



Malmesbury School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126452
Local Authority Wiltshire
Inspection number 293563
Inspection date 9 November 2006
Reporting inspector Anthony Shield

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Corn Gastons
School category	Community		Malmesbury
Age range of pupils	11–18		SN16 0DF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01666 829700
Number on roll (school)	1028	Fax number	01666 829701
Number on roll (6th form)	199		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Deborah Gray
		Headteacher	Tim Gilson (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Malmesbury School is a larger than average comprehensive school serving a rural community in Malmesbury and its surrounding villages. Most pupils are from a White British background and there are only small minorities from other ethnic heritages. The school has joint science and performing arts specialist status. Fewer than average pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is below average. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher was on secondment and the school was being led by an acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Malmesbury School is a good school with a number of significant and outstanding strengths. It benefits from pupils whose positive attitudes and sheer enjoyment of school contribute strongly to their achievement. At the same time, the school's leadership is exceptional, offering both imagination and a thoughtful concern for all who work and learn in the school. It has created a culture of high expectations and ambition, where students' personal development is as important as their academic achievement.

Parents are enthusiastic in their support of the school. Typical of comments received by inspectors were: 'Malmesbury is a great school ... caring and committed teachers inspire on a daily basis' and 'My children could not have been better educated or happier than they have been.'

Standards are above average and students achieve well throughout the school, including in the sixth form. Results both at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations have been consistently good. Results in mathematics and science are particularly good in Key Stage 3, but performance in English is also strong. At GCSE, results have been consistently good for many years and pupils do very well in most subjects. Good and sometimes inspiring teaching ensures that pupils make good progress. Teachers have high ambitions for their students and they respond with determination and a pride in what they do. However, many students are not confident in managing their own learning or in thinking for themselves, often lacking the skills to pursue ideas independently of the teacher.

The school's status as a science and performing arts college is promoting thoughtful and imaginative approaches both to the curriculum and teaching styles. The excellent curriculum is enriched by an outstanding range of well supported extra-curricular activities. Students and staff get on very well with each other. The school educates some strikingly confident young people. Students' personal development is good and very positive attitudes characterise lessons. Students feel safe and the school's procedures for the care and welfare of students are exemplary - one of the reasons why parents are so enthusiastic in their support of the school. More than anything, students appreciate the time given by staff to support them, whether helping with their work, or preparing the Christmas concert.

Leadership and management are excellent. The acting headteacher, well supported by his senior team, leads with integrity, and shared values and vision are woven into the fabric of the school. Comprehensive faculty self-reviews ensure the involvement of all staff in self-evaluation, and the school takes a meticulous approach to reviewing its work, sharing good practice and dealing robustly with areas of relative weakness. While standards are improving, there is a passionate pursuit of even higher standards. Governors, ably led by the chair, provide committed support and challenge.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Standards are above average and students achieve well because teaching is consistently effective, both scholarly and challenging. Leadership and management of the sixth form by the headteacher and his team are outstanding. Students are confident, quite rightly, that they receive very good guidance. Their personal maturity is impressive and they are strong role models for younger students. They enjoy a well planned curriculum and an extensive range of enrichment activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve learning by giving students more opportunity to organise their own learning, think more for themselves and develop skills independently of the teacher.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students achieve well at all levels, attaining standards that are above average. Performance in Key Stage 3 tests has been significantly above average in recent years. Results in mathematics are particularly good with significant numbers reaching the highest levels available in national tests, though performance in English and science is also very good.

Good progress continues in Years 10 and 11 and standards in GCSE examinations are above average, with boys doing particularly well. Students do especially well in science, geography and design and technology. Standards in mathematics are improving, but the improvement in Key Stage 3 has yet fully to filter through to GCSE. Challenging targets were largely met in 2006. Action taken to improve performance in modern foreign languages has been successful, but more still needs to be done in drama and music. Students with learning difficulties make good progress.

In the sixth form, results at A level are above average and students achieve well. They have been improving and in 2006 nearly two out of three grades were either A or B.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school encourages students to develop into mature and thoughtful young people. They particularly enjoy their learning and are extremely happy, reflected in their above average attendance. Most students behave responsibly, although bullying is a concern for a small minority of pupils. However, they are confident that it will be sorted out if reported. Students are fully aware of the importance of diet and exercise in leading

healthy lives; many, including sixth formers, participate in extra-curricular sport in addition to regular physical education lessons. Students volunteer to be a buddy for others and take these responsibilities seriously, sometimes keeping in touch discreetly by text messaging. Students have a realistic understanding of the skills they will need in the world of work and appreciate being taught about managing money! Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good, particularly in terms of their social and moral growth.

