

# John Mason School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123256
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	327878
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sheila Nolan

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>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	964
Sixth form	126
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Paul Brooks
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Di Mashiter
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 January 2008
<b>School address</b>	Wootton Road Abingdon OX14 1JB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01235 524664
<b>Fax number</b>	01235 520711

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

John Mason School, a specialist Visual and Performing Arts College, serves a community that is mixed, both socially and economically. The school population reflects the local area and is overwhelmingly of White British heritage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of the students who have particular barriers to learning; these are mainly students with low literacy skills and with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Sixth-form provision is enriched through the Abingdon Consortium. The school is registered as an Arts Award Centre.

The school was last inspected in January 2008, and was at that time given a notice to improve. Areas for improvement identified were leadership, management and governance.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

John Mason is a satisfactory school that has made rapid improvement since the last inspection. Thus, in accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Over the past year, the school has recovered well from the previous turbulence at senior leadership level. Supported by the excellent guidance of the headteacher, the restructured governing body and senior team are working well together to move the school forward. There are now secure whole-school systems and procedures, notably those through which the school checks on students' performance and progress. The school has clearly demonstrated its good capacity to improve further. Senior leaders and most staff are clear as to their roles and responsibilities. Although not all middle leaders have the skills to manage their areas fully effectively, many are increasingly holding staff to account for their work.

Parents and students have also recognised the improvements in the school. Echoing the views of many, one parent noted, 'Things have really improved this year. It is good for students to know what they have to aim for.' Students also noted that 'behaviour is much better'. The headteacher has built successfully on the goodwill of the students, the majority of whom really enjoy school. Students convincingly assured inspectors that they feel safe in school and that any concerns are dealt with rapidly and effectively. Most attend regularly, and many are active participants in sports and in the many enrichment activities open to them. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Because of sound personal care, guidance and support, students' overall personal development has improved since the last inspection and is now good. The advances in students' spiritual, moral and social development are greater, however, than those in their cultural development. Although comfortable within their own community, in conversation with inspectors, some displayed a limited understanding of our multicultural society. Nevertheless, many make a difference to others through their community service, their support for younger students, and their involvement in specialist school projects in the local area. Partnerships with external agencies are good, and contribute well to the support of vulnerable students. Sixth-formers are well served through the Consortium's wide curriculum offer.

When compared with the national picture, standards are average across the school. In the most recent national tests, Year 9 achieved satisfactorily in English, mathematics and science. Year 11 made steady progress from joining the school, and half gained at least five higher grade GCSE results, including English and mathematics. Those who achieved less well did so because their progress across subjects was too variable. The school also recognises that the progress of some students with particular needs, mainly those with low literacy skills and those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, is slower than it should be.

The school's records indicate that the progress of current students is accelerating because of the intensive drive to improve teachers' classroom practice. The majority of lessons are at least satisfactory but, as senior leaders acknowledge, there are still not enough good lessons. Despite the improvements in the whole-school systems for monitoring students' progress, in individual classrooms this information is not used well enough to match tasks to the needs of individuals. Additionally, there is no coordinated programme across the curriculum to support those students who have low literacy skills.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

John Mason does well by its sixth form students and provision is well managed. Around three quarters of Year 11 regularly stay on to take Level 3 courses (A-level-equivalent). Students' starting points in Year 12 are generally just below average. Their progress accelerates as they move through the sixth form because of good teaching. Results in advanced supplementary examinations are variable, but are overall close to average. They are average in A2 examinations. Overall, students achieve well, and a high proportion of the most able students gain A and B grades. High numbers continue from Year 12 into Year 13.

The curriculum offers a broad range of academic and other opportunities to meet the needs of current students well, and most proceed to university and further training. Individual care, guidance and support for students are a strength, and as a result the students' personal development is good. Most attend very regularly and those new to the school are well inducted so that they quickly feel at home. Many sixth formers willingly take on a range of responsibilities within school and provide unstinting support for staff and younger students, besides contributing generously to community service projects.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate students' progress across all subjects but especially that of those who have low literacy skills and who face behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.
- Raise the proportion of good quality teaching, so that all lessons take account of individual students' needs.
- Rapidly develop the skills of middle leaders so that they are fully accountable for the work of their areas.

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

Standards are average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11, and have been so over a number of years. Achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 9 in each of English, mathematics and science. Given students' starting points on joining the school, overall progress by the end of Year 11 in 2008, as in previous years, was satisfactory for most. However, some students who begin Year 7 with low literacy skills, or who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, make slower than expected progress over their time in the school. This is because the school has not had well-targeted individual education plans to support these students. Others with particular learning difficulties do make at least satisfactory progress. In most year groups, there is some legacy of underachievement because of previously low expectations of the students and their resulting low aspirations.

In the most recent GCSE examinations, half of the students gained five or more higher grades that included English and mathematics. Students were most successful in mathematics and in art and design, one of the school's specialist areas. Although students' progress remains variable across a range of other subjects, their performance was good in more subjects than in previous years. Less successful areas included drama, design and technology, and modern foreign

languages. The school's records demonstrate that the present Year 11 are making up lost ground and are well placed to meet the school's current challenging targets. These assessments are supported by the students' overall satisfactory progress seen in lessons.

