

# Maidenhill School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115775
<b>Local Authority</b>	Gloucestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326270
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mary Harlow HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	611
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Hauser
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gary Watson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 December 2008
<b>School address</b>	Kings Road Stonehouse GL10 2HA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01453 822469
<b>Fax number</b>	01453 825615

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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Maidenhill School is smaller than the average secondary school and situated in Stonehouse, on the outskirts of Stroud. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage and numbers on roll have been falling in recent years. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties or behaviour problems. The school has specialist status in the performing arts.

A new headteacher was appointed to the school in September 2008. The school has been nominated as one of four in Gloucestershire to be forwarded for Phase 1 Building Schools for the Future (BSF) funding. It has also been designated as a National Challenge school and receives support from the John Cabot Learning Federation as part of this initiative. When the school was last inspected, it was found to require special measures.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

'The new headteacher has made a huge difference to Maidenhill.' 'Things have improved greatly.' 'The school is so much better.' These are the views of parents and inspectors agree. Maidenhill is improving rapidly and it now provides its students with a satisfactory education. Without exception, students talk enthusiastically about how the new headteacher has made a difference for the better to their life at school. They appreciate his high visibility and his willingness to get to know them by name. Indeed the school's motto 'creating and achieving a brighter future' is starting to permeate throughout the school.

Improvements are happening at a swift pace because of the headteacher's impressive leadership. Nothing but the best will do for the Maidenhill students and, because of his skilful management of staff and students alike, most are totally on board. Morale is improving considerably; senior and middle leaders and governors are growing in professional confidence to ensure everything they do is focused relentlessly on driving up standards across the school. As a result, leadership and management are satisfactory. Nevertheless, there is still more to be done to increase the impact of all middle managers and governors on improved standards and achievement. Subject leadership in mathematics remains inadequate.

For some time the school struggled to tackle weaknesses successfully, particularly raising standards in English and mathematics and improving behaviour and teaching. All are now being tackled assiduously; there is no room for complacency, no stone is left unturned. Standards are improving, but remain below average at GCSE and at the end of Key Stage 3, particularly in English and mathematics. Although students' weak literacy and numeracy skills are still a barrier to more rapid progress in all subjects, their achievement overall is satisfactory. Students' personal development is also satisfactory. There have been significant improvements in their behaviour and attendance is improving. Some aspects of students' personal development require further improvement, for example their contribution to the spiritual dimension of school life.

Teaching is getting better; it is satisfactory overall but many lessons are frequently good. Nonetheless, there are not enough opportunities in some subjects, particularly mathematics, for students to take responsibility for their learning. Students' attitudes to learning are improving quickly, although a few still find it difficult to concentrate, particularly when they are not involved practically. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory, although the teaching of basic skills is not embedded fully in all subjects. The school's specialist status enjoys an increasingly high profile and has a positive influence on the students' achievements both in school and within the local community.

Most parents are positive about the improving quality of education on offer. Quite rightly several raise concerns about the quality of teaching in mathematics, inconsistencies in homework and the lack of opportunities for girls to play sport. The headteacher is addressing these issues diligently and recognises there is still more to be done to improve these aspects. The school knows itself well and is setting the right targets to get better, although these are not yet sufficiently challenging in some subjects. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school and are tackling weaknesses assiduously. Governors are holding the school to account appropriately and with increasing self belief. Weaknesses found at the previous inspection have been tackled adequately. This, together with the

substantial improvements made in a short space of time recently, means that there is satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Maidenhill has finally turned the corner. If this swift improvement continues its future now looks bright.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Embed the drive to raise standards across the school particularly in English and mathematics.
- Sharpen the focus in lessons on how well students learn and increase the opportunities for students to take responsibility to learn for themselves.
- Strengthen the teaching of basic skills across the curriculum.
- Improve the subject leadership in mathematics.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged as 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**

