

The OFSTED inspectors were at the school on 3-4 February 2010. Below are actual quotes from their report.

Main findings

The school now provides a good standard of education.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are improving. Students make good progress. Heads of department are held to account by senior leaders and they in turn hold their department colleagues to account for their work. This, along with good professional development, has brought about improvements to the quality of teaching, which is now generally good.

Behaviour is good; students are polite, considerate to staff and to each other and take an active part in their own learning. The good curriculum is well matched to the needs of students, and is particularly supportive for students who find learning difficult. Staff know the students very well and are able to offer highly effective guidance. Target setting is particularly strong with students knowing their targets, the level of their work at present and how well they are likely to achieve if they carry on progressing at the same rate. Staff are also good at identifying how students could improve and linking these to specific targets. A strength of the school is the way in which looked after children and students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are extremely well supported and how well the school works with outside agencies. Students make an excellent contribution to the local community through their media specialism.

The sixth form has also improved and is now provides a satisfactory standard of education.

The strong drive to improve has ensured greater accountability. Students take part in subject reviews and work closely with the governing body through a representative in each key stage. All areas identified as being in need of improvement at the time of the last inspection have got better. Results in science, which were very poor have improved and are broadly average. Governance has also improved. Governors have a good understanding of the school's comprehensive and accurate self-evaluation and are able to challenge from an informed viewpoint. Consequently, the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has risen significantly since 2007. The school beat its targets for the proportion of students gaining three or more A* or A grades and met, or was close to meeting, its challenging targets in its specialist areas of media and art. English, which is also a designated specialist subject, also met its target. Over time, students make good progress. This is confirmed by observations of lessons during the inspection, which show that learning is good across both key stages. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress because they receive very good support and guidance. Students enjoy school because they are successful with their work and achieve well.

Students feel safe. The school has highly effective systems to identify any inappropriate language, bullying or racist activities, for example while students are using the internet. There have been very few racially motivated incidents or exclusions. Most students behave well and know how to conduct themselves in lessons. Bullying is rare and victims receive effective support. Students have a very good understanding of moral issues.

Students know how to live healthily. They have positive attitudes to taking exercise and as a result, the uptake of extracurricular sport and other fitness activities is high.

Good social development enables students to make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. There is a strong and uncontrived spiritual element to many lessons. Themed days are used effectively to enhance students' good cultural understanding. Attendance has improved and is average and is a strong focus for the school to improve further. Students take part in a wide variety of work related activities and experiences which prepares them well for their futures.

How effective is the provision?

Students are able to follow a wide variety of courses in Key Stage 4. Good support and guidance ensures talented pupils, or those for whom the curriculum is not appropriate, are consulted, along with their parents, to arrive at jointly agreed alternatives. These are appreciated by students who achieve basic qualifications, enjoy increased self-esteem and potentially improve their future economic wellbeing. Students of all abilities say they are extremely well supported in making their choices.

The curriculum is enhanced through a variety of additional education experiences. Students enjoy a good range of extracurricular activities that include sport, and creative and performing arts. Enterprise days provide students with a breadth of experience contributing effectively to their personal development.

The impact of recent and relevant training to enhance the quality of teaching by extending the curriculum within subjects is very evident in many subjects. Lessons often involve group or practical work. Students are able to discuss their very personal beliefs without being ridiculed. This demonstrates mutual trust and respect and good relationships between staff and students. Teaching in the large majority of lessons observed was good because it is well matched to students' aptitudes and abilities.

Students know their targets. In many lessons assessment is used very effectively to identify the level at which students are working and involving them in understanding how well they are progressing. They are then advised on what they must do to reach their target grade. The strong pastoral care ensures students are well supported across a variety of areas. Excellent provision for the welfare of students is through the student support services leader and the special educational needs coordinator, who work highly effectively alongside the family support worker, learning mentors, the attendance officer and the school counsellor. The school also takes good care to make sure students are able to deal with the stresses and strains of examinations.

Year 7 students say they were prepared well for school prior to arriving and then supported well when they started in September. In other years students spoke well on how they were prepared for the next phase of their education.

Sixth form

The leadership of the school has worked hard and effectively to improve the effectiveness of the sixth form so that it is now judged to be satisfactory.

Students receive good independent advice and guidance and are aware that, if the sixth form is not the best place for them to further their education, they will be advised and supported. Students feel safe and secure and they enjoy the challenges of sixth form life. The quality of teaching and the curriculum have both improved since the previous

inspection, in part because of good cooperation with the neighbouring high school. Teachers now use assessment information more effectively.

Tracking systems have improved and data are now used more effectively to help support student progress. Students know their target grades and generally know what they need to do to improve them. This also means that if any students are identified as studying an inappropriate course they can quickly be advised and supported in changing.

Views of parents and carers

A high number of responses were received, indicating the good links between school and home. The responses were very much in line with the school's own questionnaire to which over 500 parents and carers had responded. Responses were generally very positive, with most saying that their child enjoyed school. Good support for students with special education needs and/or disabilities was identified as a strength of the school and one parent commented: 'The school has been marvellous at accommodating and helping him access what other children of his age would experience.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards further within the sixth form by ensuring that:
 - all lessons consistently challenge students so that they make good, or better, progress
 - the variety of teaching methodologies that have been effective in engaging students in Key Stages 3 and 4 are, when appropriate, used within sixth form lessons.

- Improve the consistency of leadership across subjects by ensuring all leaders:
 - accurately identify how effective teaching is in securing good learning
 - are better able to identify weaknesses and bring about improvements.

5 February 2010

Dear Students,

Inspection of Maryhill High School, Stoke on Trent, ST7 4DL

When I visited your school recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were impressed with how well you behaved and with the outstanding contribution you make to the life of the school and local community. You told us that your school has improved. Indeed, one of you said in your questionnaire: 'School has improved and is more focused on pushing us to achieve high. Teachers are giving better feedback.' We agree and have judged that your school is now good.

You make good progress. Results in your examinations are improving and standards are average. Sixth form students now make satisfactory progress, although A level results are still below average. We have asked your school to improve these. We observed nearly all teachers and we judged that teaching is generally good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. We saw some good assessment, including good questioning and teachers' feedback and marking. You really enjoy lessons which involve you with practical activities and group work. We were pleased to see how many lessons made relevant and interesting links between subjects, for example when you illustrated poems studied in English during an art lesson. In the sixth form, you do not get as many lessons like this, so we have asked the school to extend these, where appropriate, to the sixth form.

Staff care for you very well, and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education as well as helping you to settle at the start of Year 7. You enjoy the social side of school as well as being an arts and media school. I know one of the inspectors enjoyed being interviewed on your radio station. You have a very good understanding of your local area. We were particularly impressed by how many of you took part in the extra-curricular sports that are available. Your Headteacher, deputy Headteacher and assistant Headteachers have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and they are very determined that these improvements will be made. They are supported by some good subject leaders but subject leadership is inconsistent, so in a few areas, improvements are not progressing as well. Again, this is an area we have asked the school to improve, by ensuring that all staff with leadership roles analyse teaching and how it relates to your learning, so they can be more accurate in identifying what needs to be improved.

We wish you well at this very supportive school

Yours sincerely
Michael Smith Her Majesty's Inspector