

Meridian School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117539
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312647
Inspection dates	21–22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Paula Heaney HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	669
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pat Baxter
Headteacher	Dr Michael Firth
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2004
School address	Garden Walk Royston Hertfordshire SG8 7JH
Telephone number	01763242236
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Age group	13-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Meridian School is a rural, mixed, 13-18 specialist maths and computing school and is smaller than average. Prior attainment on entry is broadly average. In Years 10 and 11 there are a few more girls than boys. The majority of students progress from Year 11 to sixth form although not necessarily at the school.

The vast majority of the school's intake is from the two local middle schools. The school population is predominantly White British (97%). The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around the national average. Attendance is now above the national average, having improved significantly since 2006.

Students from Years 10 and 11 are able to take vocational courses at a local college as part of the Increased Flexibility Project. The school has healthy schools' status. The school provides a range of courses for adults in the evenings and on Saturdays, and trains new teachers through partnership arrangements with local universities. The school is a lead school for the forthcoming diploma in information communication technology (ICT). It was awarded the ICT Mark in November 2005 and the Artsmark Award (Silver) in May 2007

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school with a good sixth form. It has good capacity to improve further. Students' achievement is satisfactory. The standards the students reach are above national averages at the end of Key Stage 3, although school data indicate standards in English fell in 2007. At Key Stage 4, there have been improvements in standards, and results are around national averages. Results for students gaining five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics are above average. Changes have been made to the curriculum to interest and motivate students, including more options and work related qualifications. Standards in the sixth form are broadly average, reflecting the starting point of the majority of the students. Students make satisfactory progress overall and progress is good in the sixth form. However, given attainment on entry, there is scope to improve the rate made by the vast majority of students.

The school's self-evaluation is a largely accurate reflection of where improvements need to be made, but inspectors judged that the impact of some areas for improvement identified on inspection have not been fully recognised. During the inspection, teaching and learning were satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Half of the lessons seen were good or better. In the best lessons activities are well planned to suit individual needs and students are challenged to achieve their best. Students said they enjoy these sessions. Where lessons are more teacher-led and students more passive, opportunities for targeting students' individual needs and abilities are missed. Inspectors saw pockets of poor student behaviour in some lessons in the lower school which hindered progress for others. Strategies for improving teaching and learning are developing satisfactorily.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Their attitudes to learning are largely positive. Behaviour is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. Students speak positively about the support they receive from teachers and other staff and they feel the environment is safe. Students told inspectors they enjoy school and are aware of how to lead healthy lifestyles. There is a broad range of additional activities the students can take part in. Students make a good contribution to the community, for example through a range of fund-raising activities and supportive work in local schools. They develop good work-related skills, specifically in ICT.

The headteacher and his team provide good leadership which is focused on improving standards across the whole school, although school data indicate challenging targets were missed in 2007. Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, support for the middle managers and staff is not sufficiently sharp enough in improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning and the behaviour of a small minority of students. Governance is effective and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

Most parents speak highly of the school, although a minority are concerned about behaviour in lessons disrupting the learning of others.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in relation to their standards on entry and standards are around the national average overall. Students can select from a broad range of subjects that are well matched to their needs. Care, guidance and support are good. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new academic monitoring and target setting system. Students appreciate

the support they get from teachers and value working in small groups. Teaching is good overall and some subjects are taught extremely well. Students' personal development is good and their contribution to the community is highly valued. Their behaviour and attitudes are good. They enjoy their lessons and work with enthusiasm. Sixth formers act as 'buddies' to younger students. The focus on increasing student numbers and monitoring attendance has been effective.

What the school should do to improve further

Raise standards further by doing the following.

- Focusing more sharply on improving the progress made by all students, so raise achievement across the whole school.
- Ensuring all students are involved and challenged actively in lessons, improving further the quality of learning, and the teaching which underpins it.
- Improving standards of behaviour in the lower school in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are satisfactory overall and are broadly in line with national averages. Students' attainment on entry in Year 9 is around the national average. At the end of Year 9, students achieve standards which are consistently above national rates, although school data indicate standards fell in English in 2007. School data show that in 2007 targets set for level 5 in mathematics and science were broadly met but not achieved in English.

In 2007 standards at the end of Year 11 have risen overall to the national average, after a fall in 2006. The target of 65% achieving more than five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and mathematics was not achieved. The proportion achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or above is above the national average, as is the number of students achieving higher grades. Students make good progress overall by the end of Year 9 but this progress slows by the end of Year 11. Boys make better progress than girls. A new process of tracking progress and setting challenging targets is in place but it is too early to judge the impact. Progress seen in lessons was satisfactory overall and good in Year 11. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily overall and achieve well in mathematics. Standards in the sixth form are average and sixth formers make good progress as a result of good teaching. The standard of marked work was satisfactory overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development is good. Relationships at every level are positive and the majority of students are polite and friendly. They enjoy socialising together at break and lunch time and can work well in groups in some lessons. Behaviour is satisfactory but there is a very small minority of students whose poor behaviour can disrupt lessons so that the learning opportunities of the whole class are affected and progress is hindered. Attendance has improved considerably because of the very thorough monitoring undertaken by the school and is now good. The school is active in promoting healthy lifestyles. Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and staying safe.