On entry in Year 7, students' attainment is broadly average but literacy skills in particular are below average. Students make satisfactory progress through the school, although in English and mathematics progress is relatively weaker. The proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE improved in 2008 and at 49% was the highest for many years. While some subjects, catering, dance, performing arts, music technology and resistant materials, considerably exceeded their targets, others did less well. Only 28% achieved five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics, below the national floor target, and boys in particular underachieved. Improvements in science and mathematics were not matched by English where only 35% achieved an A\* to C grade. However, strategies to raise performance are proving successful. Assessment is being used with more precision to identify potential underachievement and targeted intervention is effective in ensuring students catch up. The school is on track to improve its results at GCSE particularly in English and mathematics. Students are making at least satisfactory progress in lessons. While previously the identification and progress of students with learning difficulties was a concern, the school now has satisfactory systems in place to identify these students and provide appropriately for their individual needs. As a result, they are now making satisfactory progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students' behaviour is improving; it is satisfactory and often good. Around the school a greater number of students open doors for the adults and greet them confidently with friendly smiles. However, there is still some boisterous behaviour by a few students in the corridors despite the diligent supervision by staff. In lessons, behaviour is good when teaching is stimulating. Nonetheless, when teaching is too controlling, stubborn pockets of low level disruption exist and a minority of students show a lack of respect. Students report that this happens much less than it used to and say the behaviour policy and better teaching are having a positive impact on their achievement. Attendance has improved, partly because students enjoy coming to school much more, although the rate is still below the national average. There are good strategies

such as 'Missing u' in place to tackle persistent absence. Punctuality is also much better and is satisfactory.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. There are strengths in their cultural development and their understanding of right and wrong. Students have adequate opportunities to reflect on important matters such as in the 'Learning for Life' programme, but they are not frequent enough. Assemblies miss opportunities to cultivate spirituality. Students help and support one another through the school council and they express confidence in the way rare incidents of bullying are dealt with. As a result, they feel safe in school and well cared for.

Students report, since the arrival of the new headteacher, their voice really matters and they value the improvements made to the school. Students also welcome the increased opportunities to take responsibility for links with the community, especially through performing arts activities. Such experiences are contributing significantly to their growing self esteem and improved social development. Many pupils adopt healthy lifestyles, helped by the good pastoral support systems available to them such as help to manage conflict. Others participate in sporting and performing arts activities as well as making improved choices in their diets. Nevertheless, there is still more to do to ensure all students are fully aware of the importance of health and well-being. The 'Learning for Life' programme is highly valued and contributes significantly to preparing students for their future lives and careers. However, students' weaker basic skills are a major obstacle.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Although they are satisfactory overall, teaching is stronger than learning. However, there are an increasing number of good and better lessons, particularly in design and technology, science, the humanities and the performing arts. In these lessons there is a clear focus on learning and students are given responsibility through stimulating independent and group tasks such as oral presentations and practical investigations. The pace is brisk, information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively as a powerful teaching tool and a well structured review of learning takes place. This motivates the students to make good progress. Where teaching is less successful, particularly in mathematics, teachers' expectations are not high enough, planned activities are not intellectually challenging and teachers' talk predominates at the expense of student learning. As a result, the students become passive and disengaged.

Most teachers have increasingly high expectations and good specialist knowledge. Relationships are positive and both boys and girls respond well to direct questioning. Planning is comprehensive but does not always build upon prior learning or include opportunities for checking students' progress. Assessment procedures are satisfactory and most students are aware of their targets for improvement. The quality of marking is inconsistent and poorly presented work, including homework, goes unchallenged in several classes. Not enough is being done by some departments to ensure the learning environment is of a high quality.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

Overall, the curriculum matches the needs of students effectively, as shown in the recent improvements in their achievement. Academic, vocational and alternative pathways at Key

Stage 4 are open to suit all abilities. Links with other institutions, together with work related and enterprise opportunities, are in place although not extensively, nor for all students. Because of this, a comprehensive review of the Key Stage 4 curriculum is taking place to ensure it reflects the needs, interests and aspirations of all students and includes improved provision for religious education, citizenship and ICT. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are not yet embedded sufficiently across the curriculum. This is a weakness.