Sixth-form students achieve well and reach average standards. The most able students regularly make good progress, gaining a higher proportion of A and B grades than reached nationally.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Students are happy and responsible members of the school community. Most enjoy coming to school, attend regularly and behave maturely. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good, and their awareness of life in a multicultural society is satisfactory. Students say they feel safe at school and that adults deal effectively with any instances of bullying or racism and with friendship issues. They report that there is always someone in the school with whom they can talk over their personal concerns.

Most students understand the need to eat healthily, and choose healthy options from the lunch menu. Participation rates in physical activities, both within and outside the curriculum, are high. They are developing well their understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities through taking part in elections, such as those for the school council. They also support charitable organisations and enjoy the links established with Europe and Africa. Students' improving basic skills, together with opportunities to take part in a range of enterprise activities, prepare them satisfactorily for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Regular monitoring and shared observations with the local authority ensure that the school has an accurate evaluation of classroom practice. Students recognise that teaching has developed over the past year. 'Teachers are more positive and lessons are fun, so that we make more progress', said a group of students.

Warm working relationships are reflected in students' confidence in their teachers, and this helps them to engage productively in learning, as does teachers' enthusiasm for and good knowledge of their subjects. In a good Year 7 English lesson on figures of speech in poetry, for example, students were excited about assessing their own work using very clear guidelines. Effective questioning allowed students to develop their communication skills through extended answers and class discussion.

Despite these strong features, the quality of marking and feedback to students on their written work is too variable, and does not always help them to improve. There are also many missed opportunities for teachers to reinforce students' literacy skills and to match both subject content and methods to students' individual needs.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum now meets the statutory requirements identified at the last inspection and is satisfactory.

The sixth-form curriculum is a real strength, and since the last inspection, adjustments have been made to the provision for Years 10 and 11 to allow for greater flexibility in the students' programmes. The school has increased the number of vocational elements available to the students but recognises that they would benefit from further such opportunities, and has not yet charted clear pathways to match the needs of all students. Specialist status in the visual and performing arts has broadened option choices and led to a wide range of enrichment activities. The gallery exhibition was a clear favourite with both students and the local community.

Students comment positively on the broad range of extracurricular activities and lunchtime clubs, particularly in sport, art and music. Visits and visitors enhance the opportunities within the personal, social, health and citizenship education programme, which is good.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall, but personal guidance is strong. Students are safe and well cared for in a supportive environment. A parent commented, 'My son settled into the school quickly due to the helpfulness of staff.' New procedures for coordinating the needs of those with learning difficulties are being introduced, but have not yet made an impact on the progress of these groups. Those students looked after by the local authority receive effective guidance to support their progress in school. Students commented very positively on the helpful guidance on subject choices, both for GCSE and post-16 pathways.

Despite effective pastoral support and good new whole-school systems to check students' performance and progress, day-to-day academic support and guidance is still too variable across subjects and year groups. The targets in some students' individual education plans often lack clarity. As a result, teachers and support staff are not always aware of how to help them make progress.

### **Leadership and management**

#### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, but some aspects are good and even outstanding, such as the leadership of the headteacher. This highly effective leadership has nourished a sense of collective accountability for school improvement among senior and middle leaders. Staff are increasingly ambitious for their students, and there is a relentless drive to improve teaching and learning. The impact is evident in the improved school systems and procedures, in the good attitudes and behaviour of the students, and in their growing belief that they can achieve. Parents also recognise the rapid pace of improvement since the last inspection.

Besides recognising the steep improvement path over the past year, the school leadership has a very clear view of where further developments are needed. Self-evaluation at senior level is accurate, and increasingly so among recently appointed middle managers. Rightly acknowledged priorities for the coming year include the rapid improvement in students' progress across subjects, and better provision for some groups of students with particular needs such as low literacy skills and behavioural difficulties. The school recognises the need to develop the skills of some middle leaders further so that they can manage their responsibilities more effectively. The promotion of high-quality teaching and learning is also at the forefront of the school's

development plan, particularly the issue of how teachers address the needs of individual students in lessons. The school is at the early stages of developing the evaluation of its work to support community cohesion. The chair of the restructured governing body undertakes his task ably and guides the governors in supporting and challenging the school well. They have an incisive grasp of the present strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors have ensured that all statutory requirements are now met.



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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	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	2
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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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**

11 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of John Mason School, Abingdon, OX14 1JB

After our visit to your school, we would like to share our findings with you. You made us very welcome and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to talk to us about the school and their work.

You think John Mason is an improving school. We agree with you, and it now offers you a satisfactory education. We are pleased that you are contributing to the school's development by behaving in a calm and sensible manner and by showing consideration and respect for each other and your teachers.

You have an exceptional headteacher who is very well supported by other senior staff and governors. They, together with your teachers, are working tirelessly on your behalf to make sure that you get the best possible education the school can provide. We know that you appreciate this greatly and are confident that staff are always ready to help you. Many of you also make a difference to others through your support and care for younger students, and through projects in the community.

To make John Mason even better, we have asked your teachers to help you make faster progress in lessons, especially those of you who need to focus on improving your literacy skills and your behaviour. We have also asked them to make sure that all lessons take account of how best you learn. Your school will also take forward its plans to develop the skills of staff in charge of subjects and year groups.

We hope you will continue to work with your teachers to make John Mason the best it can be. It would also help if some of you took greater care in presenting your written work.

We wish all of you at John Mason a very successful future.

Yours faithfully

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector