

Marple Hall School - A Specialist Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106138
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	324339
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Stephen Wall

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1405
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr N Griffiths
Headteacher	Mrs L Calderbank
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2006
School address	Hill Top Drive Marple Stockport Cheshire SK6 6LB
Telephone number	0161 4277966
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school situated in an area of broadly favourable social and economic circumstances. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is low. Nearly all students are White British. The school is housed in two separate buildings within a short walk of each other. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational need is below average. The school became a specialist language college in September 2005. Since the previous inspection there have been a significant number of changes and appointments to the senior leadership team of the school: a new deputy headteacher has been appointed to take up post in September 2009. The school has gained the Healthy School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education with several good aspects, including the personal development and well-being of students, the curriculum and the quality of care, guidance and support. The school has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. It gives satisfactory value for money. After a slow start in tackling the issues for improvement identified in the last inspection report, changes to the senior management of the school are providing the necessary momentum to get the school moving forward more strongly. This is starting to bring about necessary improvements, especially in raising standards and achievement and improving attendance. The school recognises that it needs to accelerate the rate of improvement further to ensure that all students consistently achieve as well as they should. Most parents are supportive of the school. Many of them comment on how pleased they are with the level of care and support the school provides for their sons and daughters. However, a significant number, justifiably, express concern about the inconsistent quality of teaching and the disruptive behaviour of some students in some lessons.

For two years up to summer 2008, students' achievement declined. From above average starting points, the proportion of students attaining at least five higher GCSE grades was average in 2008. Inspection evidence shows that this decline has been halted and that standards are now rising. The improvement is being brought about by a number of factors including, improved attendance levels, more effective monitoring of students' progress, an improved curriculum that incorporates a wider range of courses and qualifications, and more rigorous target-setting. The school's language specialism is also playing a pivotal part in supporting improvement by, for example, enabling students to enter for GCSE examinations early, with obvious success. While much teaching is good and sometimes better, a significant amount is only satisfactory, chiefly because it lacks pace and challenge. On occasions, the lack of challenge is so significant that teaching is inadequate. Too many lessons start late, frequently by more than 10 minutes, as students move between buildings. The loss of learning time has a detrimental effect on students' progress and achievement. Overall, the quality of teaching is improving, because leaders and managers are monitoring it more regularly and more effectively. However, the monitoring process places too much emphasis on teaching rather than learning, which occasionally leads to overgenerous judgements on lesson quality.

Students' behaviour around school and in most lessons is generally good. However, it deteriorates in lessons when teaching does not fully engage students' interest or challenge them sufficiently. Students are respectful to visitors and say how much they enjoy coming to school to meet their friends. They enjoy the opportunities they are given to take on responsibilities, by becoming peer mentors, for example. The school council is a very active body, which has contributed to significant improvements to the school's behaviour policies and procedures. A very wide range of popular extra-curricular activities support students' ability to adopt healthy lifestyles. Students are articulate and self-confident. By the time they leave, most are well prepared for future study or for the world of work. The school has recently introduced a house system which is in the early stages of combining the school's very good provision for students' personal care and welfare with more effective support and guidance for their academic progress and achievement. As a result the checking of students' achievement is becoming more rigorous so that underachievement is identified and tackled earlier.

The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has worked hard to get the school moving forward more strongly. Astute appointments to senior and middle management are

starting to bring about the necessary momentum for change and development. Much of what the school is doing, however, is at a relatively early stage and the full impact of initiatives is not always apparent. The school has, therefore, satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' rate of progress across both key stages in order to raise standards further.
- Provide a sharper focus on the quality of students' learning to make the monitoring of teaching more rigorous.
- Eradicate the pockets of inadequate teaching and make all teaching consistently challenging.
- Reduce the amount of learning time lost because of students' late arrival to lessons.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' achievement is satisfactory. From above average starting points they make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 to attain standards that are generally above average. In 2007 and 2008 students' achievement slowed in Key Stage 4. Whilst remaining above average, the proportion of students attaining at least five higher GCSE grades rose more slowly than nationally. However, the proportion of students attaining at least five higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, remained strongly above average. Overall, therefore, the picture is of students making satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4. Inspection evidence shows that standards are rising and demanding targets look set to be met. More focused and rigorous management is starting to move overall standards in Key Stage 4 forward once again with a consequent rise in standards. All groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good also. Students show good knowledge and understanding of world cultures and religions. They are respectful of each other and adults. They work together effectively in groups. Students' behaviour is satisfactory. Most students behave maturely and respectfully. However, behaviour overall is let down by some disruption in lessons where teaching does not engage students sufficiently in their learning. Students feel safe in school. 'Wherever you walk around, there are teachers about and no hidden corners. There is always an adult to turn to if we need help or advice' is a typical comment. Students value the programme of personal, social, health and religious education which makes them aware of the dangers of substance abuse and of the importance of personal safety. Students enjoy the opportunities they are given to take on responsibilities, as peer mentors, for example. They are also successful and eager supporters of charities both locally and internationally. Students' above average levels of literacy and numeracy, together with their levels of maturity, mean that their preparation for their future economic well-being is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Relationships are good in most lessons. As a result, behaviour in most lessons is good and students enjoy their learning. Where teaching is most effective, teachers have high expectations, set challenging tasks and pose questions that make students think for themselves. Effective teaching is also characterised by detailed preparation and the setting of assignments which are appropriate to students' abilities and needs. Lessons are also conducted at a good pace and with enthusiasm to encourage students to join in eagerly and make good progress. In those lessons where the pace is not quick enough and the level of challenge too low, students are, unsurprisingly, less engaged in their learning and make slower progress. At times, students' frustration takes the form of disruptive behaviour which acts as a brake on their progress and learning. Teaching in the school's languages specialism is very good and, at times, outstanding. The school is starting to capitalise on this by sharing good practice more systematically across subject areas.

