

The Matthew Arnold School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125263
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315215
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Ramesh Kapadia 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	943
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Denison
Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Pearson
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2004
School address	Kingston Road Staines TW18 1PF
Telephone number	01784 457275
Fax number	01784 450037

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team of three Additional Inspectors, led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools.

Description of the school

Matthew Arnold School is a medium sized school in Staines, close to boroughs in west London; it has become more popular recently and grown slightly in size. There are more boys than girls; about a tenth of pupils are entitled to free school meals and a similar proportion is from ethnic minorities. However, a high proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD); the number with a statement of special educational need is above average, including some with behavioural, emotional and social needs. In 2004, the school acquired specialist status as a business and enterprise college and also Investors in People Status, re-affirmed in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, which has made major improvements since the last inspection. The key issues from the previous report have been very well addressed, especially the 'significant decline in GCSE results in 2004'. The 'very good' leadership continued its relentless drive to improve standards across the school. This led to a rapid rise in results from a low base to enable the school to become one of the most improved schools in the country. This inspection confirmed that standards are now above average on most measures and that the good achievement is being maintained, with signs of further improvement.

Many changes have been made, not least in the outstanding curriculum that is carefully conceived to effectively meet the needs of pupils. Good teaching and learning ensure that pupils' progress from Key Stage 2 is good across the school. However, an element of teaching which is less strong is the marking of pupils' books. The school's overall effectiveness is good, in line with the school's own thoughtful and rigorous self-evaluation, which was rather cautious about its outstanding features.

The outstanding nature of care, support and guidance ensures that the school is very good at dealing with pupils at risk of under-achievement, including some who are particularly challenging. Behaviour is now good and well managed by teachers. After a decline in attendance in 2006, there has been an improvement and attendance is now slightly above the national average. There have been difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff but this has been carefully managed by a stable and cohesive senior management team who work hard and smartly together to provide outstanding leadership, thereby raising performance across the school. Senior and middle managers continue to monitor the quality of lessons and other aspects of the school systematically to produce a fair and accurate summary each year: this is undertaken by all subject areas, as well as by pastoral teams.

There is very strong partnership with a range of agencies. Specialist status has been very well promoted and ensures that business and enterprise education permeates the curriculum and provides a lead to other schools with regards to the teaching of personal finance. The school is poised to become even better, with its outstanding capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning with a stronger focus on routine marking which shows pupils how to improve.
- Sustain the improvements in attendance and behaviour, by enhancing pupils' respect for the school's strong and positive ethos.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. The school's intake is slightly below average when pupils join in Year 7. They make good progress, with about four fifths reaching the expected level in tests in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3, a notable achievement in view of some staffing difficulties in both departments, which had a slight adverse effect on results at Level 6. Good progress is also made in the key stage in information and communication and technology (ICT) and most other subjects.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 4 and last year about three fifths of them attained five or more higher grades, including qualifications in functional literacy and mathematics, a figure which is significantly higher than the national average. Results in science were relatively low, but results in most other subjects were around or above the national average. A particularly notable achievement is that all pupils achieved at least one pass at GCSE and virtually all attained at least five passes. As results in the subjects of the specialism exceeded the challenging targets which were set, these are now being revised upwards. Standards on most measures are above average.

The GCSE results in 2007 show that all groups of pupils made good progress, particularly boys, for who the school has run an effective support programme. There has been a notable increase in the proportion of pupils obtaining the highest grades at GCSE, though this remains below average. Pupils with LDD, including those with statements, make faster progress than their peers nationally. Internal data suggests that results in 2008 will show further if more modest improvement, from a high base.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good with some outstanding features. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as seen in assemblies and displays around the school. The school council represent pupils' views very effectively, bringing about changes that improve their school experience and liaising with community organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce. They have encouraged school caterers to improve food on offer at breaks and lunchtimes. Pupils take pride in the success of their sporting teams. Participation in sport, accompanied by good knowledge of healthy diet, encourages pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. Sometimes a routine lesson encourages pupils to think seriously about the feelings of others: this was observed in Year 11 drama, when pupils gave constructive and sensitive feedback on their friends' performance, while their practical work showed awareness of the complexity of family relationships.

Pupils enjoy lessons and make much of the school's business and enterprise focus, which is celebrated with an informative display in the school. This makes an outstanding contribution in providing opportunities for problem solving and enterprise activities that enhance good basic skills. Pupils contribute very well to both the school and outside communities: the pupils' premises committee takes responsibility for the school environment, making practical suggestions for improvements, such as with the toilets. A range of charitable activities are supported.

Attendance is slightly above average, an improvement on last year. Teachers take strenuous actions to establish good behaviour, resulting in a relatively high number of exclusions; a range of strategies such as enhancing vocational provision in Key Stage 4, have been introduced to reduce exclusions. Concerns about behaviour, reported by about a sixth of parents who responded to the questionnaire, were not confirmed by inspectors. Generally there is a safe, orderly and positive atmosphere in class and around the school. About a third of parents responded to the questionnaires and a sixth stated that they would like to be consulted more regularly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Over half the lessons seen were good, including a few which were outstanding. Lessons are almost invariably characterised by high expectations and many also take account of the differing abilities in the class. In the best lessons, the activities set for pupils were stimulating and imaginative, holding their interest to secure outstanding learning. This was observed in physical education, where pupils were developing a fitness programme using their own experiences. In technology, pupils were proud of their design of a school using new software programme. In ICT, pupils excitedly learned how to design a logo fit for purpose, based on ideas from the commercial world, presented on an interactive white-board (IAWB). Some departments, such as mathematics, use IAWB and data projectors routinely in most lessons.