Students are generous in their fund raising, for example, organising gift boxes for 'Christmas Child', and come up with imaginative ways to generate money for charities. Sixth formers willingly volunteer to spend time working in the community. Teachers readily listen to students' opinions and their involvement in staff interviews and governors' committees gives them excellent insights into the real world. However, both year and school councils have not been effective recently.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good progress is the result of good and sometimes outstanding teaching. Learning in classrooms is focused and purposeful. Lessons are well managed; students are attentive and enthusiastic. Teachers clearly display what they expect students to learn and adopt a wide range of learning strategies to challenge and interest the students. For example, the Year 8 'Water Day' was imaginatively used to excite students and make learning across a range of subjects relevant and more meaningful. Questions are well used to gauge how much the students have learnt and also to probe and deepen understanding.

Above all, it is the framework of good relationships which gives students the confidence to succeed. Students commented how much they enjoy learning – 'teachers smile a lot and we like their jokes, even the bad ones!' Students also commented that the most effective lessons are those where they are active learners and where their ideas and contributions are valued. Teaching is nurturing good learners, especially through the recent school focus on developing students' thinking skills. However, many students still lack confidence in their ability to organise their own learning and to think for themselves. In this regard, homework is not always effectively used to develop these skills, and learning in some classes remains too heavily directed by the teacher. In the sixth form, students excel in the more tutorial style of teaching, appreciating the opportunity to discuss ideas and draw their own conclusions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is imaginatively and flexibly planned to ensure learning is meaningful and interesting. Several times throughout the year, the normal timetable is suspended for one day so that students can focus on topics, such as 'Rockets', 'FairTrade' or 'Darwin'. This latter successfully brought together work related to the school's two specialisms, science and performing arts. During the inspection, Year 8 students much enjoyed learning about the environmental and health aspects of water. Such days extend and enliven the curriculum. Students in Years 7 to 9 are finding the new personal and social programme relevant to their futures.

In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, the curriculum effectively matches students' interests and aptitudes. Recent additions to an already good list of academic and vocational options include environmental science, beauty therapy, equine management and music technology. Timetable flexibility ensures that students have longer lessons when necessary, particularly for practical subjects. Students value and participate in an extensive range of enrichment activities. The range of events put on by the creative and performing arts faculty is high profile and a distinctive feature of school life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

All students benefit from the school's outstanding procedures for care and guidance. They know that adults care about them and are committed to ensuring they fulfil their potential. The recent appointment of an inclusion welfare officer to support vulnerable students is typical of the thoughtful approach. Comprehensive and effective links with outside agencies support a number of students at risk. Students' personal and academic development is carefully tracked and they are confident about the levels they are working at and what they are aiming for. Academic guidance for sixth form students is particularly effective. Students blossom in this caring and supportive environment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school thrives on shared values and common purpose. The headteacher has established a distinctive ethos in which human values and personal development are nurtured alongside a determined focus on high academic standards. Outstanding leadership has maintained high standards and been successful in improving achievement where needed, for example, in mathematics. The headteacher's absence on secondment has not affected the school's purpose and the acting headteacher and his team have moved seamlessly into their new roles with confidence and authority. The acting

headteacher is very well supported by his senior team and leaders at all levels. Innovation is encouraged and initiatives are carefully discussed and implemented only if their impact on students' development is clear, for example, in the imaginative approach to curricular planning and timetabling. The committed and well informed support of governors, who regularly attend faculty review meetings, also contributes strongly to the overall outstanding leadership and management.

Through annual subject reviews, all staff are able to contribute to school self-evaluation. The commitment of all staff to a realistic and self-critical review is clear and evidence of the school's determination to improve still further. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development, and is vigorous in seeking improvements. Action taken, for example, to improve performance in mathematics and modern foreign languages, has been effective. Given the recent improvements, the school is very well placed to make further gains. The school is very well regarded locally and parents are extremely supportive of the school.

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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	1	
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?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
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	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

Thank you very much for being so welcoming when we recently visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were particularly impressed by the courteous way in which you greeted us and the maturity you showed in answering our questions. It is clear that you enjoy being students at the school and take part in everything the school offers with energy and enthusiasm. Yours is a good school with a number of outstanding features. In particular:

- Your very positive attitudes and enjoyment of school are a strong contributory factor in your good achievement.
- Good and sometimes inspiring teaching ensures you do very well.
- Staff take considerable care to ensure that you are exceptionally well looked after and supported through school.
- The sixth form offers you good opportunities to thrive and flourish.
- Many of you develop impressively confident personal and social skills, which help prepare you well for your future beyond school.
- The curriculum is excellent and there is a superb range of clubs and enrichment activities.
- The headteacher, his senior team and all other managers carry out their responsibilities exceptionally well.

There is one aspect of the school's work that would benefit from further development:

- Some of you lack confidence in your capacity to manage your own learning, think for yourself, and develop skills independently of the teacher. We have asked the school to think how best it might develop these skills with you.

Thank you once again for your help during our visit. Good luck with your work in the future!