Students take an active part in school life. The work of the school council is respected and valuable to the school and they undertake responsibilities willingly and efficiently in school. Sixth formers participate in a range of activities within the local area, such as helping in local middle schools. This provides a valuable dimension to their understanding of their own skills and the importance of helping others. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good so they have a good understanding of other faiths and ways of life. Students develop good work related skills, particularly in ICT.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and good in the sixth form. Recent actions to improve the quality of learning are beginning to have an impact and there is some evidence to indicate the increased focus on learning is having a positive effect. However, there are inconsistencies and variability in performance across the school and within departments. While there are examples of good and a small amount of outstanding practice, particularly in the sixth form, much remains satisfactory in the main school. The better teaching is challenging. In these circumstances teachers plan their activities well and employ skilful questioning to engage the students fully in their learning. In the less effective lessons, not all teachers make it clear to students what they expect from them in terms of high standards of behaviour and achievement, nor provide them with constructive feedback on how to improve their work. One consequence of this is some students do not make sufficient progress. Barriers to learning for students who have learning difficulties are carefully assessed but learning support is not allocated to these students in a proportion of lessons. In the sixth form, teaching, including in vocational subjects, promotes independent learning strongly and students are supported effectively by thorough assessment and review of progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Curriculum provision is good. A broad range of courses meets the needs of almost all students in Years 10 and 11, including those with learning difficulties or who are at risk of exclusion. Specialist status in mathematics and computing has had a good impact overall and all students study ICT in Years 9 to 11. Students have access to a wide range of enrichment activities. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students' personal development, including aspects of citizenship and work related learning. Students have a good choice of vocational courses, including through the Individual Flexibility Programme at a local college of further education. Year 11 students are able to opt from a good range of A-level courses in the school's sixth form. There are few vocational options in the sixth form as there is strong provision offered by the local colleges.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There is a high level of commitment from staff, who identify students at risk effectively. Staff coordinate feedback from subject specialists and external agencies to ensure good provision for these learners. Good child protection arrangements are in place, ensuring students are safe in all areas of the school. The school has recently introduced a more frequent review of students' academic and behaviour targets in all their subjects to improve performance, but it is too early to assess its impact on improving standards. Appropriate school policies are in place and are easily accessible by students and parents. Increased awareness of school policies is improving communication between parents and the school. Students receive helpful advice about options and choices at the end of each key stage of their learning. This helps transition between stages well and further development is planned to improve the quality of that advice in response to parental request.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall with some good features. Effective action has been taken to bring about improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher is focused well on the improvement and development of the school. His concern for the students is apparent and underpins all he does. He is supported strongly by a recently formed senior leadership team that works together effectively with drive and energy. The recently revised approach to student target setting and review is in its early stages and is yet to impact on improving standards. School data indicate challenging targets set last year were not achieved. Self-assessment is largely analytical and mostly accurate, but the impact of some areas for improvement have not been fully recognised. For example, the minority of incidences where poor, disruptive behaviour affects progress and prevents opportunities for all learners to engage fully in learning within the classroom environment is not yet sufficiently well addressed. The senior team works effectively to promote a common sense of purpose amongst all staff, reviewing the work of departments and challenging underperformance. Professional development and training supports improvement satisfactorily.

The work of the senior leadership team is challenged effectively by a dedicated, committed and informed chair and body of governors who know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They are concerned about the incidences of poor behaviour and want to raise further the school's profile in the community. Their active involvement underpins the good relationships that exist throughout the school. Leadership and management are good in the sixth form and have contributed to raising achievement well.

Financial management is good and the school provides satisfactory value for money overall. Both staffing and resources are managed well, although some sixth form groups are small.

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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?	3	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	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	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?	3	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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	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

23 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Meridian School, Royston, SG8 7JH

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. I would like to thank you for your openness and cooperation during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that this is a satisfactory school with a good sixth form. Test results at the end of Year 9 are above national averages, although there was a drop in English last year. GCSE and A Level results overall are around national averages and results for five GCSE passes at grades A*-C including English and mathematics are higher than the national rate. You are making satisfactory progress, taking into account your starting points, and better progress in the sixth form.

Where we saw good or better lessons, these were interesting and challenging, with a good range of activities tailored to your abilities. You told us you enjoy these lessons. The majority of you behave well and enjoy your education, but we did see some poor behaviour in the lower school. Your attendance is good. You feel well supported by your teachers and other staff at the school.

We have asked the headteacher to take action on three things.

- Improve the progress you make and so raise achievement across the whole school.
- Ensure lessons meet your individual needs and challenge you to achieve the best you can.
- Improve standards of behaviour in lessons, particularly in the lower school.

You can help your school by ensuring that you discuss with your teachers how you learn best, behave well at all times and above all by working hard. We wish you well with your future studies.

Best wishes

Paula Heaney

HM Inspector