small minority of parents express concern about students' behaviour.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is good overall and ensures students achieve well. A rigorous system of peer lesson observations, together with wide-ranging and well focused professional development for teachers, has contributed to the progress made in strengthening the quality of teaching and learning.

Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength. Students enjoy learning because most teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and plan a range of stimulating activities, well matched to students' learning styles and abilities. They make good use of resources including interactive whiteboards to add variety and challenge in lessons. The most successful lessons are well organised and conducted at a lively pace. Relationships add powerfully to learning because they are based on mutual trust and give students the confidence to make mistakes. Teachers use praise well to motivate students. Learning objectives are clear and students understand the purpose of their work.

Outstanding practice often includes the skilful use of questioning to deepen students' understanding, opportunities for them to evaluate how they have been successful in their learning and the scope to apply new learning independently. In contrast, some lessons are over-directed by teachers and do not encourage students to think for themselves. As a result, their attention wanders and a few get caught up in low level disruption.

Regular assessment provides information that helps set appropriate targets for students. Marking of their work, however, varies too much. Some is of high quality but too often there is a lack of precision in what students need to do next to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. The wide range of options and pathways ensures provision is well matched to the needs of individual students. The options in Years 10 and 11 enable students to take a mixture of academic and vocational qualifications. Links with a nearby college also provide opportunities to follow courses related to work. Accelerated courses and summer schools enhance the choices for gifted and talented students. In addition to the subjects normally provided, there are significant benefits from specialist status in visual arts that spill into other subject areas, for example the use of cameras in microscopes for science and photographing movement in physical education.

The wide range of extra-curricular activities, including good opportunities for organised games and sports, makes an important contribution to students' development and enjoyment. After consultation, the school has quite rightly decided to increase the minimum length of lessons to enhance the delivery of the curriculum and ensure sufficient scope for a range of activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The systems for child protection, health and safety procedures are secure and robust. Students overwhelmingly feel that the pastoral system contributes significantly to their social and emotional development and complements their academic success. Advisors know their students exceptionally well and create a safe and supportive environment. Extensive tracking ensures every child's progress is carefully monitored and evaluated. Swift action is taken to deal with any underperformance. The school's monitoring system, called e-portal, gives parents immediate access to how well their children are working and behaving. Most students know about their targets but opportunities for reinforcement in the marking of work are sometimes missed.

The learning support department makes a strong contribution to supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities ensuring they achieve equally well. Support staff are effectively deployed. As one student commented, 'they are so positive about your work and help guide you through lessons'. Strong links with parents and external agencies increase the school's effectiveness.

The school is inclusive. For example, students from a community including Gypsy/ Roma and Travellers of Irish heritage are happily settled in the school. One student summed it up when he said, 'I enjoy coming to school because I feel I belong'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has made good progress since its previous inspection because, together, senior leaders play a highly effective role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. Excellent systems for linking information about students' achievement and well-being to the evaluation of their progress are driving up standards. The professional development of all staff is given a high priority and supports continuous improvement. The robust system of line management keeps leaders sharply focused on their accountability for students' achievement.

Whilst there is excellent potential amongst subject leaders, some are inexperienced and still acquiring the skill of extracting strategic messages from the day-to-day work of their teams. Senior leaders are rightly focusing on developing leadership at every level to ensure the consistent and effective implementation of policies and systems.

Governors are well informed and dedicated. They test the validity of their knowledge through their monitoring activities. Consequently, they are well placed to influence the direction of the school and provide effective challenge and keen support for its future development.

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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	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	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
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

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	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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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	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, 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

18 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Mascalls School, Paddock Wood, TN12 6LT

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your openness and cooperation. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection. Your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it.

Yours is a good school; some aspects of its work are excellent. Leadership is strong and focused on ensuring that everyone can achieve their best. You are making good progress and standards are rising. Senior leaders know the school very well and are excellent at identifying strengths and taking action to improve things. Of course, the contribution you make to improving your school is at the heart of everything. We agree that the advisory groups have really helped to improve attitudes. You have grown in confidence and the belief that you can change the school and your own lives for the better. Staff have worked successfully to get the curriculum right for you and have plans to make it even better. There is a good range of courses available to you and a wide choice of extra activities that help you to develop as well-rounded, outgoing young people. You are well looked after and told us you feel safe, happy and supported at school. Most of you understand the importance of making a positive contribution to your school and the wider community. We were pleased to see how well you are developing as reliable and thoughtful young people. Sometimes, a few of you get involved in behaviour that interrupts learning. Those responsible need to think about how this might stop them and others from getting on well.

Staff and governors are ambitious for you. They want you to aim high and have clear plans for bringing about further improvement. We have asked them to keep on developing everybody's leadership skills (including yours) and help you to understand how you learn best so you can use those skills independently throughout your lives.

We think if you keep working and learning together things will just keep getting better. Of course, if you believe enough and work hard enough you can achieve anything.

With very best wishes for the future,

Jacqueline White Her Majesty's Inspector