

Great Marlow School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110535
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	337522
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Limm

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1208
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Keith Goulding
Headteacher	Geralyn Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2007
School address	Bobmore Lane Marlow SL7 1JE
Telephone number	01628 483752
Fax number	01628 475852
Email address	gwilson@bucksgfl.org.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 29 lessons, and 29 teachers were seen. The inspectors met with governors, groups of students, and staff, but did not meet with parents. Telephone conversations were undertaken with the school's improvement partner and two headteachers of partner schools. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including the school's self-evaluation form, development and improvement plans, assessment data and students' work. Inspectors also scrutinised 347 parental questionnaires, 97 responses from students and 79 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well the school has improved the use of assessment, tracking and targeting systems to enhance learning and raise the achievement of the more able students
- the extent to which teaching and learning activities are challenging and lead to good outcomes for different groups of students.

Information about the school

Great Marlow School is a large school with a growing and thriving sixth form. The school accepts applications from students who come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds in a local authority where many schools apply selection criteria. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds but about a fifth comes from different minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is about average. The school attained technology status in 2005.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

It is easy to see why Great Marlow is now a very popular and oversubscribed school. It is a good school which has strengthened some aspects of its provision so that they are now outstanding. There is a strong learning ethos and attainment and progress have improved. The proportion of students attaining 5+ A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics has been above average for the last five years. Attainment in specialist technology subjects has improved. Achievement is good for most students, both in the main school and the sixth form, and often outstanding for the very well supported students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The questionnaires returned from students and from parents and carers show that they are very happy with the school, and value the opportunities and care that it provides. One sixth former said, 'If I had to describe how I feel about attending this school in one word, it would definitely be proud.' In discussions, students were overwhelmingly positive about 'their' school and how well they know staff, and are cared for. This helps to explain why attendance is above average.

The school provides a good curriculum both in and beyond school, but opportunities are missed to improve the quality of students' writing skills in a coordinated way across different subjects. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. This ensures that the quality of students' learning, the progress students make and all aspects of their personal development are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through planned opportunities in the curriculum. In the large majority of lessons teaching is good and it is often outstanding, but in some cases the marking in students' books and files does not always provide enough information to help them improve their work.

The headteacher has provided excellent leadership and drive and, with extremely good support from her leadership team, has worked very hard to improve the school so that it now has a good reputation. Other leaders and managers, governors and staff are passionate about improving students' outcomes and have robust systems to do so. As one governor said, 'We are on a journey to excellence.' Partnerships with other schools and colleges help to improve students' learning and well-being. The school engages positively with parents and carers and does much to ensure they support the school's aims. Students contribute well to the development of the school community and there are good links with the local businesses and charities. The school's rising results and improvements in teaching and learning, together with a clear and accurate awareness of its strengths and weaknesses, demonstrate good capacity for sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of students' progress further by ensuring that:
 - marking always shows students precisely and clearly how to improve their work.
- Improve the quality of students' writing skills by:
 - providing regular, planned opportunities across the curriculum for students to consolidate and hone their skills through extended writing.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' results in 2009 showed that all groups achieved well, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities did extremely well. Observations of lessons and the work in students' books confirmed the school's own findings and showed that all groups of students are doing at least as well as last year. Overall attainment is broadly average, but this represents good progress through the school. The most able students are being challenged more rigorously and they are performing better as a consequence. The school works very hard and effectively to support students who struggle in any aspect of their work. The school has focused on improving learning skills this year and, in subjects where attainment had fallen well short of national averages, the gaps are closing rapidly or have already closed. Students are keen and committed to do their best and their attendance is above average.

Students feel safe and say that staff listen to their concerns and respond to their needs. Students understand that they are expected to behave well in lessons and around the school, and do so well. A minority of students who responded to the questionnaire indicated that there are sometimes incidents of low level disruption in some classes, but inspectors did not see any such incidents. Students' attitudes towards healthy lifestyles are positive. Students value their school and make good contributions to the school and the broader community. For example, they act as school council representatives, guiding visitors, supporting charities and working with younger students in primary schools. Students have a good understanding of the 'real' world and what it means to be a good citizen. They are developing their knowledge of the world of work through work experience weeks and enterprise days. Most students have high aspirations for the future and many are successful in gaining entry to good universities. They recognise the valuable contribution the school makes in supporting them through different curriculum pathways to success, early entry to examinations, and providing a flexible curriculum for those who require more vocational training. There is a sense of enjoyment in learning about others and the world around them. Students socialise and cooperate well, know right from wrong and apply such knowledge well in practice.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is often outstanding, but some is satisfactory and a small number of lessons are still inadequate despite the school's efforts. In the best examples teachers prepare and plan their lessons carefully using assessment adeptly to match the work well to students' differing needs. Lessons start crisply and they provide very good pace and challenge to all. Teachers use questioning to make students think, to draw on their previous learning and to give reasons for their answers. Teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm help to convey a love of their subject to students. In good and outstanding lessons staff continually monitor students' progress and respond appropriately. Where teaching is less good, some teachers do not give students sufficient opportunity to improve their learning through discussion or active self-evaluation and they dominate the lesson. Activities are sometimes mundane; there remains a lack of challenge and the use of assessment to guide learning is limited. Working relationships in most lessons observed were at least good and students' behaviour was managed well in a climate of praise and reward.

Students know their targets and in most cases their current levels of attainment and what they need to do to improve. Most marking is good, but again there are inconsistencies and some does not provide effective help for students on how to improve their work.

