

Marlborough School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101487
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307707
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	67
6th form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Matthews
Headteacher	Ms Audrey R Chamberlain
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2005
School address	Marlborough Park Avenue Sidcup DA15 9DP
Telephone number	020 8300 6896
Fax number	020 8309 5612

Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Marlborough is a community special school for 67 students aged 11 - 19. All have a statement of special educational needs relating to severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple difficulties, autistic spectrum and other complex needs, or sensory impairments and communication difficulties. There is also a significant number of students who have medical needs, physical disabilities and challenging behaviours. Some of its post 16 provision is off-site and the school works in partnership with several other local schools and colleges of further education. Recent awards include the Healthy Schools Award, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Sportsmark. The school is in the early stages of applying for Specialist Schools Status in drama and performing arts.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Marlborough School provides a good quality education and outstanding care, guidance and support for its students. Their personal development and well-being are excellent enabling them to achieve maximum independence. When compared to mainstream schools, standards are, inevitably, exceptionally low. However, in relation to their special educational needs, achievement by students throughout the school, including the sixth form, is good.

Students' behaviour is excellent and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school ensures that all students know a lot about staying healthy, enjoy their lessons, feel safe wherever they are and are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives. The quality of teaching and the curriculum is good. Teachers and teaching assistants know the students well and plan relevant lessons with a very strong emphasis on effective communication and first hand experience. Relationships in school are excellent and best use is made of the accommodation to provide for students' academic and therapeutic needs. Committed fund-raising has resulted in a first class hydrotherapy facility for students and community use.

The overall quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Secure procedures ensure that students' well-being is assured. Careers education and academic guidance prepare them very well for leaving school. Students receive appropriate therapies according to their needs. The school's management minimise the impact on students caused by any shortfalls in services beyond their control. Respect for the students' wishes and dignity in their personal care are strong features of daily life at school. Teachers' use of assessment to plan lessons is good. Annual reviews and those for looked-after children are of high quality and take full account of students and parents' views.

Leadership, management and governance are good, as is its capacity to improve further. The headteacher gives excellent leadership in seeking to improve the school's curriculum, teaching and accommodation. The school's improvement since the last inspection has been good although there are still too few subjects offering accredited awards in Key Stage 4. The headteacher and senior staff have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness, but acknowledge the need to improve the use of students' achievement data in subject development plans. The school regularly surveys staff, students and parents about what works well and suggested areas for improvement. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The governing body gives excellent support on personnel, student welfare and finance issues although its role in systematically evaluating students' achievement requires further development. The school's work with other partners, including local schools, colleges and agencies is excellent.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is led and managed by the school's senior management team and as a result students' achievement and the quality of provision is also good. Significant time is spent in other settings including local schools and colleges of further education. The feedback from these partner settings is universally positive about the impact of these inclusive links on students in all settings.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the use of achievement information by all staff and governors to ensure that all students are achieving as well as they can.
- Maximise opportunities for accreditation across the curriculum, particularly for Key Stage 4 students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The students' achievements are good because they receive good quality education. The standards attained are inevitably exceptionally low given the nature of their special educational needs. However, all students in the school and sixth form make good progress according to their abilities towards targets in their individual education plans (IEP's) Achievement in relation to their starting points and capabilities, as measured by national criteria (P levels) and National Curriculum levels is good. Students in the sixth form achieve well on work experience and in Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network courses (ASDAN). Some students gain the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The students' obvious expressions of excitement as they enter the school each morning show that they are happy to be there. Attendance is good and any absences are invariably for medical reasons. In relation to their abilities to communicate, students show extremely positive attitudes to each other and staff. Students feel safe, their behaviour is excellent and the very few exclusions in the last year are due to a small minority of students with highly challenging behaviour. There are no recorded racist incidents and all faiths are addressed in religious education and ASDAN. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. As they mature, they show a growing self-awareness and understanding of the world around them. For example, showing increasing confidence and independence when visiting off-site venues such as local schools and colleges of further education. For example, the school choir performs concerts in the community and students' art is regularly on display. Residential school journeys and adventurous activities are enjoyed by all who attend.

The school is racially harmonious and cultural diversity is celebrated. Fundraising for the school and others less fortunate is a frequent activity. Responsibilities are enthusiastically taken up throughout the school and the school council gives good opportunities to make the student voice heard. Wherever possible students respond well to opportunities to make decisions. They make informed choices, for example, options for physical activity and selecting meals from the healthy school menu.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers and teaching assistants have a good knowledge of the students' needs. Some teaching is outstanding and a particular strength is the provision of practical experiences to consolidate learning and the promotion of communication and independence. Where appropriate, staff employ a wide variety of objects, communication methods and sensory experiences to engage the students in learning. Good account is taken of national guidance for the structure of lessons and ways to involve learners in assessment. Students try their best to assess themselves but are occasionally confused about whether to say how much help they received or how hard they found the task. In some lessons, students are not given frequent enough opportunities to practise skills in smaller groups. The teamwork between teachers and other staff is a strong feature. Although they do not plan jointly, the assistants are adequately briefed before the lessons and assist with assessment. Higher level teaching assistants have additional specialist roles that include subject responsibilities and behavioural support. Staff use information and communication technology well to support learning, for example, they are familiar with devices to enable students to communicate effectively and the use of interactive whiteboards is increasingly effective. Staff use digital cameras well to record achievements and there are many informative displays adorning walls.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It has maintained the strengths identified in the last inspection and the school is quite properly reviewing and developing its provision to fully meet the increasingly wide and complex needs of the students. The school continues its strong focus upon communication within the National Curriculum alongside the students' personal, social and physical development in order for students to achieve maximum independence. Students with additional complex learning needs access the curriculum through appropriate sensory experiences.

