

Marshland High School

School Road, West Walton, Wisbech, PE14 7HA

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough students make good progress, particularly the more able.
- Achievement in mathematics is too low because the quality of teaching is not high enough.
- In other subjects there is not enough good and outstanding teaching.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations for their students and so do not give them work which is sufficiently challenging.
- Behaviour requires improvement because students' attitudes to learning are not good enough.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning by leaders and managers is sometimes over optimistic because it does not take account of all the evidence available about the impact of teaching over time.
- The quality of some middle leadership is not effective enough.
- Governors are too reliant on the school to evaluate achievement data and as a result do not challenge the leadership about the performance of different groups of pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The number of pupils gaining five grade A* to C GCSE qualifications is rising, as is attainment in English.
- The headteacher and senior team clearly articulate high aspirations for the school.
- There is some strong teaching in a number of subject areas such as English and geography. Teaching in modern foreign languages is consistently good.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 35 lessons. Eight of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Tutorial sessions and an assembly were also observed. Inspectors observed students at breaks, lunchtimes and before school.
- Inspectors reviewed documents, including those about students' attainment and progress, the school's development plan and evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, governing body meeting minutes, records concerning behaviour and safeguarding documents.
- Meetings were held with staff, groups of students and members of the governing body. An inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- The views of 48 parents and carers, who submitted them on the Ofsted online Parent View website, and of 42 staff who completed a questionnaire, were analysed and taken into account. A very small number of letters received from parents were also considered.
- An inspector listened to a group of Year 7 students read.

Inspection team

Paul Lawrence, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christopher Moodie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Carol Evatt

Additional Inspector

Sally Lane

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Marshland High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is higher than the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for pupil premium funding is slightly below the national average. Pupil premium funding is additional funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school uses alternative provision for a small number of students based at the College of West Anglia and Open Road, West Norfolk.
- The school meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school so that all teaching is at least good by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what all students are capable of achieving, especially those who are more able
 - ensuring that students' literacy skills are developed and applied consistently across all subjects
 - making sure that students know how to improve their work in all subjects.
- Raise standards in mathematics by:
 - improving students' grasp of basic mathematical skills
 - marking work thoroughly and carefully
 - regularly assessing the understanding of students within lessons.
- Improve the effectiveness of some middle leaders by:
 - raising expectations across all middle leaders so that they match those of the senior leaders
 - ensuring that they make better use of assessment data to judge the quality of teaching.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students join the school in Year 7 with standards that are below those expected of their age. Students make less progress than they should and leave with standards which are below average in important subjects such as mathematics and science. Standards in English have been steadily improving and are now broadly in line with national averages.
- The proportion of students who achieve five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, is rising. Results in 2013 were the school's best ever and were just below average.
- Students who joined the school with average attainment made the most progress. Less-able and more-able students did not do as well as they should. As the more-able students in the year did not make enough progress the number of higher level grades at GCSE was below the national average.
- Evaluation of the progress of students currently in the school suggests that the trend of improvement in the proportion of students who achieve five A* to C grade GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics, will continue.
- In lessons, pupils often do not make enough progress and their work does not demonstrate the standards they should be achieving. This is because teachers do not set work which is challenging enough, and because students' attitudes to their learning are not sufficiently positive to make sure they grasp opportunities to learn quickly when they are offered.
- In 2013, students who were eligible for support through the pupil premium achieved, on average, just over one third of a grade lower in English and just over one half of a grade lower in mathematics than other students in their GCSE examinations. However, in both subjects their progress was greater than that made by other students. The attainment gap is narrowing for students currently in the school due to effective use of additional funding to support their learning.
- Students with a statement of special educational needs and those identified at school action plus make progress in line with similar students nationally. However, students identified by the school at school action do not do well enough.
- Additional 'catch-up' funding is provided by the government to support the learning of pupils whose English or mathematics is below expected standards when they join the school in Year 7. This is being used well to provide extra lessons in small groups. A number of such pupils read to inspectors and demonstrated that they were improving quickly. However, older pupils are not sustaining similar progress in their literacy or numeracy.
- A large proportion of the Year 11 group were entered early for mathematics GCSE in 2013. This limited the achievement of students in this subject, as a high proportion of students who achieved a C grade early were not guided to improve their grade in the summer examinations, even though this outcome represented weak progress. The school is not planning to repeat this strategy.
- The school liaises closely with alternative providers to ensure that students attend, are safe and achieve well. In many cases, students' success in the courses they take off-site is evident because they are able to carry on studying at these placements when they leave school.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching is inconsistent across the school. Typically, some teaching is good and there is a small amount that is outstanding but too much still requires improvement.
- Lesson planning is weak. Too little is done to challenge the more able or support those who need additional help. Too often, more-able students are provided with extension tasks which are simply additional exercises at the same level. As a result, students do not expect to have to push themselves. The English department are piloting new arrangements to stretch students. Current evidence indicates that this has been successful in accelerating progress.
- In some mathematics lessons, students do not possess basic arithmetic skills, leading to difficulties when students face more complex tasks. Teachers do not always regularly check what students understand within lessons. As a result, some students are left behind when the teacher moves onto the next stage of teaching.
- The mathematics department has not established a consistent approach to marking. The feedback that students receive in this subject is too infrequent and provides insufficient guidance about what they need to do in order to improve.
- Written feedback is typically too irregular and cursory in many subjects. Even where it is more thorough it rarely relates to the subject enough, concentrating instead upon encouraging comments about effort and presentation. Teachers do not give precise enough advice about what students need to do improve in their subject.
- The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is of variable quality. There is no common approach to how teachers respond to errors and misconceptions in spelling and grammar. As a result, there is a mixture of strong practice, where mistakes are clearly indicated and students correct them, and ineffective practice where poor spelling, punctuation and grammar are ignored.
- The teaching of English is frequently very strong. The best learning is carefully planned to provide students with a range of tasks. This leads to them demonstrating proficiency in an impressive range of different types of writing over time. However, current gaps in staffing have led to the strongest staff being deployed across several different classes and some English teaching has been covered by less effective non-specialist staff for significant periods.
- There are pockets of high quality teaching across a range of other subjects. Teaching in modern foreign languages is strong, and students make good progress as a result. In a geography lesson, the high expectations of the teacher encouraged less-able students to use specialist geographical vocabulary to explain their work. As a result, the students produced thoughtful writing of which they were justly very proud.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because many do not consistently show positive attitudes to their learning. They do not routinely take the opportunity to work as hard as they should, especially when required to work independently. Paired or group work is often superficial and quickly strays into off-topic talk. Inspectors observed some more-able students opting for simpler tasks when given the opportunity to work at a more challenging level.

