

Tribal Group  
1-4 Portland  
Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR  
T 0845 123 6001  
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Dr A Jones  
The Headteacher  
Maryhill High School  
Gloucester Road  
Kidsgrove  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST7 4DL

Dear Dr Jones

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 December 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I would particularly like to thank the staff and students who gave up their time to speak to me.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 29 and 30 November 2006, the school was asked to:

- raise achievement in science by improving the quality of teaching
- raise achievement in the sixth form by improving the overall quality of teaching and guidance to students
- ensure the consistent use of assessment to inform students how to improve and to enable teachers to better plan work matched to students' starting points.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising pupils' achievement.

Since the last inspection the senior leadership team has been strengthened. It has made improvements in raising the quality of teaching and learning by the use of coaching and mentoring. The school has developed a better use of data to monitor students' progress and put in place interventions for students who are underperforming. Much of the work is at the early stages of development and has not yet shown significant improvements in raising standards.

After a considerable number of staffing issues in science over the last two years, the school now has new staff and more effective leadership of the subject. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 declined and science did not meet the challenging

targets set. In Key Stage 4, GCSE results in science also declined and remained inadequate with only 28% of students obtaining a grade A\* to C. Current data for Year 11 shows that students are on course to do better. Results for modular exams show an upward trend. Teaching and learning are improving with a detailed programme of support from senior managers and the local authority. In the lessons observed there was a clear focus on lesson objectives and plenaries to review students' learning. Older students comment on the improvements in the teaching of science. In lessons where behaviour is well managed, students are focused and complete the tasks set, and there is a good working ethos. In other lessons there is some minor disruption by students who are not engaged in learning and whose behaviour goes unchallenged by the teacher. Some older students are disengaged from the subject despite high target grades due to previous poor teaching. Lesson observations are regularly undertaken by managers, are critical and clearly indicate how lessons can be better, with a strong focus on assessment. However, assessment practice remains variable. Some books have precise targets on how to improve, but other targets are too generic and do not focus sufficiently on how to improve in the subject.

Achievement in the sixth form is improving. The A level pass rates are much improved in 2007, with many subjects reaching 100% with an overall average of 97%. Most students are making satisfactory progress. There is a wide variation between the performance of different subjects at AS level. The average pass rate at AS level was 78% and indicates that students should be making better progress. Collaboration with the local school and college is improving the curriculum with courses at different levels and the opportunity to study both academic and vocational courses. The school has improved its advice and guidance in Year 11 to ensure students are on appropriate courses once they enter the sixth form. The lack of provision for religious education has been appropriately addressed with a range of research topics undertaken by students as part of the tutorial programme. However, the extent of spirituality is not always evident in these topics. Students comment positively about the increased opportunities to enjoy sport and fitness, for example in the fitness suite. Teaching and learning are improving with more monitoring of lessons in the sixth form. School records indicate that no lessons in the sixth form are inadequate. There is good assessment practice in psychology, which clearly indicates to students how marks are awarded and what needs to be done in order to improve. There is better tracking of students' performance and target grades on a half termly basis to tackle underachievement.

Governors are now better informed about the performance of the school and the sixth form. The governors' standards committee is still fairly new yet has met three times. Governors are being provided with a range of data and information on examination results and the progress students are making. However, the sixth form data provided to governors on AS and A level performance does not show trends over a number of years to make comparisons year on year. Governors are not at a stage to sufficiently challenge the school about areas of underachievement.

Assessment continues to be given a high priority in school training and lesson planning. Assessment also now features in every teacher's performance management objectives. The tracking of students' progress is detailed with some subject areas like

mathematics undertaking detailed analysis of students' progress in relation to targets. Whole school monitoring of assessment shows that improvements are being made in the consistency and embedding of practice across the school. Significant work has been undertaken with subject leaders to develop practice, alongside coaching and mentoring. The school recognises that whilst improvements have been made they have not yet sufficiently impacted on raising standards. Students are more aware of target levels and grades and what they are learning. Motivational stickers and stamps are used well in some areas to engage students.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh  
Her Majesty's Inspector