

Inspection of The Marlborough Science Academy

Watling Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 2QA

Inspection dates: 29 and 30 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are polite, respectful and behave very well. Excellent relationships are evident between staff and pupils. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are very positive. Breaktimes are calm and lessons are productive. Pupils appreciate that leaders prioritise their well-being and safety. As a result, pupils feel safe, cared for and happy in school.

The school is ambitious for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils enjoy rising to the challenges they are presented with and consequently engage with their learning and achieve well. As a result of their education, almost all students in the sixth form go on to further education or employment.

Pupils have many opportunities to build important leadership skills and to take on positions of responsibility. Older pupils work alongside younger pupils in developing the work of the student parliament, for example. Pupils have a strong voice throughout their school community. One example is how pupils produce the exceptional school magazine.

Pupils benefit from high-quality extra-curricular activities, including table tennis, swimming, Latin and drama. There are plenty of opportunities to discuss and debate important issues. Pupils demonstrate open-mindedness and respect towards those who are different from them. As a result, they develop into thoughtful young people.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has carefully considered their local and pupil context when designing their curriculum. Leaders have set out what pupils should know and by when. Staff teach new knowledge so that pupils can build on their prior learning. The majority of teachers use leaders' curriculum plans consistently well so that pupils learn what they should.

The majority of teachers provide pupils with lots of opportunities to review what they have studied previously. This helps pupils to remember important information over time. In the majority of lessons, teachers consistently check what pupils remember and understand. Staff are skilled at identifying gaps in pupils' learning. Leaders check for gaps in pupils' reading skills. Staff use a range of successful strategies, such as morning reading to help pupils to become confident and fluent readers. They provide precise and targeted support for pupils who need to catch up with their reading.

In a few instances, a small number of teachers do not always check well enough what pupils have learned before presenting new knowledge. This means, at times, a minority of pupils do not achieve as highly as they should.

Staff in the sixth form teach students the specific skills needed to be successful. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. Through skilled questioning, they encourage students to combine a range of knowledge and more complex ideas in their responses. Consequently, students acquire an exceptional understanding of the curriculum.

Pupils receive a wide range of information about further study and employment opportunities before they start sixth form and during. Study programmes reflect the local employment background. All students undertake work experience in the sixth form. A high proportion of pupils go on to study at university.

The school identifies the needs of pupils with SEND quickly. Staff across the school provide precise support to overcome the specific challenges they face. Teachers adapt learning as necessary so that these pupils can achieve well, which they do.

Behaviour around the school and in lessons is exemplary. Pupils enjoy their learning and engage positively with their work. They are respectful and polite. Staff support pupils who find learning challenging to access the curriculum and become successful in their studies. Pupils are diligent, present work to a high standard and are proud of their achievements. For example, pupils' artwork is of an exceptionally high standard throughout all year groups.

The school maintains a sharp focus on improving attendance. They diligently work with pupils and their families to remove barriers and to foster positive habits of regular attendance among pupils.

The school's commitment to supporting pupils' personal development and well-being is exemplary. Any incidents involving pupils are promptly addressed, and efforts are made to incorporate solutions within the curriculum whenever possible. Pupils learn to respect different cultures and religions. The school ensures a constant and strong focus on diversity and inclusion, with many associated pupil support groups such as the Diversity group and a group for young women that addresses sensitive issues.

The school provides valuable support to pupils, fostering a safe space for discussions on a wide range of topics. The leadership has delivered life-changing and invaluable support for extremely vulnerable pupils and families.

Staff well-being is a priority for school leaders and governors. Staff highly value leaders' consideration towards staff workload and well-being. Staff, pupils and parents speak highly of the leadership at the school. Parents overwhelmingly express their support for staff and leaders and the excellent work they do to support pupils and families.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a very few instances, teachers present too much knowledge and do not check routinely pupils' understanding. When this happens, pupils do not learn as well as they should. The school should ensure that staff requiring support are sufficiently supported and trained to deliver lessons that enable all pupils to make strong progress throughout the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138042
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10318697
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,293
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jane Walker-Smith
Headteacher	Annie Thomson
Website	www.themarlbroughscienceacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school currently uses one registered alternative provider for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met members of the local governing body and held a telephone meeting with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, humanities, modern foreign languages and art. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. The lead inspector also considered several letters from parents.
- The inspectors considered the views of staff and pupils through meetings and informal discussions, and through their responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Cindy Impey, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Stonier	His Majesty's Inspector
Adam Cooke	His Majesty's Inspector
Caren Earp	Ofsted Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector

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