

The Marlborough Church of England School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123267
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327881
Inspection date	28 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Bill Stoneham

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1035
Sixth form	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gordon Lloyd
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Fenn
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	Shipton Road Woodstock OX20 1LP
Telephone number	01993 811431
Fax number	01993 813530

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: how well the students achieve at all levels, how well the Every Child Matters agenda is delivered, and whether the curriculum is effectively meeting the needs of all. Evidence was gathered from examining documents and data; lesson observations; and meetings with staff, students and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Marlborough Church of England School has joint specialist status in Business and Enterprise, and Humanities. Few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Similarly, the proportion of students for whom English is not their first language is well below the national average. The Ormerod Unit for students with physical and/or learning disabilities is on the school site, and since it forms part of the school's provision it was included in this inspection. Students from this unit integrate well into lessons and other additional activities. The school's facilities are used extensively by the local community, for example for the provision of adult education courses in the evening.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Marlborough Church of England School is a good school. It has many outstanding features. Students achieve well and reach above average standards in their work. Their personal development is outstanding because of the excellent opportunities offered by the curriculum, and the effective care, support and guidance provided by the school. The school is successful in meeting its aim of valuing each of its students, and enabling them to achieve well and to become enterprising learners. The school is a popular one and valued by parents. The vast majority of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were lavish in their praise of the school.

Students enter the school with levels of prior attainment that are broadly average. They achieve well in the first five years of the school and attain results by the end of Year 11 that are above the national average. In the specialist subjects of English and business-related subjects, standards are consistently at least above average. Students in Years 7 to 11 make good progress towards meeting their challenging targets. In the 2008 GCSE results, there was evidence of underperformance by some girls. The school has been diligent in identifying and addressing the causes of this, and has taken appropriate action. As a result, students in all years achieve well, because they are taught well.

Students' personal development is outstanding; they are provided with an excellent curriculum and they benefit from outstanding care, guidance and support. Most enjoy their education, have excellent attitudes to learning, and feel that the school provides a safe and caring environment. Incidents of bullying and other forms of harassment are rare. Students say that any such incidents are always appropriately and effectively dealt with when they arise. Attendance is above average. Behaviour is good, and often exemplary. It was especially impressive during a moving whole-school assembly. A sizeable minority of parents expressed some reservations about behaviour during the previous academic year. In the occasional lesson, classroom control led to some disturbance and a slackening of the pace of learning. Senior staff acknowledge this criticism. Decisive action has been taken and there are now even fewer incidents. The Every Child Matters agenda is very well met. Students have an excellent awareness of how to lead safe and healthy lives, and they know who to consult if they need advice or guidance. All aspects of health education are taught thoroughly and effectively through excellent personal and physical education programmes. A high proportion of the students participate in a wide range of sporting activities. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Their understanding of different cultures is promoted extremely well. All students take a GCSE course in religious education. There are regular whole-school assemblies, and community partnerships, both at home and abroad, are strongly promoted to extend and broaden the students' understanding. As part of a recent Beijing Day, for example, students were taught meditation. The school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding, and is characterised by excellent opportunities within the curriculum and the many charitable efforts that are supported by the students. The school's dual specialist college status is the other important reason why the school is able to offer the students good opportunities to work in their local community and beyond. The students' involvement in enterprise activities, allied to a thorough careers education and guidance programme, and the emphasis placed by staff on developing literacy and numeracy skills, all make a good contribution to developing skills for future employment and adult life. The students play an active and important role in helping the school to improve.

Students learn well because most teaching is good and some of it is outstanding. Lessons are well planned, expectations are high, and students are usually set appropriately challenging work, though a few parents commented that children in Year 7 with above average abilities are not consistently stretched. However, in the lessons observed, the work set, both in Year 7 and all other year groups, was appropriately challenging and the students responded well. Some inconsistencies were noted in the structure of a minority of lessons. Not all staff identify lesson objectives and learning outcomes. Quality starter activities do not always feature, and good-quality plenary sessions, whereby staff can readily evaluate the learning that has occurred, are not routinely used to ensure a strong end to the lesson. The school is aware of these issues, and there is a good programme to identify and share strengths in teaching and learning and to ensure that support is offered where improvements are needed.

