

Mount Grace School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 117583 |
| Local Authority | HERTFORDSHIRE LA |
| Inspection number | 312661 |
| Inspection dates | 26–27 September 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Paula Heaney HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 850 |
| 6th form | 172 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Colin Daniel |
| Headteacher | Mr Peter Baker |
| Date of previous school inspection | 27 September 2004 |
| School address | Church Road Potters Bar Hertfordshire EN16 1EZ |
| Telephone number | 01707655512 |
| Fax number | 01707663725 |

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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

The majority of children enter Mount Grace School with standards that are just below the national averages, and the numbers with higher ability are decreasing. The proportion of boys overall is 60%. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average, as is the proportion from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Attendance is in line with the national average.

The school's intake is mostly from Potters Bar and the surrounding area. Some students take advantage of good rail links and travel from Barnet, Highbury, Finsbury Park and other areas of north London. The number of applications and admissions to Year 7 has increased steadily since 2003. The proportion of students receiving free school meals is at the national average. There are some pockets of deprivation for students in Potters Bar, Barnet, Enfield and further into London.

The school became a business and enterprise college in September 2005 and works closely with the Arcadia group as a business partner. In April 2005 the school opened 'The Retreat', a unit which provides personalised learning programmes to avoid permanent exclusion. The school site is used for community and evening classes, and activities for teenagers are provided during the summer. The school has links with other local secondary schools to provide shared level 2 and 3 courses.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Standards are rising and the progress students make in the main school is good. Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE results have been rising year-on-year and the 2007 school data indicates significant improvement. Standards are now broadly in line with national averages. Standards and progress in the sixth form are satisfactory as results have been more variable, but this is an improved picture since the last inspection.

The headteacher, supported very well by the leadership team, other managers and the school staff, has focused very effectively on ensuring each student is known well. This enables staff to set and monitor appropriately challenging targets to enable all students to reach their potential. One student said, 'What is good is the work is neither too easy nor too difficult. They know me as an individual'. The effective use of information across the school to drive up standards has enabled staff to know how well both they and their students are performing, and where they need to improve. Target setting and monitoring are less well developed in the sixth form and the school recognises this. The school's self-evaluation reflects where improvements need to be made very well. Actions taken by the school have resulted in year-on-year improvements and have been very effective in raising standards significantly.

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding practice seen on inspection. Learning is usually well paced, challenging, and students are actively involved in developing skills and knowledge. Very good relationships between staff and students, and between each other, contribute effectively to a positive atmosphere for learning. Staff use information and communication technology (ICT), through the interactive white boards, imaginatively and confidently, which students enjoy. The curriculum meets the needs and interests of the students well, both in the main school and in the sixth form. There is a good range of vocational courses in the sixth form from which students can choose. Students' progress on these courses is improving.

Students' attitudes to learning are very positive and they behave very well. They feel the environment is safe and that they are very well supported. The good range of additional activities available is valued. Students in Key Stage 4 have opportunities to take part in work experience activities, which they enjoy. Across the school they benefit from activities linked to the school's business and enterprise specialism. The very large majority of parents speak highly of the school and describe it as a very caring, well-managed school, where their children are happy and enjoy their education. There were many positive comments on how well the school is improving.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. A broad range of courses including vocational options is well matched to student needs. Standards are improving but remain below average particularly for advanced level courses. Students make satisfactory progress overall in relation to their standards on entry. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Students appreciate the support they get from teachers. Teaching is satisfactory overall and some subjects are taught extremely well. Students' personal development is satisfactory. The focus on increasing student numbers and improving retention has been effective. The consistency and rigor of academic monitoring and target setting is not yet ensuring that standards rise.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency and rigour of academic monitoring and target setting to ensure standards rise in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are satisfactory overall and are now broadly in line with the national average. Students' attainment on entry in Year 7 is below average. The school has set increasingly challenging targets to ensure all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. Standards have been rising steadily each year and are now broadly in line with the national average by the end of Year 9. In 2007 school targets for level 5 in English, mathematics and science were all met. Rigorous use of data to track progress and set targets for individuals is ensuring that progress in lessons is good.