The sixth form curriculum furthers these elements and significantly increases the time spent in other settings to pursue a more vocational education and preparation for life after school. The extensive schemes of work are supplemented by accredited ASDAN modules and mini-enterprise projects that develop decision making and independence. Accreditation has widened for sixth form students, however, there is still too little on offer at Key Stage 4. For example, awards are only available this year in art and although science is almost ready for accreditation, other subjects are still at the planning stage. Opportunities for integrating with students from other schools are numerous. Lunch-times and breaks are very well used to support the students' personal development through excellent enrichment activities, including clubs and residential school journeys. Work-related learning including careers education and guidance prepares all students well for leaving school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Excellent provision is made for the students' care, support and guidance. The school pays close attention to the students' personal development and well-being including their medical needs. Arrangements for child protection and safeguarding students are robust.

Students are given excellent support and guidance to meet their individual targets. Annual reviews and those for looked-after children have the student at heart and ensure academic and personal needs are met as a result of well-focussed intervention. Comprehensive reports by school staff keep parents very well informed about their children's progress, although occasionally reports written by other staff are too brief and less useful. Parents also welcome being invited to discuss targets and achievements throughout the year. During periods when external therapy was not readily available, the school extended its own remit, for example by providing occupational therapy support for students' mobility needs.

The school deploys its therapy resources very well. Students receive appropriate therapies which further increase their ability to access the curriculum. For example, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and hydrotherapy improve the students' mobility. Good speech and language therapy is provided in class and during discrete sessions. Skilful liaison between staff, including those dedicated to students' personal hygiene needs, minimise disruption to the students' learning.

Close attention is given to induction of students both on admission and in transition to the sixth form and other placements. Relationships with other agencies, including care workers, therapists, medical staff and careers advisors, are excellent. The provision for careers education and guidance is a particular strength in preparing the students in Key Stage 4 and post-16 for life after school.

The vast majority of parents support all aspects of the school's work. Some parents take advantage of school-run workshops to discuss how to help their children's independence at home. Several added comments to the pre-inspection questionnaires, and these included: 'the school have helped every step of the way...I don't hesitate to approach them if need to...the level of care is exceptional.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher gives excellent leadership on many fronts and is well supported by her deputy and recently re-organised senior management team. The school's improvement has been good since the last inspection. Notably, the addition of the excellent and well-used hydrotherapy facility and teachers' comprehensive lesson planning and evaluation. The role of teaching assistants has been significantly enhanced and has had a positive impact on students' academic progress and personal development. However, due to earlier staffing difficulties, progress has been slow in establishing accreditation in Key Stage 4.

One of the main challenges since the last inspection has been to ensure that the provision meets the changing special educational needs of the students. In order to achieve this, the school's focus has been on developing the curriculum and staff expertise for students with

autism and communication needs. Close tracking of students' progress and the quality of teaching resulted in implementing effective improvements. Staff re-structuring has also provided clarity of roles and responsibilities.

The school has good systems to induct new staff, and all benefit from performance management and targets are set to raise the achievement of students. Subject development planning is satisfactory overall. The headteacher acknowledges the need to standardise planning formats and improve the use of progress data by all subject leaders in their development plans. The views of parents are routinely sought and the feedback is used to assist the school's evaluation of its performance.

Governors provide good support for premises, personnel and curriculum: notably, the hydrotherapy pool. Facilities' improvements continue that are aimed at further promoting students' achievements and independence. Their role in the school's self-evaluation is developing well, although their overview of students' achievement is not so well established. The recent appointment of an ex-headteacher governor is designed to improve their effectiveness in this area. Financial matters are well managed and appropriately audited. Feedback from other schools indicates overwhelming satisfaction with their well-managed partnerships that result in benefits for students from all settings.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	1	

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?	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.

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	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

07 July 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Marlborough School, Sidcup, DA15 9DP

Thank you for helping me get to know your school and for giving me such a warm welcome. I am pleased to say that you go to a good school. Some things are outstanding, especially your personal development and well-being. The support you get to help you do more things on your own is also outstanding. The headteacher leads the staff very well and they all work very hard for you. The teachers and teaching assistants make sure that your lessons help you to learn in lots of different ways. They provide you with choices and help you to communicate and use number where you all make good progress as well as becoming more confident and able to look after yourselves.

Activities like your school journeys and time at other schools and colleges prepare you for leaving school. You get on well with the staff and do your very best to see that everyone can get on and learn in class. I was impressed by the way you look after each other in the playground.

I could see you were happy when you arrived at school and were tired when it was home time. You have lots of lessons, including swimming, games and movement lessons to keep you strong, fit and healthy.

Your school meals are especially healthy and it's clear they are tasty too! You obviously enjoy your lessons, especially when you are active. Such as doing experiments in science, making choices in English, painting pictures in art and using the computers and whiteboards.

The headteacher, the staff and governors are working hard to keep all your lessons just right and to improve the school even more. I'm asking the headteacher to do a couple of things. One is to make even better use of all the information staff and governors have about how well you are doing. The other is to allow you to get more awards for the work you do at school, especially in Key Stage 4. I wish you lots of luck in the future!

Yours sincerely,

Greg Sorrell

Lead Inspector