- Lessons are always taught in double periods totalling 100 minutes. Students often find it difficult to maintain their concentration and focus effectively for the last quarter of that time. This was when there was most likely to be small amounts of low level disruption or, more typically, students simply became lethargic and harder to motivate.
- Many students have not developed the attitudes necessary to use effectively the school's extended homework project approach in Years 7, 8 and 9. The work they produce is brief and does not reflect the amount of time that they should have put into it. This also means that they do not develop the study skills and working habits they require for effective learning in Years 10 and 11.
- The 25 minute vertical tutor session at the start of the day does not usually shape student behaviours for the lessons ahead. Some students do not read or revise, even when encouraged to do so by their tutors. Some tutors exploit the opportunity offered by the mixed-year forms to organise mentoring and study support by older to younger students. However, too often tutor time serves to hinder the development of positive attitudes because there is not a prompt or constructive start to the day's learning.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The conduct of students around the site is generally calm and orderly, and they are almost always polite and courteous. Parents who responded to the online questionnaire believe that students are safe and well cared for at school and students confirm this. Students are confident about raising any concerns with teachers and other adults.
- The school is working successfully to improve attendance in response to levels of absence which were too high last year.
- Bullying is rare and is effectively tackled by the school when it does arise. Racist or homophobic language is not tolerated. The school's wide range of international links, including a teacher exchange with a school in Sri Lanka, means that students are aware of the diversity of cultures and beliefs globally and within this country. Students are taught effectively about the risks associated with modern technologies.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Some middle leaders do not have high enough expectations. There are no effective systems to help them learn from more successful middle leaders in the school. Some are too complacent about current standards of achievement and, according to staff questionnaire returns, a very small number do not support the headteacher's approach to improving the school.
- Leaders realise the importance of monitoring the quality of teaching in the school and have systems in place for this to happen. However, the results of this monitoring are sometimes over optimistic because they do not take account of all the evidence available about the impact of teaching over time, such as assessment data and the work in students' books.
- The school generates a large amount of data about student progress. Not all leaders analyse this data sufficiently well to inform them about the performance of student groups, such as those of different abilities in every year group, and for this to guide subsequent interventions.
- The school provides students with a suitably broad and balanced range of learning opportunities. An appropriate range of extra-curricular opportunities are available to students. However, the school does not sufficiently well monitor the take up and ongoing attendance of students at

these activities.

- The headteacher has a clear idea of how she would like the school to develop which is demonstrated in the school development plan. The school website, prospectus and other associated documents forthrightly articulate the aspiration that the school is endeavouring to promote the highest level of achievement possible for every student.
 - The headteacher and her senior team have faced a number of contextual problems in putting their plans into action. There has been a fairly high recent turnover of staff, in part as a result of the headteacher's determination to improve the school rapidly. The headteacher has worked effectively to cover gaps in staffing which have arisen as a result of the difficulty of attracting high quality staff to the area.
 - In the past, staffing changes in the mathematics department have contributed to previous underachievement. The current situation is more stable and school leaders are carefully monitoring the quality of teaching.
 - The positive impact of recent changes put in place by the head of the English department demonstrates what can be achieved rapidly by effective middle leadership.
 - Arrangements are in place to review the performance of teachers, tackle under-performance, reward those who teach effectively, and support others so that they improve. Salary progression is tied to evidence of teachers' successful achievement of targets for their performance.
 - The local authority has this year engaged constructively with the school to help improve middle leadership and to support the school in analysing achievement data.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Members of the governing body are highly committed to the improvement of the school and totally supportive of its leadership. They play an active role, for example by supporting school leaders in their safeguarding duties.
 - The governors are mindful of the large amount of information provided to them about key areas by its leaders, including how different groups of students perform and the nature and impact of pupil premium spending. However, they are not confident enough about their mastery of this information to be proactive in challenging the leadership robustly about it.
 - The governors fulfil their statutory duties, including those concerning the performance management of the headteacher. They are confident about the recommendations that school leaders make to them about pay progression following the performance management of teachers. They are aware of areas of relative underachievement in the school, but are unclear about what role they might play in helping to tackle it.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	121212
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	442048

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	758
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Coleman
Headteacher	Elizabeth Dormor
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2012
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