Teachers have appropriate lesson plans using an agreed school model. They explain the learning objectives at the beginning of a lesson so that pupils are clear what they are to learn. Starter activities are commonly used but sometimes last too long, leaving limited time for pupils to work individually.

Teachers generally establish a good atmosphere for learning and there is a brisk pace in most lessons that enables pupils to make good progress. An area for development is the quality of marking, which is not good enough. Some books have not been marked for several weeks and too few include diagnostic assessment to show pupils how to improve the quality of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum for its pupils. The great majority of pupils enjoy their education and achieve well because they are extremely well served by the curriculum. The curriculum in Years 7–9 has appropriate breadth and balance. A wide range of options is available to pupils in Years 10 and 11, including a range of vocational courses on site and at local colleges. All pupils take a vocational course such as business or ICT. A few take GCSE English or mathematics early but the results have been mixed.

There is excellent provision for pupils for whom the traditional options are not effective. The alternative curriculum include Asdan (Award scheme development and accreditation network) and a 'construction bus', as well as vocational courses such as travel and tourism. These initiatives not only improve pupils' learning but also help to encourage better attendance and to develop personal skills of self-confidence and self-respect.

Very good links with businesses enable their personnel to willingly contribute to curriculum delivery. This is effectively contributing to outstanding future economic well-being. In particular business and enterprise activities support independent learning. The school's specialist status and its extended school provision enable large numbers of pupils to participate in an increasing and imaginative programme of extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school, which is inclusive, provides outstanding support for vulnerable pupils and for those with emotional and learning difficulties. It works extremely well with a wide range of agencies, including multi-professional teams, a school nurse and social services, to ensure that these young people are given the support that they need; their progress and well-being are consistently monitored. The support for lower attaining pupils is very good. The school has recognised the need to similarly support their most able pupils and has increased the proportion of highest grades attained at GCSE markedly, with over a tenth of pupils attaining five or more grades at A/A*. Procedures for safeguarding such as staff checks and safety in the school are robust.

Pupils' academic progress is monitored carefully in order to ensure that they do not fall behind unchecked. They are appropriately given aspirational targets in some years and minimum targets in other years. As a result of wide option choices and very good guidance, a high proportion of pupils are continuing with education, employment or training. In addition to work experience, pupils develop good awareness of money, through the teaching of personal finance.

'My daughter has been taught educationally but also she's learnt how to be around others, to understand how others think and feel and how to behave' reports a parent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

An outstanding headteacher, supported by a very effective senior leadership team has provided a clear direction for the school's rapid improvement. The team's rigorous and searching self-evaluation is captured in a concise but effective management information system, which includes not only an extensive range of performance indicators but also trends over time since 2004. This shows that, apart from a few fluctuations, there has been an upward trajectory on virtually all measures, which include test and examination performance, progress, attendance and lesson monitoring. The system also tracks key contextual information such as the social and ethnic composition of the school. Actions are planned and undertaken on the basis of this valuable system which enables a clear view of strengths and areas for development. The school development plan is evaluated in order to decide future priorities and set challenging targets.

The evaluation has shown that most middle managers are effective, but some areas require additional support, partly because of difficulties in recruitment and retention of teachers. A rigorous focus on observation of lessons has led to secure judgements on the quality of teaching, accompanied by appropriate feedback to teachers. Senior managers are also aware that improvements in behaviour and attendance have to be maintained and are using some non-teaching staff to help.

Effective leadership and management of specialist school status have helped to raise standards and increase the range of business and enterprise courses, as well as enhancing extra-curricular provision. This has made a significant contribution to the improved ethos within the school. Prudent financial procedures have led to a small surplus from deficits in the past. The governing body, which includes former pupils, supports and challenges the school very effectively. For example, they suggested additional measures for the management information system and made constructive comments for the school's self-evaluation form. They work closely with the

senior managers and make links with subject and pastoral areas. Their expertise enables the school to espouse a culture of business and enterprise.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	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	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?	1
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	2
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	2
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

29 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Matthew Arnold School, Staines, TW18 1PF

Many thanks for the welcome you gave us to your school. We enjoyed our discussions with you in meetings, in lessons and around the school.

Matthew Arnold is a good school, with some outstanding features. Standards are mostly above average across the school. You are very well cared for and links with the community are very good, not least because of the school's status as a specialist college for business and enterprise. Teachers work hard to make sure you make good progress. Most of you work hard and teachers are well aware of your capabilities. They use this information well in most lessons and provide extra support and encouragement to help you after lessons. Your behaviour in lessons is generally good. Many of you are enthusiastic about the very wide range of activities available after school, through curriculum plus. You are offered a very good range of subjects to study, including vocational courses.

As with any school, there are some improvements that can still be made and we noted two. One is about keeping up the improvements in attendance and behaviour (where you can play a part too). Another is for teachers to mark your books more regularly.

However, we also recognised why yours is one of the most improved schools in the country because of its outstanding leadership and community spirit. You can all be proud, as would one of my predecessors, after whom your school is named.

Yours truly

R Kapadia

Her Majesty's Inspector