

# Marshland High School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	121212
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	327432
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Rhona Seviour HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	805
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Derek Goddard JP
Headteacher	Mr M Parr-Burman
Date of previous school inspection	5–6 July 2006
School address	School Road West Walton Wisbech Cambridgeshire PE14 7HA
Telephone number	01945 584146
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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 29 lessons and held meetings with a governor, a representative of the local authority, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including the tracking system used to monitor pupils' progress, pupils' written work, the self-evaluation documents and future plans. They also gathered evidence from 159 questionnaires from parents and the views supplied by one who contacted inspectors.

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

- the progress being made by pupils in all year groups
- the quality of assessment information and how well teachers use this
- how well the school combats the barriers to the achievement of more vulnerable pupils
- the accuracy of the school's evaluations and how well it uses this information to bring about improvement.

## Information about the school

Marshland is a smaller than average secondary school serving a rural community. Nearly all the students come from White British backgrounds and the proportion claiming free school meals is broadly average. The school draws its students from the Fenland region. There is a number of looked-after-children in the school and the proportion of pupils with a traveller background is above the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or a statement of special educational needs is well above the national average; in the main the identified needs relate to pupils' social, emotional or behavioural needs, dyslexia and severe physical disabilities. When they enter the school, pupils' attainment is in line with the national average although there are fewer more able students than average.

The school was granted specialist status in science in 2005. It works with the Cambridge Partnership to provide initial teacher training through the graduate training programme. A new headteacher took up post in September 2007.

## Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

## Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires a notice to improve because it is performing less well than in all the circumstances it could be reasonably expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the effectiveness of the safeguarding procedures and the governance of the school.

Previous inspections of Marshland have commented favourably on the school's inclusiveness and its commitment to the care, guidance and support of its pupils, including the most vulnerable. The school continues to have strengths in these aspects of its work and these are an important reason why it is popular and over-subscribed. In discussion with inspectors, pupils describe the school as having a friendly environment where they feel secure and well supported by the staff. Nonetheless, inspectors found shortcomings in some of the school's child protection systems and procedures which make its safeguarding and governance inadequate. Specifically, adults do not receive the required training on child protection, the child protection policy and procedures do not meet statutory requirements and the governing body does not ensure that the school fulfils its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding.

Since his appointment, the headteacher has strengthened the school's focus on raising standards and introduced a number of changes to halt the decline in GCSE results which has occurred since 2005. Some changes, including a new system for tracking and reporting pupils' progress, tighter procedures for promoting good attendance, the increased use of targets and better support for pupils preparing for examinations, are making an impact and standards are beginning to rise. Not all the changes have had sufficient time to make an impact or have been fully implemented. For example, work to highlight the importance of learning and raise pupils' aspirations is at an early stage of development. A new Key Stage 4 curriculum which is already generating much enthusiasm amongst pupils will begin operating in September 2009.

Pupils' attainment is broadly average and most pupils make satisfactory progress. Over the last three years, the school has experienced significant turbulence in its staffing and has found it difficult to recruit high quality teachers. The use of

temporary staff has resulted in a lack of continuity in the teaching of some groups. Subject leaders, particularly in English and mathematics, have worked hard to overcome these difficulties but have not always been able to mitigate their impact on pupils' learning and progress. Senior leaders monitor teaching quality well and know where and how it needs to improve. They have acted to eliminate most of the inadequate teaching and successfully tackled weaknesses within subjects, including information and communication technology (ICT), music and drama. Nonetheless, variations in the quality of teaching remain a barrier to raising standards as not all teachers have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve and lessons are not always sufficiently challenging. There are also inconsistencies in assessment, the use of targets and the quality of marking of pupils' work.

Pupils feel that behaviour is mostly good. Inspectors found it to be satisfactory and experienced instances where staff and pupils' expectations of acceptable behaviour were not high enough. Pupils enjoy the social life of the school and, given the rural isolation in which many live, this is necessary for their development. On occasions, though, social chatter in lessons impedes the pace of learning. There are good relationships between staff and pupils and pupils feel the staff help and support them well. Pupils have a good grasp of how to keep themselves safe and, when supervising corridors at lunchtime, prefects demonstrate a high level of maturity. More pupils are attending school regularly than at the time of the last inspection and the number excluded has declined.

