



Matravers School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126510
Local Authority Wiltshire
Inspection number 293580
Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007
Reporting inspector Mary Massey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Springfield Road
School category	Foundation		Westbury
Age range of pupils	11–18		BA13 3QH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01373 822666
Number on roll (school)	1087	Fax number	01373 824283
Number on roll (6th form)	129		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Chris Millard
		Headteacher	Chris Dark
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	24–25 January 2007	293580

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Matravers is a specialist arts college. The number of students receiving free school meals is below the national average but varies from year to year. There are relatively few very high attaining students. One in eight has learning difficulties, which is below the national average but the proportion is increasing. The number of students with statements is close to the national average. There are very few ethnic minority students and in 2005 there were none with English as an additional language. Student mobility is close to the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory, with many good features. Students and staff describe the school as friendly, with a cooperative atmosphere where students feel valued and well cared for. Students increasingly enjoy their education as they progress through the school and appreciate the time given by staff to support them both in lessons and in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. As result of robust management systems, behaviour has improved since the last inspection and now the great majority of students behave well.

Over the last few years, standards have remained steadily average at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. Students make satisfactory progress between Years 7 and 11. However, there is considerable variation between subjects, and this is linked to the quality of teaching and learning, which overall is satisfactory. Although there is much good teaching, there are wide variations across the school. In the best lessons, students make good progress and behave well, because planning is thorough, a variety of strategies are used to engage students' interest, and there is a strong focus on students' learning. They are given opportunities to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. Weaker teaching sometimes results in students' poor behaviour and less motivation to learn. The use of marking and target setting to guide students' progress is often not subject-focused and is not consistent across or within faculties.

Specialist arts status has an impact on the whole school, promoting imaginative and thoughtful approaches both to the curriculum and to a good range of well supported extra-curricular activities. Participation in drama, dance, art and music helps students develop self-confidence and social skills. This is evident in their relationships with each other and with adults.

There are challenges ahead. The number of students has increased by 21% in four years and this rapid growth is expected to continue. The school is outgrowing its town centre site and the Governors are looking at possibilities for future relocation. The current accommodation has an impact upon achievement. When it has been possible to refurbish classrooms as, for example, in science recently, both the motivation and attitudes of students have improved.

The headteacher has been in post for four terms. In that time, he has reorganised the leadership team and developed and consolidated management systems. As a result, senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Strong systems for self-evaluation and focused planning extend through middle managers to teachers in classrooms so that they feel involved with, and committed to, initiatives for development. This strong leadership means that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students reach satisfactory standards and make average progress when compared with students nationally. The curriculum focuses on a small range of advanced level subjects and does not yet cater for those who would like to stay on at school and pursue more vocational options. Classroom practice shares the strengths and weaknesses which are evident in the main school.

The sixth form is satisfactorily led and managed. The head of sixth form has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. There has been an over-reliance on whole school initiatives, for example to improve teaching and learning, but specific sixth form issues are now being tackled as a result of a recent review. With the expansion of the sixth form numbers, the space and facilities are stretched to the limit; staff and students work hard to overcome this difficulty, which includes a lack of sufficient study and social space.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that teachers share best practice so that high quality teaching which focuses on students' learning is extended more consistently across the school
- challenge the least effective classroom practice so that teaching consistently engages students' interest and promotes more positive attitudes to learning
- ensure that subject teachers inform students more consistently about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve specific subject skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Students enter the school with attainment which is close to the national average and make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9. In mathematics and science, test results at age 14 are consistently close to the national average, whilst there are variations in students' performance in English from year to year. Overall, the standards that students reach by the end of Year 9 are broadly average.

This satisfactory progress is maintained through Years 10 and 11 so that the standards that students reach at age 16 are broadly average. However, there are marked variations between subjects, with consistently strong performance in art and design, dance and geography. In contrast, achievement in science is comparatively weak. The school is working hard to tackle this issue and there are indications that standards are rising, although this is yet to work through to science GCSE results. High quality support for students with a wide range of learning needs ensures that they make good progress through the school.

Achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. There are marked variations in examination results in different subjects from year to year, but the significance of these is hard to judge because class sizes are often very small.

The school's analysis of its performance data is very good. Senior managers are alert to signs of underachievement in particular subjects and tackle these promptly. Overall test and examination results meet the realistic targets set by the school and senior managers are now beginning to set more challenging performance targets for individual subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development is good. Students' behaviour and attitudes around the site and in classrooms are good, particularly where teaching and learning are strong. However, the behaviour of a small minority can be distracting to others, particularly when teaching is less accomplished. This is a concern to some parents and students.

Effective measures have been taken to improve the security of the school site and as a result, although the site is cramped, students feel safe. They are fully aware of the school's high profile anti-bullying policy and have confidence that staff will deal with incidents quickly.

Students become increasingly self-confident as they progress through the school. Parents are encouraged to develop a partnership with the school which, in turn, has a positive impact on students' attitudes, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Students participate in a wide programme of activities and visits and show positive attitudes to learning experiences outside school hours, appreciating the opportunities opened up for them. The older students have confidence in the school council as an effective forum for the students' voice. The few students from minority groups are well integrated into the school community.

Social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is good. Year 10, 11 and sixth form students organise activities which support younger learners and engage in activities in the community, although there is scope for expansion of these opportunities. The school actively promotes the development of a healthy lifestyle and has achieved the National Healthy Standards Award. As a result, students are making increasingly healthy lifestyle choices. Students value and make the most of good opportunities for work-related learning and are very confident about their preparation for the world of work.

