

Marsh Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135290
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	348699
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	John Kennedy HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
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	928
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	133
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Alston
Headteacher	Tracy Luke (Executive Principal) Marion Emptage (Head of school)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Station Road New Romney TN28 8BB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They visited 32 lessons and support sessions and observed 32 teachers. Lesson observations did not include Year 11 and 13 because of examinations, but inspectors were able to scrutinise samples of students' work. They also observed an assembly and a tutorial period, held meetings with staff, governors, three groups of students and spoke with some parents and carers. Inspectors observed the academy's work, and looked at its development plan, analyses of students' progress, safeguarding documentation and other policies and some of the students' records. They evaluated questionnaires from 79 parents and carers, and a representative sample of 150 students.

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

- teaching and learning, with a particular focus on how well teaching meets the needs of all abilities
- the academy's effectiveness in raising levels of attendance and promoting positive behaviour
- the flexibility of the curriculum in meeting the full range of students' needs
- the progress that students make from their starting points in the sixth form.

Information about the school

Marsh Academy, sponsored by Microsoft, Tonbridge School and Kent local authority, opened in September 2007 following the closure of Southlands Community Comprehensive School. It serves a largely rural community. The academy is using the same buildings as the predecessor school because the planned development of new accommodation has been delayed. Agreements have recently been signed to enable the new building to proceed. The academy works in partnership with Folkestone School for Girls. The Executive Principal leads both the school and the academy and there is a head of school and governing body for each establishment, with a joint committee to look at links between them. The academy has a specialism in business and enterprise and operates within the Kent selective system. It achieved Healthy Schools' status in December 2009.

Most of the students are of White British heritage, reflecting the composition of the local community. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is low. An increasing proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, well above that found nationally. Most of these have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, but fewer than is typical have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. A relatively high number of students, currently 19, are looked after by a local authority.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Marsh Academy is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. In its relatively short history, it has brought marked improvements to some core areas such as attainment, attendance and the curriculum. Other aspects such as behaviour, the quality of teaching and the consequent progress that students make are also improving well. Effective and determined leadership and management are at the cornerstone of this positive picture.

The overall attainment of students who start at the academy and the sixth form is low. Standards at the end of Year 11, while still below national averages, have improved considerably against most key measures since 2007. While there was a dip in performance in 2009, it was directly related to the different starting points of the groups of students involved. Attainment in mathematics, one of the specialist subjects, is higher than in English. Current and accurate internal tracking suggests that Year 11 students are on course to reach GCSE standards which are closer to national averages. Students' attainment in the sixth form is generally much lower than average, but shows an improving trend in AS-level courses. The academy's data, confirmed by inspection evidence, indicate that standards in the sixth form are also rising, and a higher proportion of students are on track to reach A or B grades than previously.

The proportion of students making satisfactory or better progress is increasing and is being sustained over time. This is demonstrated among younger students through the innovative project-based curriculum, which is influenced considerably by the specialism. Progress in Key Stage 4 is more rapid because of rigorous tracking, a more relevant curriculum and better teaching. Despite this positive picture, progress remains somewhat variable. This is because of the behaviour of a minority of students in lessons and some inconsistency in the quality of teaching. In some lessons, including in the sixth form, there is not enough emphasis on the quality of learning for all, insufficient challenge and engagement and missed opportunities for students to develop their literacy. Some subjects have been affected by changes of teacher and difficulties in recruiting staff, which have largely been outside the academy's control.

Improvements to the sixth form ensure that the majority of students are now making satisfactory progress and some better than that. However, a significant minority are not yet making enough progress given their starting points. This is because, in addition to the variable quality of teaching, some courses were not the most suitable for a few students who chose them. Tutoring, which has strengthened this year, is not yet providing a sufficiently strong contribution to supporting the minority who are underachieving, because, for instance, tutors are not making full use of the wealth of tracking information.

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The academy is well led by a committed and skilled Executive Principal and a strong head of school who are passionate about inclusion and continual improvement. They are well supported by skilled governors, an effective senior leadership team and middle leaders who are responding very well to the increasing levels of responsibility they hold. Together they have tackled change in a measured and carefully considered way and this has brought about sustained improvement since the academy opened. Self-evaluation, driven by senior leaders, is evident at all levels and is at the heart of the work of governors. Consequently, the academy knows where its strengths lie and what areas need more attention. The academy faced considerable challenges in its first year because of the limited preparation time it had when it first opened. It has therefore come a long way in a short space of time. A solid platform for improvement has been put in place and there is good capacity to sustain this.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good teaching throughout the academy, including the sixth form, by:
 - making learning expectations clear and ensuring that the range of tasks stretch students of all abilities
 - providing more opportunities for literacy development in lessons
 - improving students' engagement by making activities more practical and grounded in real world examples
 - supporting continuity of learning by taking steps to minimise changes of teacher.
 - Improve outcomes and provision in the sixth form, by:
 - ensuring that all students make at least satisfactory progress from their starting points
 - strengthening tutorial systems and the individual guidance that students receive so that they are all taking the right courses and those who are struggling receive timely and well-targeted support.
 - Improve behaviour, particularly in lessons, by:
 - ensuring greater consistency in how staff manage behaviour
 - reviewing the systems for promoting positive behaviour
 - developing students' positive attitudes towards learning and providing them with skills to enable them to be better equipped to make the most of their time in lessons.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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Lessons are often characterised by a very positive rapport between staff and students, resulting in calm and productive working environments. Students enjoy their learning and are attentive. They commented that lessons are more interesting because the teaching is better. This was observed in a science lesson on the digestive system where students enjoyed the activities and, consequently, were fully engaged and making good progress. Most students behave well and are actively involved in their learning. In some lessons, despite the best efforts of the teacher, a minority have underdeveloped learning habits, are lacking in self-motivation and easily distracted. Consequently, they are not as productive in their learning.

