

The Marches School and Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123584
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	314642
Inspection date	1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1277
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arthur Walpole
Headteacher	Graham Davies
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2005
School address	Morda Road Oswestry SY11 2AR
Telephone number	01691 664400
Fax number	01691 671515

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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 issues: standards and achievement, the quality of provision and leadership and management. They collected evidence from interviews with governors, staff and pupils, lesson observation and observations of the school during the working day. 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 this report.

Description of the school

This large school serves the market town of Oswestry and the surrounding rural area, including a significant number of pupils from across the border in Wales. The school has been a specialist technology college for 12 years and has gained Leading Edge and Training School status as well as achieving many other prestigious awards. The school has an attached unit for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties which is currently attended by 30 pupils. Although the area has few social disadvantages, the school serves an area that has a significant element of rural deprivation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Marches is a good school with many outstanding features. For the vast majority of pupils, it meets its aim to provide all 'with the knowledge, skills, technological capability and personal attributes necessary to thrive as living and working adults in the 21st Century'. Standards have risen over the last four years, and now 70% of pupils gain five or more higher-level GCSE passes, including mathematics and English. This figure is well above the national average. Other measures show that standards are good. Many pupils make excellent progress but achievement is good overall because a minority of pupils do not make sufficient progress. Often, but not exclusively, these pupils have failed to complete examination courses because of absence or adverse personal circumstances. The school works very hard for these pupils to gain success by the time they leave school. The school has met or exceeded most of its challenging targets, including those for its specialisms.

Pupils like school and say that they are very happy. One parent commented that if the school was open, her daughter would attend seven days a week. Pupils report very little bullying and say that any incidents are dealt with very well. Behaviour is good and often exemplary in classes, with very few exclusions. Pupils know the dangers from smoking and other substance abuse, and they are confident in taking the appropriate actions. They are keen to keep healthy, with many taking part in the large number of sport and physical education opportunities after school. Many cycle to school and there is a good uptake of pupils taking the healthy-meal option. Pupils have been able to influence the menu and also designed the very practical and aesthetically pleasing outside seating area. The grounds of the school, along with the buildings, set a very good environment where pupils feel comfortable. They are also conducive to very good academic work. The Digital Centre and Bridge Centre have both received much rightly deserved acclaim for the work they do and are seen as centres of excellence by the local authority and the many visitors they receive.

Pupils receive outstanding support for their cultural development. The school's many links with other schools in different parts of the world are extremely successful in giving pupils perspectives of life beyond the immediate locality. Pupils also take a very active part in developing extremely good relationships with the local community. The school has excellent links with the community through its specialist school status. These are used very well to support partner schools and also to provide support for members of the public, who enjoy a variety of courses, particularly in information and communication technology (ICT). Moral and social developments are very good, with pupils having an excellent understanding of right and wrong. They eagerly support other pupils and act as 'buddies' and as reading partners to help others improve their literacy skills.

The school has used its specialist status to improve the quality of teaching and learning, which is now good, with outstanding features. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and this is supported by good subject knowledge, which ensures pupils usually make good and often very good progress in lessons. The school is improving teaching further by introducing a number of initiatives, for example, improved assessment and expanding opportunities for pupils to learn in a variety of different ways. Because these are in the early days of implementation, they are not fully established in all classes and subjects. Preparations for GCSE examinations are very focused and pupils know the criteria by which they are to be assessed. The school provides outstanding support and guidance. Large numbers of classes are organised to support pupils with revision topics, forms are re-arranged to group pupils with similar needs

and additional classes are run during holiday periods. Target-setting is used extremely well to challenge pupils. The good curriculum provides appropriate courses for pupils to follow, including a wide variety run in conjunction with the local college and other local schools. The school has demonstrated its outstanding ability to improve further by the greatly improved provision for citizenship since the previous inspection. It also has clear plans to increase the amount of time for older pupils to study religious education.

The school has made such significant improvements through the outstanding drive and commitment of the headteacher, very ably supported by the senior leadership team. They have greatly improved the effectiveness of middle managers who are held to account for the actions and results of their subject areas. Departments are reviewed very effectively each year, and this includes taking account of the views of pupils. Pupils are also involved in the appointment of staff and have fed back at staff briefings on what they regard as features of good lessons. Governance is very effective in supporting the school but also rigorously holding it to account for its actions. The school has gained a number of additional funds and has used these well to bring about improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of pupils by ensuring they all make good or better progress.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to be consistently good or better by embedding developments for assessment and increasing the opportunities for pupils to learn in a variety of ways.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

2 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Marches School and Technology College, Oswestry, Shropshire SY11 2AR

We visited your school recently and met with some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons. We were very pleased with the friendliness you showed us and how helpful you were. Your good school has many outstanding features and it seems a very happy place to be. We were very impressed with how many of you gain five or more higher-level passes at GCSE, including mathematics and English. Standards are good and many of you make excellent progress, but some of you could achieve higher results, especially those who miss their examinations at the end of Year 11.

Staff support and guide you extremely well and we thought you received excellent care. Many of you told us how much you enjoy taking part in sports clubs and other activities. We were impressed with how many of you take responsibility within the school and how you have been able to influence aspects, for example, the very nice outside eating area, and letting teachers know what you thought made a good lesson.

Teaching is good and often excellent. But some of the new initiatives your school has introduced have not become established in all lessons and we feel this is an area your school can improve. Behaviour is good and you told us that any bullying was dealt with quickly and well by staff in the school.

Many of you have a very good understanding of what you need to do to become healthy and you thought the school helped you. The curriculum is good and really meets your needs well, especially with the wide range of courses available in Key Stage 4. We were very impressed with the work you do in ICT and the improved provision for citizenship. You make an excellent contribution to the local community and your school gives you excellent opportunities to learn about a variety of different cultures.

We feel your school is extremely well led and that it has a very good understanding of its main strengths and areas which it needs to improve. We wish you well in this improving and supportive school and thank you again for your cooperation.

Michael Smith HMI

Annex B

2 November 2007

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