There is a good range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities for students including mixed year clubs, visits, after school activities and international links. That said, there are inadequate opportunities for girls to participate in sport. Appropriate booster and revision classes exist in most subject areas. The school's specialist performing arts status enjoys an increasingly high profile both within the school and the wider community. The school's theatre company works effectively with a nearby special school and poignant plays, such as 'Out of the Box', have won several awards at local festivals. Students benefit greatly from regular high quality dance and drama productions and charity fundraising events.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

Students are well cared for by the school and pastoral systems are effective in ensuring students feel safe and supported. Concerns raised by students are picked up quickly and dealt with effectively. Students who find school challenging are well provided for by committed staff who know and understand them. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place. The revised behaviour for learning policy is consistently implemented and students acknowledge that it is fair. Moreover, they report that behaviour and the climate for learning in lessons have improved as a result. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved; it is now satisfactory. Nonetheless, there is still more work to do to ensure intervention programmes enable these students to make better progress. Some well-targeted and effective support has gone into supporting students with poor attendance records with some success. Procedures for tracking and monitoring the students' progress are rigorous against their targets. This ensures an early warning of students at risk of falling behind. The analysis of performance data to identify patterns and groups who may be underachieving is variable across the school and remains underdeveloped in some departments.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Visionary, steely, determined leadership by the new headteacher has given the school fresh direction and hope. Aply supported by a committed senior team, substantial improvements have been made in a short space of time. The school has an accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses and is setting the right targets to make it better. In a few subjects, these are not yet sufficiently challenging. Monitoring by the senior team is rigorous and middle leaders, rightly, are held to account in a challenging and supportive manner. Most, but not all, are executing their roles with renewed energy and enthusiasm. Subject leadership is particularly strong in design and technology, humanities, science and the performing arts. It is inadequate in mathematics. Resources such as text books are insufficient both in quality and quantity in most subjects.

The school uses external bodies successfully to validate its own evaluation. The close partnership established with the John Cabot Learning Federation is having an excellent influence on the professional development of staff. The school works effectively with local and city schools and the community. Its audit to promote community cohesion is comprehensive and good plans are in place to develop the school's strategy for this work.

Governance is satisfactory. The local authority has ensured that the governing body has now the right blend of skills and qualifications to hold the school to account. Extensive training is helping them to do so in a rigorous and supportive manner. Governors play a key role in ensuring improvement priorities are scrutinised carefully against stringent checks and controls to secure effective financial management. The financial plan has been agreed appropriately with the local authority. It is now being monitored robustly by governors.



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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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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**

30 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Maidenhill School, Stroud GL10 2HA

Thank you for making me and my colleagues welcome when we inspected your school recently. We were pleased to be able to talk with some of you and to watch you at work in lessons. What you said to us was helpful and contributed to the judgements that we made in the inspection report.

Many of you will know that Maidenhill was found to have many weaknesses when it was inspected two years ago and it was placed in 'special measures'. Since then much work has gone in to making improvements. The students that we spoke with said that many things have got better recently since the appointment of the new headteacher, particularly your behaviour and the teaching. We agree with you. Your school is now improving rapidly and it no longer requires special measures.

Everyone has worked really hard to improve the quality of education at your school. As a result, you are making much better progress and are on course to reach your target grades. We also know that you enjoy your lessons more because your attendance is getting better and behaviour is improving.

Of course, there are still matters that need more improvement. We have asked the school to:

- embed the drive to raise standards across the school particularly in English and mathematics
- sharpen the focus in lessons on how well you learn and increase the opportunities for you to take more responsibility to learn for yourselves
- strengthen the teaching of basic skills across the curriculum
- improve the subject leadership in mathematics.

You can help by attending school as regularly as you can. With very best wishes for a successful bright future; we hope you achieve great things!

Yours faithfully

Mary Harlow (on behalf of the Inspection Team) Her Majesty's Inspector