Inspection evidence shows that the majority of students are making satisfactory and, occasionally, better progress in lessons. An increasing proportion are making rapid gains in their learning. This is sustaining the three-year trend. In 2009, performance data show that progress was in line with national expectations in English and significantly above in mathematics. Progress this year has accelerated in science. There are no significant variations in the performance of any groups, including those who are looked after and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Targeted intervention programmes, such as the 'golden curriculum' in Year 7 and Year 8 are boosting literacy and numeracy among those with less-developed skills, and students receiving this support are making good progress.

The large majority of students feel safe at the academy. Students develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe through, for example, the work they do on e-safety. Behaviour is improving and this is reflected in the below average and reduced number of fixed term exclusions and the reduction in incidents where senior staff are called out to intervene in lessons. Some students indicate that, despite this, more could be done to reduce bullying and poor behaviour further. Inspectors observed isolated incidents of poor behaviour which disrupted the learning of others. In most instances where behaviour was a concern, it was because students had not developed positive attitudes to learning and it was hampering their own progress rather than that of others.

Students have a developed knowledge of the importance of healthy lifestyles, which is promoted well through the curriculum. However, some feel that more could be done to promote healthy eating. There is an increasing range of opportunities for students, including those in the sixth form, to play a more active role in the life of the academy but these are at a relatively early stage of development. Effective and well thought-out systems for managing attendance are reflected in higher and overall average levels of attendance. There has also been a significant decrease in the proportion of students who are persistently absent.

Although attainment is still low, the academy is successful in raising students' aspirations, broadening their experiences and providing them with key basic skills. The specialism contributes well to the development of information and communication technology (ICT) competencies and provides an increasing range of enterprise opportunities for students. These help students learn about the world of work and grow in confidence as they develop presentation and other work-related skills.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

A strong and determined focus by leaders is contributing to better teaching. In most lessons, the positive relationships between teachers and students form a solid basis for learning. Inconsistencies remain and, therefore, the learning experience of students is variable. In the best lessons, knowledgeable and skilled teachers plan their lessons well. They provide a variety of well-timed, practical and suitably challenging activities, which engage the students and are tailored to their individual needs and abilities. Students have a good idea of what is expected of them and they know the next steps to take. In lessons where teaching is not at this level, the range of tasks is not practical or engaging enough, and learning expectations are unclear. Students have limited opportunities to develop their literacy, oracy or independent- thinking skills. Inspectors noted examples of helpful and informative feedback, but this practice is not yet consistent.

Students benefit from a flexible and tailored curriculum. Curriculum planning is inextricably linked with analyses of students' learning and abilities. The range of vocational courses has been broadened and is helping many students make good

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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progress in these subjects. Project-based learning in Years 7 and 8 helps students cope well with the transition from primary. Targeted programmes such as those provided by the inclusion centre help those with behavioural, emotional and social needs to overcome barriers to their learning and improve their behaviour and attendance. The academy takes effective steps to overcome the geographical isolation of the site and the issues this poses for transport, by providing access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities every Tuesday. The specialism contributes to this programme and to increased opportunities for using ICT, but impact across the full curriculum has not yet been maximised.

Marsh Academy is proud of its inclusivity, which is central to its vision and purpose. The care it provides for the most vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is a strong feature of its work. Staff are committed to doing what they can to bring about positive outcomes for looked after children and this contributes, for example, to their very high attendance levels. While the steps the academy is taking to improve behaviour are making a difference, some students and their parents and carers believe more could be done to strengthen behaviour management. Inspectors agree. A few students, parents and carers perceive that the range of incentives aimed at encouraging good behaviour do not sufficiently recognise the consistently good behaviour of the majority.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team share a common ambition and relentless drive to bring about continuous improvement. They are well supported by staff at all levels. Leaders have a clear understanding of the aspirations of the academy and their role in achieving the demanding targets that are set, particularly around raising attainment. Leaders are not slow in tackling areas of underperformance, while at the same time they provide good opportunities for staff to hone their skills and improve their practice. Managers are being given increased responsibility and held accountable in equal measure.

Management of teaching is rigorous and sophisticated evaluation of lesson observations provides an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses. Findings are used to shape staff training and development and individual coaching. As a result almost all teaching is at least satisfactory and there has been a rise in the proportion of teaching that is consistently good.

