

Matthew Arnold School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123258
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314556
Inspection date	13 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Emma Ing 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	1066
6th form	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maureen Ford
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine Ryan
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	Arnolds Way Oxford OX2 9JE
Telephone number	01865 862232
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Introduction

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

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following areas: leadership and management; the curriculum and the impact of the school's subject specialism in mathematics and science; the support of underperforming and vulnerable students and achievement and standards in the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; curriculum and planning documents; observation of the school at work; students' work; interviews with staff and students; and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Matthew Arnold is an average sized school on the outskirts of Oxford. Most students come from relatively affluent backgrounds. A small but significant proportion come from minority ethnic groups and about seven per cent of students have Asian roots. The school has been a specialist science school since 2002 and has recently been re-designated. It gained Healthy Schools Award in June 2007. The school council and governors are working together to enable the school to achieve Eco schools status. The school has good links with local initial teacher training institutions.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Matthew Arnold is a good school with an outstanding sixth form. The senior leadership team is excellent. The headteacher has a very accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school; she is ambitious for the school and has robust plans to ensure that all students are very well served by it. Senior leaders are playing an important role in developing the leadership and management skills of middle leaders and through secure systems are ensuring that most staff are playing a significant part in driving improvements. Leaders throughout the school, including students, are involved in contributing to the development of new initiatives and in evaluating the impact of the work of the school. The school is inclusive and leaders use data very well to monitor the progress of different groups and to set challenging targets for achievement. The governing body takes its responsibilities very seriously. They aspire to lead an outstanding school and are well informed about progress towards this goal. They engage in healthy debate with senior leaders about the way forward. As a result of all of these factors, the school has very good capacity to improve.

Students make exceptional progress in their first three years at the school and the standards that they reach at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science are very good indeed. Until recently, the progress made in Key Stage 4 has slowed. The school is aware of this and have been addressing the issues rigorously such that progress in these two years is improving and overall achievement is now good. The standards achieved at Key Stage 4 are above average. The advice and guidance given to students is good with the result that most students go on to appropriate courses either in the school sixth form or at local colleges. Students have good opportunities to develop interpersonal skills through a comprehensive and exciting range of school visits, trips and extra curricular activities. As a result and also because their literacy, information technology and numeracy skills are strong students are well prepared for their future economic well-being. However, they are rather passive learners in lessons and need to develop further their independent learning skills and their initiative.

Students enjoy school and their attendance is good. They are articulate and purposeful. The school enables many to take leadership roles and to support others through, for example, peer reading schemes, the eco-school initiative and a wide range of sporting options. Students are aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall and they are sensitive to issues relating to minority cultures. They are confident that racism is not an issue in school. Most students behave well around the school, however, a very small minority occasionally engages in aggressive and intimidating behaviour. The school site is very difficult to monitor during breaks and recently one or two incidents have caused concern to some students and their parents. The students spoken to are clear that if such problems are reported they are quickly resolved, but a small minority of parents feel that the school does not communicate well with them and a few are not as confident as they would wish that such matters are dealt with effectively.

Students generally know what grade or level they are aiming for. The school has begun to use data well to track their progress and intervene to encourage and support when appropriate. Key stage leaders are appropriately involved well in this process. The transition between primary and secondary school is well managed. One parent commented that they feel that, 'The teachers appear to know my children well and readily give advice and guidance'. Students with specific learning difficulties achieve well but the needs of a very few who have personal education plans are not always followed up rigorously. The school has recently introduced an initiative to support

learning by setting out the expectations of behaviour in lessons but this has not had time to become established routine and there are still some instances of students missing learning as a result of silly behaviour.

As the schools' leaders are aware, lessons are mostly good but they tend to be dominated by teachers' talk and lack the creative and imaginative activities to really engage and enthuse students. Although there is some very good practice across the school, teachers' marking is not consistently giving clear and helpful feedback. The best teachers are very good at explaining what it is that students need to do to improve their work and achieve their target grades. In some subjects focused booster classes in lunch times and after school are supporting older students very well.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements at both Key Stage 3 and 4 although the school needs to add rigour to the levelling and reporting of citizenship. The school is right to be working on creating pathways for students from Key Stage 3 that will allow all students to choose a curriculum very specific to their needs. Plans to improve the quality of the personal and social education programme are also suitable. The school's specialist status has been effective in moving forward the specialist subjects and there is a high take up of mathematics and science at advanced levels and by students going on to university. It has also underpinned partnership working with primary schools. Plans are in place to widen its impact.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth formers enjoy their time at school and do well. Their academic progress, which is very well supported by form tutors, is excellent and the standards reached are very good. The curriculum in the sixth form is right for the school. Students are guided well and nearly all of those who stay on for sixth form complete their courses. A high proportion goes on to pursue a university education or apprenticeships.

The quality assurance of teaching in the sixth form is robust and leads to appropriate staff development and consistently good and better teaching. The compulsory core programme ensures that the spiritual and moral development of students is excellent. In addition, they contribute very positively to life of the school as a whole and to the community beyond. The very able head of sixth form, together with her colleagues, sets a clear direction promoting highly effective education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve aspects of the school's care by further developing communication with parents and ensuring that students' behaviour is effectively managed at all times.
- Develop a curriculum that meets all learners' needs and places appropriate emphasis on their citizenship and personal development.
- Support teachers in developing innovative and creative lessons that demand more independence and responsibility from learners.

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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	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	1
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	
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	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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

28 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Matthew Arnold School, Oxford, OX2 9JE

Thank you for talking to us about your work and sharing your views about your school when we visited to inspect. We enjoyed meeting you and watching you at work and were very interested to hear what you had to say. We judge your school to be good and your sixth form to be outstanding. Sixth formers do really well and contribute to the life of the school fully too.

We were particularly impressed by your headteacher and her senior leadership team, who, together with the governors, have set a clear direction of improvement and have excellent plans in place to enable the school to achieve this.

We were pleased to see that most of you are well behaved and involved in the life of the school and many the extra-curricular activities on offer. Your commitment to reading in all different forms is tremendous. We could see that you make outstanding progress in Key Stage 3, and are making good progress in Key Stage 4. The teaching in your school is generally good but it is dominated by teachers and it would be even better if you were more involved and took more responsibility for your learning. Some of you mentioned to us that you would like your lessons to be more exciting. We agree. You need to work with your teachers to make this happen - one way in which you could do this is to support the 'Ready 2 Learn' initiative and make sure that 'silly' behaviour does not mean that teachers cannot risk exciting lessons.

A few of your parents are concerned about the behaviour in breaks and lunchtimes. I have asked the school to make sure that this is well managed and also that parents' can expect swift responses to their communications with the school. Your school is rightly adjusting your curriculum at the moment to ensure that the needs of all learners are fully met from the day they arrive and our report suggests that they continue with this.

Your school has many strengths, some of which are written up in the full report. I do hope that you feel that you want to read about it. You will be able to find it at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully,

Emma IngHer Majesty's Inspector