The quality of marking is inconsistent. Where it is good, it gives students a clear indication of how well they are doing and how to improve their work. However, some books are marked infrequently and comments are not helpful enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It has been developed to match the needs and abilities of all students. The school has started to enter significant numbers of Key Stage 3 students for GCSE examinations in modern languages. This is popular with students. Results are good with the vast majority gaining A* to C grades by the end of Year 9. Courses and qualifications have been overhauled and extended in Key Stage 4 so that they match students' interests and aspirations more closely. For example, GCSE results in science are rising significantly following the introduction of a new course and syllabus. Vocational courses have also been developed in, for example, health and social care, beauty therapy and motor vehicle engineering. Students following the courses are enthusiastic about the increasing vocational opportunities available to them. Students praise the very wide range of enrichment activities available. Sports, music, drama, tuition in languages and foreign travel are all popular and make a significant contribution to students' personal development and levels of self-confidence.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Arrangements to ensure students' personal welfare are highly effective and a strength of the school. Arrangements for safeguarding students are in place and meet current government requirements. Attention to health and safety matters, including risk assessments, is meticulous. Strategies to foster students' ease of transition from primary schools enable students to settle in quickly. Older students say that they receive copious guidance on options available to them when they leave the school. Well established links with outside agencies ensure that specialist guidance and support are on hand when necessary. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective in helping them make progress in line with other students. The school has been especially effective in raising

levels of attendance, which are now above average. This is helping the drive to raise standards and achievement. Procedures to track students' progress are becoming more effective. Students know their targets and, in most subjects, they know what they need to do to achieve them. Teachers are becoming increasingly adept at using data on students' targets to inform their teaching and identify when students are not making enough progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The reorganisation of senior leadership and management and some astute appointments to the senior leadership team are enabling the school to move forward more purposefully. Self-evaluation procedures are satisfactory. They result in senior leaders knowing the school's strengths and weaknesses and making honest and generally accurate judgements about the school's effectiveness. Subject leaders are gaining a clearer understanding of their roles. Using assessment data, subject reviews have been introduced to hold middle managers more closely to account. As a result the inconsistencies in standards across subjects are being evened out. The monitoring of students' progress is now rigorous and enables effective intervention for those who are underperforming. Current data, including GCSE results already gained, indicate that this has had a positive effect on achievement this year. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good: students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well. Leadership of the languages specialism is good, leading to high standards and very effective teaching. The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. There are strong links with local schools. Languages tuition for the local community and an international day for students promote effective involvement in the local and global communities. However, students' awareness of life in a multicultural society does not receive the attention it deserves and needs. Governors are supportive of the school. They are becoming more knowledgeable about how effective the school is. They are receiving more relevant information, which is enabling them to hold the school more rigorously to account.

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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?	3
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	3
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?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for your warm welcome when my colleagues and I came to inspect your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you. What you told us helped us to reach our judgements about how well your school is doing.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory and improving quality of education. Your personal development and well-being are good. So too are the quality of the curriculum and the levels of care, guidance and support the school provides for you. After a period when standards did not improve in line with the national picture, evidence shows that standards and your achievement are now starting to rise. They are improving because of several factors: your attendance levels have improved – well done! – the school is tracking your progress more effectively, leaders and managers are monitoring the quality of teaching and learning more regularly, and your targets are now more demanding. We are pleased to see that the school is now starting to move forward more strongly. We were impressed with much of your behaviour around school and in lessons. However, behaviour in a few lessons was simply not good enough and prevented many of you from learning effectively. We were also concerned to see how many lessons get off to a slow start because so many of you arrive late for lessons. This wastes a lot of learning time.

To make sure your school continues to improve, we are asking it to do four things:

- increase the rate of improvement to make sure the drive for raising standards and achievement continues to gather momentum
- make the monitoring of teaching and learning more rigorous, by providing a sharper focus on the quality of your learning
- eradicate the pockets of inadequate teaching and make all teaching consistently challenging
- reduce the amount of learning time lost because of your frequent late arrival to lessons.

Your support and hard work will help the school continue to sustain the improvements which are already underway.