The curriculum is outstanding. Students are offered a very wide choice of subjects and it is well designed to meet the needs of all students. Curriculum development has been enterprising and innovative. This is reflected in the school's desire to ensure that the provision for modern foreign languages remains to the fore; the recent introduction of a National Vocational Qualification German course reflects this commitment, as does the improved provision for vocational education. Moreover, students are offered excellent opportunities to involve themselves in extra-curricular and enrichment activities, and the elective programme, which provides for personal, social and health education, effectively supports the high quality of work undertaken in promoting the students' personal and social development. Care, guidance and support are also excellent, and the academic tracking arrangements have been improved considerably. Target setting is embedded. Students consulted during the inspection knew their targets, knew what levels they were currently attaining, and understood what they needed to do to improve further.

The school is well led and managed. The leadership of the headteacher is especially strong. She is well supported by her senior managers, who have a good understanding of both the strengths of the school and the areas where improvements are required. The governing body offers good support; they, too, have a keen understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. Their commitment to the school and the pride that they show in the students' achievements are very strong.

The school works most effectively in partnership with many agencies and external bodies. This excellent partnership work benefits the students' education in many ways and offers a variety of extra opportunities. The school's contribution to community cohesion is excellent. Many parents highlighted the inclusive nature of the school, with particular praise for the transition arrangements for students joining the school in Year 7 and for the Ormerod Unit. Students attending the Ormerod Unit are fully involved in the work of the school, and their levels of attainment and achievement match those of the other students. The school is a lively and enterprising place to study and work. Good progress has been made since the last inspection, especially in terms of the quality of self-evaluation and in successfully addressing differences in levels of achievement between boys and girls; there is a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education. It, too, is characterised by some outstanding features - for example, the excellent personal development of students, and the way that the school uses partner organisations to enliven sixth-form teaching and learning, and the curriculum

provided. A high proportion of Year 11 students, though not necessarily all those who attained highly, join the sixth form, with a number being recruited from other schools. This latter group feel well supported and say they are made welcome. Levels of achievement are good. Standards on entry are broadly average, but A-level results are above average, with very high course completion rates. Students achieve well because teaching is good, and they respond positively to a good curriculum. The curriculum has been improved, with more vocational options available. Academic monitoring is good and the students' work is well tracked. Consequently, target setting is realistic but challenging. Sixth-form students make excellent role models for younger students, and they play an integral part in school life, adding to the vibrancy of the school. They act responsibly and are appreciative of the opportunities offered and of the help and support they receive. Sixth form provision is managed well, but one aspect of attendance needs to be tighter - students are allowed to leave the campus during the school day when not in lessons. The arrangements for signing in and out of school are often not followed. The head of the sixth form and her team have created a good working environment, and their planning for further improvements is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure greater consistency in classroom practice, especially in terms of using lesson objectives, learning outcomes, starter activities and plenaries.
- Ensure that all sixth form students comply with the requirement that they sign out when leaving the campus, and sign in on their return.

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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?	2	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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	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**

10 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Marlborough Church of England School, Woodstock, OX20 1LP

Thank you for the welcome you gave us on our recent visit. We enjoyed learning about the work you are doing. We have concluded that you are offered a good standard of education. It is improving, and there are many outstanding features, especially regarding your personal development; the curriculum; care, guidance and support; and the partnership and community work that you undertake. The school is well led and managed overall, and the headteacher leads the senior team exceptionally well. She is very well supported by her senior management team and all other members of staff. They are all working hard to help you. Your standards of work are above average compared with national standards, and most of you are making good progress in your studies. The school provides you with a very safe and caring environment in which to work. We were pleased to see how well you behave in your lessons, around the buildings and in assembly. I really enjoyed attending your assembly, and the song from Cats was performed brilliantly. It was also pleasing to see just how much you enjoy your work and that many of you are very keen to succeed.

We have highlighted areas where improvement is needed. We have asked the school to make sure that:

- in all lessons, the purpose of the lesson is set out clearly, and effective starter and plenary activities are included
- the arrangements for signing in and out of school by sixth formers are made tighter and complied with fully.

Thank you for your contribution to this inspection. We really enjoyed meeting you and I would like to wish you every success in your future endeavours.

Yours faithfully

Bill Stoneham

Lead Inspector