The school's view of its effectiveness is broadly accurate. However, it was unaware of the weaknesses in safeguarding and this finding indicates the need for more rigorous self-evaluation at all levels. At present, middle leaders are not entirely clear about their contribution to the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work and the impact of initiatives is not evaluated well enough. Leaders are not analysing the performance of different groups of pupils well enough or always identifying the causes of underachievement and taking prompt action to eliminate these. Nonetheless, the school is improving and has met its targets for attendance. Its own data indicates that it will meet or exceed its 2009 GCSE targets. Consequently, it demonstrates satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, improve safeguarding procedures by ensuring that:
  - adults receive the required training on child protection
  - the child protection policy and procedures meet statutory requirements
  - the governing body improves its procedures for ensuring that the school fulfils its statutory responsibilities.

- Improve the progress that all groups of pupils make and the standards they reach by:
  - analysing the performance of different groups of pupils, including boys and girls and those who are vulnerable to underachievement
  - identifying the causes of underachievement and taking prompt action to eliminate these.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that:
  - all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - lessons are sufficiently challenging
  - there is a consistent approach to assessment and the use of targets across the school
  - pupils' work is marked regularly and provides pupils with clear feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the rigour of the school's self-evaluation by:
  - providing clear direction to middle leaders and managers on how they are expected to monitor and evaluate the work of their departments
  - ensuring that there are robust procedures to monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives on pupils' attainment, progress and personal development.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3
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In around half the lessons observed, pupils' learning was good. Pupils were attentive, interested and keen to achieve. They responded positively to questioning, particularly when, as in one mathematics lesson, this challenged them to think more deeply. In the same lesson, pupils' progress was aided by the opportunity for them to work together, share ideas and evaluate each other's work. In contrast, there was insufficient challenge in a minority of lessons because teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve were too low. The slow pace of these lessons and undemanding nature of the activities often contributed to a deterioration in pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE has declined from 53% in 2005 to 43% in 2008. This is below the national average. In the same period, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics fell from 36% in 2005 to 28% in 2008. Action taken since September 2008 has begun to make an impact and evidence from the school's tracking system, lesson observations and pupils' books indicates that standards, particularly in English, mathematics and ICT in Key Stage 4, are rising.

Between 2006 and 2008, boys made more progress than girls. This contrasts with the national trend and, because the school had not analysed its performance data sufficiently, it was unable to explain the reasons for the gap. A new tracking system, introduced in 2008, is enabling the school to monitor more closely the progress of individual pupils and respond to any underachievement. This system, allied with the increasing use of targets, is helping to raise expectations of pupils' achievement.

However, the school is not yet analysing the performance of different groups of pupils well enough and the targets set for a minority of pupils are insufficiently challenging. Evidence from classroom observations and the school's tracking indicates that most pupils, including those who are looked after or who have learning difficulties, are now making the expected progress.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is satisfactory and reflected in their satisfactory attendance. Pupils report that there are relatively few instances of bullying and that the school gives high priority to dealing with these. They are well aware of the importance of exercise for their health and well-being and are very positive about their lessons in physical education. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. They show a strong concern for those less fortunate than themselves and are outstandingly successful at raising money for charitable causes. In discussions with inspectors, pupils expressed strong views against racism and other forms of discrimination and showed an appreciation of other cultures. These attitudes and pupils' rising aspirations are a sound preparation for their future lives.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	3
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	3
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	3
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	3

## How effective is the provision?

The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory; in half of the lessons observed by inspectors teaching was judged as good or outstanding and a minority of teaching was inadequate. In the best lessons, teachers' explanations were clear and well structured, indicating their secure subject knowledge. Pupils were encouraged to reflect on their work, sometimes with others, and consider how it could be improved. Teachers often shared or modelled high quality work and this helped raise pupils' expectations, as did the use of targets. In these lessons, pupils were rarely off task

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

and were eager to succeed. In weaker lessons, too little was demanded of pupils. Teaching activities were insufficiently varied and, on occasions, pitched below the level of the class. In these lessons, there was little evidence of the use of assessment information to guide teaching or to meet individual needs. Low quality work was accepted rather than challenged.

Assessment practice, while improving, varies across the school. The PRAISe system ensures that pupils in all years have target levels and grades and that their progress in meeting these is tracked. Across the school, there is inconsistency in teachers' use of targets and in their marking of pupils' work. Although there are examples of marking which provides pupils with detailed feedback and a clear indication of what they need to do to improve, this was the exception in the work seen during the inspection. Little marking referred to pupils' targets. These variations in practice result, in part, from a lack of clarity in the school's expectations and from insufficient monitoring by middle and senior leaders.