The school has tailored its good curriculum to ensure that it meets all students' needs

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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better than at the time of the previous inspection. It is coherent and well planned and mixes both the traditional with the innovative to ensure that every student achieves well. In Year 7 the new integrated learning lesson is designed to help students develop their learning skills so that they can apply them in other subjects. It is not yet clear how well this is leading to the desired improvements. In Key Stage 3 the flexible pathways curriculum is beginning to have a positive impact on attainment and progress. Many students begin their Key Stage 4 programme in Year 9 and again there are well-differentiated pathways to meet the needs of all students. However, opportunities for students to improve their writing skills across the curriculum are underdeveloped. There is evidence that the curriculum is leading to increased aspirations among students, and an increasing number are staying on into the sixth form with the aim of going to university. For students at risk of leaving school with no accreditation or who are disaffected, alternative support programmes and accreditation are available at local colleges. The technology specialism is apparent throughout the school and it makes an increasingly strong contribution to its success.

The good range of extra-curricular activities on offer is designed to capture the interest of all students. Activities, such as the excellent rowing provision, have proved very popular. Nearly every student is involved in out-of-hours learning.

Outstanding targeted support for all students is available throughout the year, and is much appreciated by the students. Any students who require further support to enable them to achieve well in English and mathematics are happy to attend additional sessions to improve their work. Good tracking for individual students is used at all levels, ensuring minimal underachievement. Students have high levels of confidence and trust in the staff. The school ensures that parents and carers are involved in their child's learning, including those who speak English as an additional language. Transition from primary schools is very good.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's leadership is exceptional in driving forward improvement and embedding ambition. Senior and middle leaders and governors are ambitious for the school and working hard to ensure that it continues its trajectory of improvement. The school has created a good climate for learning. The senior leaders set challenging targets and almost all staff work effectively to achieve them. The school's systems for

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improving students' attendance, punctuality and behaviour are good and having positive results. Improvements in the quality of teaching have come about as a result of a determined focus on the impact that teaching has upon learning. Improvements in the use of assessment have been good in some subjects but not in all. Tracking systems and the scope of monitoring and professional development are thorough, and as a result more lessons are good or outstanding than at the time of the last inspection. Senior leaders are accurate in their judgements about lessons, and are aware of the remaining weaknesses.

Good partnerships with other primary and secondary schools, external agencies, off-site working, and those related to the specialist status and the community help to support and improve students' achievements. This is particularly the case where primary school pupils are given a good introduction to life at secondary school before they start in earnest. The school promotes equal opportunities well. Good procedures for safeguarding result in a safe school. Although students from all ethnic groups mix well and enjoy school, community cohesion is satisfactory rather than good because opportunities are missed by the school to evaluate current provision and extend the international dimension to the curriculum. The use of resources is considered carefully by governors and the school, and they are deployed well to achieve good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form provides a good education. Students say they are proud of being at the

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school and demonstrate rising aspirations for their future. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is rising but is still below average in national terms. By the time students leave at the end of Year 13, attainment is broadly average. Effective action after the previous inspection has led to continued improvements in student outcomes and confirms the school's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning, and current progress, remains good. Care and support are extremely good, leading to rising retention rates for the sixth form and a majority of students progressing on to further and higher education. Good leadership and management ensure that students are given clear guidance so that they take appropriate courses linked to their capabilities, and are given good advice on how to improve the quality of their work.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers express good support for the school. Most of those who responded to the questionnaire indicated that their children enjoy school and feel safe. Most agree that teaching is good, the school is helping their children's learning well, and that overall they are happy with their children's experience at the school. A few parents disagreed with the statement that the school helps students to have healthy lifestyles. Inspectors found that there is plenty of encouragement for students to lead active lives, including good extra-curricular sports opportunities.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Great Marlow School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 347 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1208 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	97	28	219	63	27	8	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	87	25	245	71	13	4	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	105	30	202	58	32	9	6	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	85	24	223	64	26	7	11	3
The teaching is good at this school	85	24	228	66	22	6	5	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	50	14	233	67	51	15	5	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	13	234	67	56	16	10	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	80	23	220	63	25	7	5	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	81	23	218	63	33	10	6	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	92	27	205	59	36	10	7	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	56	16	219	63	44	13	8	2
The school is led and managed effectively	139	40	179	52	18	5	5	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	125	36	197	57	18	5	5	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 July 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Great Marlow School, Marlow SL7 1JE

On behalf of the inspection team I am writing to tell you about our findings during the inspection. First of all, thank you for talking to us and being so helpful and courteous during our visit. We were impressed by your behaviour in lessons and around the school.

Great Marlow provides you with a good quality of education. You are making good progress during your time at the school, including those of you in the sixth form. Much of this is due to the good attitudes to learning you are developing and also to the broad and thoughtful curriculum and the excellent care, guidance and support that staff provide. You attend well and are punctual to lessons because you understand how important it is to get the most out of your time at school. You are provided with an excellent range of extension activities from study support, clubs, and visits. The excellent leadership of your headteacher is supported by good leadership and management of others in the school, including the governors. Your school is popular and has a waiting list.

We have asked your headteacher and her staff to make two improvements, which they agree with.

- Increase the rate of your progress further by ensuring that:
- teachers' marking consistently helps you to improve your work.
- Raise the quality of your writing skills.

You can help by never being afraid to ask if you do not understand feedback from your teachers, and by trying that little bit harder when you approach each writing task. I should like to wish you all well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm

Her Majesty's Inspector

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