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Highly committed and knowledgeable governors provide very strong support and challenge. However, despite the efforts made to improve links with parents and carers, such as through the creation of a forum for them to express views, this is an area which requires greater focus. Staff place high priority on promoting inclusion and equality of opportunity and this is reflected in rigorous tracking of students' progress to ensure that variations between groups are identified and appropriately targeted. Careful attention is paid to ensuring that the most vulnerable groups receive personalised care and attention and have the same life chances as others. Following Ofsted's monitoring visit in June 2009, the academy took immediate steps to improve security around the school. This reflects its strong commitment to safeguarding. Staff are well trained in child protection and high profile is given to e-safety. Staff use of the 'common assessment framework' exemplifies their commitment to partnership working to safeguard students and promote their well-being.

The academy benefits from effective partnership arrangements, such as those provided by the federation. These provide staff with opportunities to share good practice across both establishments. Sponsors contribute well to the work of the academy, for instance, through providing staff training and strengthening ICT provision. The academy has a good understanding of the needs of its community, captured in well-considered plans to promote community cohesion. The impact is evident in a range of areas, such as a project enabling young and old to have a better understanding of each other's perspectives. The impact of some aspects, particularly those relating to the global dimension, is not yet as striking. Initiatives help targeted students with poor behaviour to make amends and develop a keener moral sense and this is contributing to the internal cohesiveness of the academy.

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	3
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	3

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Sixth form

The majority of students in the sixth form make satisfactory or better progress from their starting points and a few make great strides in their learning and development. However, despite improvements in the curriculum and in the quality of teaching a significant - though reducing - minority are not yet making the progress expected of them. The majority of students now access a curriculum that is better matched to their wide range of abilities and interests, with clear progression routes in both academic and vocational subjects. The academy's good partnership arrangements, most notably with Folkestone School for Girls, ensure a breadth of choice, in particular to A-level courses chosen by a minority of students. Most of these students make expected or better progress on these courses. Across many subjects teaching is not yet consistently good enough and academic guidance and support are not yet sufficiently well targeted to boost the progress of a minority of students. Attendance is not as high in the sixth form as in the rest of the academy. Students say they enjoy sixth form life. They are well cared for and say they always have someone to turn to for help when it is needed. Students have had limited opportunities to broaden their experiences outside of lessons or to contribute to the life of the academy. The academy has recognised this and has recently put in place a programme of enrichment activities, which nearly all students have already participated in. Leadership and management have been strengthened, and their impact is evident in the improvements brought about, particularly since September, and more so over the last six months. However, these changes have not yet had sufficient impact on ensuring positive outcomes for all students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	4
The quality of provision in the sixth form	4
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

A low percentage of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. The majority are positive about the overall work of the academy. However, many questions received high negative responses. There were written concerns expressed about several areas, particularly the quality of communication, staffing discontinuity in some subject areas and the management of behaviour. Inspectors find, while acknowledging that the academy has not yet overcome all weaknesses, behaviour and the quality of teaching have improved since the monitoring visit last year and the academy is taking positive steps to engage with parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Marsh Academy 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 79 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 928 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	14	42	53	18	23	6	8
The school keeps my child safe	15	19	49	62	6	8	8	10
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	25	36	46	14	18	7	9
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	16	38	48	20	25	6	8
The teaching is good at this school	6	8	41	52	23	29	8	10
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	13	39	49	20	25	7	9
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	6	41	52	21	27	6	8
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)	9	11	46	58	16	20	5	6
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	14	39	49	18	23	9	11
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	11	24	30	26	33	19	24
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	9	36	46	22	28	10	13
The school is led and managed effectively	8	10	37	47	15	19	14	18
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	19	34	43	19	24	11	14

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.



18 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Marsh Academy, New Romney, TN28 8BB

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we inspected your academy. We enjoyed our visit and learnt a lot from listening to you and seeing you at work in your lessons. We found this to be a satisfactory academy. Standards are rising and most of you are making the progress expected of you. Improvements can be seen in lots of areas, such as attendance, behaviour and the quality of teaching. However, there is more that can be done to improve teaching and behaviour. The sixth form is getting better but it is not yet where it needs to be and the progress that a number of students are making is too slow.

There is much that is good about the academy. Staff care for you and go out of their way to help those who have additional needs. Your academy is well led, and the staff at all levels are committed to making it a better place for you. You now have a rich curriculum, which provides a wide range of vocational and academic courses for you. Your academy works well with its partners to improve the quality of education it gives you and one example is your access to better ICT facilities. There are a number of specific things that could be even better. We have asked the academy to give priority to the following:

- improve teaching by, for example, making lessons more engaging, placing more emphasis on how well all of you are learning and giving you opportunities to develop your literacy skills
- improve the sixth form so that all students make the progress that they are capable of, choose the right courses and receive the help they need from teachers and tutors to stay on track
- improve behaviour, especially in lessons, by asking staff to be more consistent in dealing with poor behaviour and by helping individual students develop more positive attitudes and the skills to be good learners

We have also asked the academy to try to reduce the number of changes of teachers you have had in some subjects, although this is not always easy to achieve.

You can play your part by making sure you come to lessons motivated, ready to learn and determined to make the best of the time you have at the academy.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector

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