The pattern of improvement and progress is sustained in Years 10 and 11. There has been year-on-year improvement since 2004 in the numbers gaining five or more A* C grades. School data for 2007 GCSE results indicates students achieving in line with national standards. The percentage of students attaining at least five A*–C grades at GCSE rose significantly as did the proportion achieving five A*–C grades including mathematics and English. Progress seen in lessons is good. Standards in the sixth form are below average and though improving are more variable. Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students benefit in particular from many opportunities to learn about their own and other cultures, and are able to reflect on spiritual issues through a variety of school activities. They know how to lead a healthy life style. Students settle in quickly when they join, and enjoy coming to school, because they feel safe and well supported by teachers and other adults. Students relate well to one another and to their teachers. Their behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school. Incidences of bullying are rare and are dealt with effectively by the school. Attendance is in line with national averages, which represents a steady improvement over recent years. Students make a good contribution to the school and to the wider community, participating in their school council and in fund raising events. Students are well prepared for further study and for the world of work. They benefit well from the school's partnership with local commerce and higher education institutions. In the sixth form, students also enjoy their education, and make a good contribution to the school. They help younger pupils with their reading. However, sixth form students do not benefit from a structured programme of support to enable them to develop their personal skills in a more systematic way.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Recent improvements in classroom practice are well summarised by a student who said, 'The teachers are fantastic'. Teachers plan lessons well and make sure that students are clear about what they are expected to learn. They also take account of the differing needs of students, including those who need extra support. Normally expectations are high and lessons are characterised by very good relationships between teachers and students, contributing strongly to an enjoyable learning environment in which pupils achieve well. Many teachers use interactive white boards to very good effect, enhancing the pace and vibrancy of lessons. Work is marked regularly, and teachers routinely make it clear to students what they need to do to improve. A minority of teachers still do not allow enough time for independent work, plan a limited range of activities and their lessons lack pace and rigour. Students are set targets that are challenging but realistic and they say there are ample opportunities to discuss their progress with teachers. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are satisfactory. However, some good and outstanding lessons were seen and these have already started to have an impact on achievement, notably in vocational courses.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are prepared well for the world of work in Key Stage 3 by the enterprise awareness course and studying two modern foreign languages. The school has broadened the curriculum through its specialist status as a business and enterprise college and shares good practice with other schools well. Students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are able to choose from an increasingly wide range of courses, including BTEC diplomas in media, business and health and social care. Provision for ICT and design technology has improved significantly since the last inspection. The 'Retreat', which provides individualised programmes for students at risk of exclusion and support for students experiencing difficulties, underpins further the school's commitment to all its students well. In Key Stage 4 the time allocated to religious education does not allow full coverage of the syllabus. The curriculum is well supported and enhanced by a range of subject related visits and pupils speak enthusiastically about the wide variety of after school activities and opportunities for overseas travel.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

School leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that individuals are valued, supported and encouraged to achieve their best. Procedures for safeguarding children are good. Working with other agencies, the school has made strenuous efforts to raise attendance, resulting in a steady improvement. It has also been successful in minimising the disruption caused by exclusions. The school provides good information and advice which enable students to move from one key stage to another successfully. Its programme for transition from primary

school is outstanding. Many parents reported how quickly their children settle in and how much they enjoy school. Academic guidance is consistent and thorough, involving students and their parents. Students aim for challenging targets and are given the means to achieve them. Sixth form students feel that they receive good support from their teachers and from pastoral staff, but there is no structured programme of personal and academic guidance, to enable a closer focus on maximising achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher's leadership is very good and has been a key factor in shaping the direction of the school so that it is focussed effectively on raising academic standards alongside developing students as individuals. The leadership team has ensured that all staff share a clear and accurate vision of what the school needs to do to improve further. Middle managers are involved in raising standards and are supported by the senior leadership team very well. Managers set realistic and challenging targets from school and examination data which match the potential of most students very well. Monitoring is used effectively by senior leaders and governors in analysing where the school is doing well and where further improvements need to be made.

The procedures for checking the effectiveness of learning and students' progress are embedded well in the main school. The school recognises the need to improve standards in the sixth form. The development plan is focussed effectively on raising performance across the school.

Resources are managed and deployed well. Significant investment in ICT has enlivened learning particularly for underachieving boys. Governance of the school is good and the governing body is knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors provide good support to the headteacher and staff, and question the senior leadership team on progress effectively. Actions taken by the school have resulted in year-on-year improvements and have been very effective in raising standards significantly. The school provides good value for money and its capacity for continued improvement is outstanding.

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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 |
|---|----------------|-------|

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 |
| 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 | 1 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 | 2 |
| 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 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 | 3 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 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 | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |

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

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|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 | 3 |
| 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 | 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

28 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Mount Grace School, Potters Bar, EN6 1EZ

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. Firstly, 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 yours is a good school which is well managed. Results have improved year-on-year. The results at the end of Year 9 and your GCSE results are now meeting standards achieved nationally. You are making good progress according to your starting points. Recent results for your Key Stage 3 tests and GCSEs show significant improvement. In the sixth form your standards are more variable. The school is aware of this.

We saw a majority of good lessons and these were interesting and challenging, with a good range of activities which you clearly enjoy. Your teachers support you well to get you to achieve to the best of your abilities. You particularly enjoy the use of information and communication technology and the interactive whiteboards to develop your skills. Your attendance is improving and your behaviour is very good. You enjoy very much the range of activities and sports on offer through the school, and the vocational courses you can choose from in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.

We have asked your Headteacher and staff to improve how targets are set and monitored to ensure standards rise in the sixth form.

You can help your school by ensuring your attendance is good. We wish you well with your future studies.

Best wishes

Paula Heaney

HM Inspector of Schools