The school has a satisfactory curriculum. Since the last inspection, the provision for ICT has improved. In addition to studying two languages in Years 8 and 9, more able pupils are able to follow an advanced level course in critical thinking in Years 10 and 11 as well as three separate science courses. Reflecting its specialist status, the school has a good science curriculum and a range of productive partnerships, some with local colleges. In constructing a new Key Stage 4 curriculum for September 2009, the school has been able to build successfully upon these partnerships to offer pupils a much wider range of choices. The school has a varied programme of extra-curricular and enhancement activities. These include a successful Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, an extensive programme of sporting activities, visits to Poland, Holland, Spain, France and Germany, and a bi-annual three-week visit to assist a school in Malawi. Additional funding is provided to enable less advantaged pupils to participate fully in these activities. The school also offers pupils free instrumental music tuition.

The school gives high priority to the care, guidance and support of its pupils. There are good arrangements to ensure that pupils joining the school are well supported, including the most vulnerable, and that those leaving at 16 are fully aware of their career options. Consequently, the percentage of pupils not engaged in education, training and employment once they leave the school is very low. The very wide range of support the school provides, often with the assistance and involvement of outside agencies, has contributed to a marked improvement in attendance, a reduction in exclusions and the good achievement of some of the most vulnerable pupils. The provision for pupils with physical disabilities is particularly good; buildings are accessible and support staff always on hand to assist. The school's large team of teaching assistants provides valuable individual and class-based support for pupils.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

Since his appointment two years ago, the headteacher has introduced a number of changes to strengthen the school's focus on learning and achievement and raise pupils' aspirations. Although some initiatives have led to improvement, others have not been driven with sufficient clarity or urgency. One example of this is the lack of direction given to middle leaders and managers on how they are expected to monitor and evaluate the work of their departments. In contrast, pupils across the school speak positively about the increasing emphasis on individual achievement. When asked to describe the school's strengths, typical responses included 'a place of opportunity', 'a place where everyone can succeed' and 'equal treatment of all'.

The school does much to extend pupils' understanding of other cultures and faiths and to engage with the local and international communities. Governors have led a recent audit of the school's work to promote community cohesion and are aware of the need to strengthen their evaluation of the impact of the provision.

Governors are highly committed to the school and in most respects, fulfil their responsibilities very well. Although well informed about most aspects of the school's work, they have not ensured that it complies with all the statutory requirements on safeguarding. Whereas there are robust arrangements for vetting staff, carrying out health and safety checks and for encouraging pupils to adopt safe and responsible practices, there are significant weaknesses in the school's child protection policy and procedures. As a result, both safeguarding and governance are inadequate.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

## Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire approve of the school’s provision. Parents are most positive about how well the school keeps their child safe. There were positive comments about the new reporting system and the regular newsletters. Some parents feel that the school does not deal well enough with their concerns and that communication is not always as good as it should be. Inspectors agree with the parents’ concern at the high turnover of staff and the impact of supply teaching on pupils’ progress, attitudes to learning and behaviour.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Marshland High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

650 questionnaires were sent to parents and carers and 159 of these were completed and returned to the inspection team. In total, there are 1147 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	68	72	15	4

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
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. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
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.

20 May 2009

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Marshland High School, West Walton, PE14 7HA

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We were pleased to have the opportunity to speak to so many of you in lessons, meetings and around the school and are grateful for your views.

Many of you told us how much you enjoy being at Marshland. You find the school a welcoming and happy place and value the good relationships you have with the staff. We noticed that you are very positive about physical education and sport and that most of you eat healthily – this shows us that you are concerned for your own health. Your behaviour is satisfactory although, on occasions, some of you lack self-discipline and chatter too much in class. When this happens, we noticed that you all learn less. We were impressed that so many of you are prepared to take on responsibilities as prefects, house captains, sports captains and as members of the school councils. We were also impressed by your outstanding success in raising money for charitable causes and would like to congratulate you for this.

We observed some outstanding and good teaching. In the best lessons, you listened well, focused on the activities set and were keen to learn. The school has found it difficult to fill teaching vacancies and we agree with your parents and carers that this has affected your progress. Dealing with the staffing difficulties has been a challenge for the leadership of the school and the school knows that some teaching is still not good enough. Despite these difficulties, the school is improving. It now tracks your progress closely and ensures that your parents and carers receive regular reports. Mr Parr-Burman and the staff rightly emphasise the importance of learning and working hard to achieve your targets. They believe you can achieve more and so do we.

During our inspection we found weaknesses in the school's procedures for safeguarding. For this reason, we have said that your school requires a notice to improve. This means that it will have another inspection in about a year's time. In addition to improving the procedures for safeguarding, we have asked the school to ensure that more teaching is as good as the best we saw, to check more carefully how well it is providing for different groups of pupils and take action if any are underachieving. We also want it to monitor its own work more thoroughly. We know that Mr Parr-Burman, the governors and staff will do all they can to improve the school quickly. We wish you all the very best for your future education.

Yours faithfully

Rhona Seviour  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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