Sixth form students have a mature approach and relate well to each other and to other adults. They have a useful role in the school council but would like more opportunities to interact with the younger students so that they would feel more part of the main school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but it is too variable. There are examples of highly effective and imaginative teaching. In these well-planned lessons, teachers are very clear about what students are expected to learn and check carefully to find out if they have been successful. The most accomplished teachers are confident about encouraging students to think for themselves and discuss what they are learning. In contrast, some lessons are too dependent on teacher-led activities; there are few opportunities for students to work independently and sometimes there is a lack of clarity about what they are expected to learn. In most lessons, teachers insist on good behaviour and are adept at establishing a productive atmosphere where students work hard because they want to learn. In a few lessons where teaching is less purposeful, a minority of students lose interest and their behaviour deteriorates.

There are also wide variations in how well teachers assess students' work and progress. There are examples of very good practice where students are provided with helpful and supportive feedback which lets them know how well they are doing and highlights key areas for improvement. However, this is not yet firmly established across the school. Subject areas adopt different approaches and these are not always implemented consistently or effectively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum that meets statutory requirements and, within the constraints of some cramped accommodation, has sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of most of its students. Specialist art status permeates the whole school, and all students must take an arts course at GCSE. A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 are given the opportunity to learn vocational skills in local colleges because the school curriculum is unsuited to their needs. In addition, students with learning difficulties or disabilities may choose a basic skills course. Plans to develop the curriculum further to provide vocational courses for students in Years 10 and 11 and separate citizenship lessons are already underway. The provision of information and communication technology (ICT) was criticised in the previous inspection and all students now study ICT both as a separate subject and within most subject areas. The range of extra-curricular activities is good and is well attended by students of all ages, although more girls than boys are involved. The school has very good community links and offers a range of courses to adults in visual and performing arts as well as literacy, numeracy and ICT. Local businesses provide work experience for all students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are good. Coherent systems of care and support are leading to improvements in students' expectations. Since the appointment of a non-teaching pastoral manager, the range of support offered to parents and students is broader and the time it takes to respond to their queries is shorter. Her team of staff and a school counsellor provide ready access for students to help and advice.

Procedures to monitor students' academic progress are strong. Learning directors have a robust overview of all targets and analyse assessment data in detail. This leads to targeted intervention at all levels and, because staff know students well, guidance at the end of Years 9 and 11 is good. Regular opportunities for students to review targets individually with tutors facilitate this process. Within individual lessons, however, academic guidance and target setting are less consistent. The needs of different groups are regularly identified and programmes are put in place, for example, visits to colleges and universities for middle-ability students, and weekend problem-solving events for the gifted and talented. Flexible and individualised support for pupils with learning difficulties enables them to achieve well.

Care, guidance and support in the sixth form are satisfactory. Additional systems have been introduced since the last inspection and this guidance is evaluated and then further developed as the sixth form team gain in knowledge and understanding. However, inconsistencies in the quality of tutor support remain.

All staff understand the arrangements for child protection. Staff liaise closely with a range of external agencies to support any pupils who may be at risk.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher and a recently reorganised capable senior leadership team have established clear links between self-evaluation, analysis, planning and target setting. The systems they have developed extend through all levels of management and effectively allow all staff to understand and subscribe to a clear vision for the future of the school. This helps them to build on strengths and deal with weaknesses. A regular meetings structure means that staff are well informed, regularly consulted and take an active role in decision making. The result is a productive and positive atmosphere in which teachers feel confident and students respond well. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Students' performance in tests and examinations is carefully analysed. Any indications of underachievement are quickly recognised and strategies put in place to tackle these promptly. Senior leaders' judgements about the quality

of teaching are accurate but they are aware that the time is now right to focus more sharply on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Although staff turnover has been high in the last two years, new staff feel well supported and that their fresh perspective is valued by both senior and middle managers. Effective induction through mentors and middle managers means that they quickly assimilate the school's vision and values.

Over recent years, governors have provided an increasing degree of challenge for the work of the school and provide good support.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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 the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am sure you will remember that your school was inspected on 24 and 25 January. The inspection team was impressed by your friendly welcome and would like to thank you for the honest and open way in which you told us about the good features of your school and what needs to be improved. In return, I would like to tell you about the inspection findings.

Matravers is a satisfactory school and is improving. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Both teaching and non-teaching staff provide you with good care and support, and helpful guidance about the next stage of your education or development. Your headteacher, senior managers and the governors run the school effectively and have good systems in place to check how well you are doing in your studies. Specialist arts status and the commitment of teachers mean that there are lots of interesting activities for you both in and out of school time. The majority of you enjoy coming to school and want to succeed. Most of you behave well and there is a very positive and friendly atmosphere.

We know that much of your teaching is good but not all of it. We know that you are making varying progress because the quality of teaching is too variable. We have asked for high quality teaching that focuses on your learning to be extended more consistently across the school. Lessons must be good enough to sustain your interest so that you do not get bored. We have also asked the school to ensure that you know exactly what you have to do in order to improve your performance in each subject.

The headteacher, senior team and all staff at Matravers are committed to doing their best for you. They deserve your support.

I wish you all the best and hope you will do all you can to help your school improve further.