

The Malling School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118897
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326922
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Robin Gaff

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	426
Sixth form	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Sams
Headteachers	Mr Ian Hobson, Mr Carl Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 May 2006
School address	Beech Road East Malling Kent ME19 6DH
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The Malling School is a smaller than average school. It is non-selective in an area which operates a policy of selection by ability. The great majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than the national average. The Malling School has a specialist support unit, the Tydeman Centre, which recruits students from a wide area within the county. The school moved into new buildings in September 2007. It joined another local school to form The Malling Holmesdale Federation in February 2007. The federation has a single governing body and is led by an executive headteacher. The Malling School principal was appointed in September 2008. The federation gained Trust status in March 2009. The sixth form works within a consortium of four local schools. A private company provides childcare in a separate building on the school premises.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Malling is a good school. It has some outstanding features, including care, guidance and support, and the curriculum. The school has undergone significant changes since the last inspection and has improved during that time. Students treat the new buildings with care, and they benefit from the many new facilities, including up-to-date computer-based technology. The local federation is having a good impact on the school, which has gained from the expertise and shared resources that membership of a larger body has brought. The school also makes a positive contribution to this partnership, in particular through its outstanding provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This serves as a model of excellent practice locally and regionally. It is too early to judge the impact on the school of the federation's newly acquired Trust status. The school works with a very wide range of organisations, and students benefit a great deal from the expert care and guidance they help to provide.

Standards are rising and are now closer to national averages in the main school and the sixth form. Achievement in both areas is good. This is because the school has succeeded in addressing areas of relative weakness, such as students' literacy skills, and building on its strengths, for example in science. It has also modified its curriculum so that it provides a very close match to students' needs, interests and abilities. Teaching and learning are good because teachers build strong working relationships with their students, maintain a good pace in their lessons, and create and maintain an expectation of success. Students enjoy learning, and they know and understand their long-term targets, but the quality of day-to-day marking is inconsistent, and teachers do not always plan sufficiently varied activities to cater for the full range of students in their classes.

Students' behaviour is good, despite the reservations voiced by a very small number of parents. For example, during a rare, unplanned evacuation of the premises owing to a fire alert, the students exited the building in a disciplined fashion, responded promptly to staff instructions, and were rightly praised for their response. Students feel safe in school. They report that instances of bullying are few and they are confident that any issues are dealt with promptly. Students' high participation levels in extra-curricular sport activities and their understanding of healthy eating contribute positively to their adoption of healthy lifestyles. Students enjoy school a good deal: one commented, 'I miss school in the holidays!' Students make a good contribution to the school community through, for example, the school council. Their good preparation for future economic well-being is demonstrated by the very low number of leavers who are not in education, employment or training. One of the many successes of the school's care and guidance systems has been to ensure that students understand the importance of regular attendance, which is now above the national average.

Leaders and managers have been successful in bringing the school through a period of significant transition. They have created a clear vision for the future and a common sense of purpose among staff, and are committed to raising standards still further. The success of the changes they have already implemented shows that the school has good capacity to improve still further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is very small in comparison with sixth forms in other schools nationally, but it is growing rapidly. The new curriculum, as well as good teaching and support, makes it an attractive option for an increasing proportion of students. Standards, which were below average, are now rising, because teaching has improved and students are now following courses that are much better suited to their interests and abilities. Although the school offers only a small number of courses, these are well chosen to respond to students' needs and preferences, and students can access a much wider range through the sixth form consortium. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form. They feel that their teachers are approachable and prepared to give them extra individual help when they need it. However, they also report that communication between staff is not always as good as it should be, which limits their ability to coordinate support for students. Students make a good contribution to the rest of the school through the help they give to younger students, for example in physical education lessons, and to the wider community through their participation in the sixth form consortium council. In this well run sixth form, leaders are strongly committed to students' well-being, and to continuing to improve the provision in order to further increase standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers include in their lessons a range of different activities that meet the needs of all the students in their classes.
- Improve the consistency of day-to-day marking so that it gives students clearer indications of what they should do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students join the school with standards that are well below the national average. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has been below average in recent years, with a particular dip in 2006, but has begun to rise. Achievement also shows a rising trend. By the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment in GCSE examinations and in courses at the same level is still below average, but much closer to national benchmarks. Although standards at the end of Key Stage 4 were below average in 2008, there was a rise in the proportion of students gaining five A*-C including English and mathematics. Data, including the results of modular tests, indicate that current Year 11 and sixth form students are on course to gain results that are broadly in line with national averages. This indicates good achievement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress owing to the extremely effective individual and group support they receive, as well as the very high calibre of teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

As a result of the school's strong commitment to each individual's personal development, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Students behave with respect towards and consideration for each other and their teachers, and they value diversity in terms of ability and background. High expectations and clear systems have led to good behaviour both in lessons and around the school. Students are positive about learning and about their school, and one referred to the school as 'an energetic place with care and laughter'. They say that they enjoy lessons, especially when they are stimulating and involve them fully in their learning. Students feel listened to and are proud to be able to bring about changes through the highly effective school council. The school's growing international links, for example with schools in Africa and in Finland, raise students' awareness of lifestyles other than their own, but they have relatively limited experience of life in multicultural Britain. Students are well prepared for further learning and the world of work. They receive good quality guidance, and develop important skills, for example problem-solving and group working, in courses such as project-based learning. Students, both in the main school and in the sixth form, contribute well to the school and wider community through their roles as prefects, and, for example, by helping in primary schools and local residential homes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons often contain a productive mix of practical and theoretical work, which energises and enthuses students. The approachability and friendliness of the staff is cited as a major strength of the school by students. The school has high expectations of its students and uses assessment data effectively to ensure that teachers have relevant information about students' current standards and progress. As a result, learning activities are mostly well matched to students' abilities and enable them to make good progress. This is particularly the case for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, both in the support unit and in mainstream classes. However, planning for activities to extend the progress of more able students is inconsistent, and they are not always challenged sufficiently. As a result, they do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Marking varies in quality. Not all gives students enough guidance on how they can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum has undergone a period of significant change recently, and this has had a substantial impact upon many aspects of students' education. School leaders have identified and responded to the needs of the community that the school serves and have implemented an outstanding curriculum which both interests and motivates students. This is evident from the improvement in their attendance at school, the enjoyment they display in lessons and the improved standard of work that they produce. In response to surveys conducted with students, the school now offers a full range of vocational courses which are better suited to their interests and needs. This is making a very strong contribution to students' achievement, with many in the current Year 11 having already gained GCSE or equivalent level qualifications, for example in sport and science. Students in the support unit benefit from an exceptional curriculum which is very well tailored to their individual needs. The

school provides a wide and developing range of extra-curricular activities, encompassing sports, drama and music productions, and well attended subject-related clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school rightly prides itself on the excellent pastoral care it provides for all its students. Parents are particularly appreciative of the care that students in the support unit receive. The comment of one parent, 'I am blown away by the quality of support he receives there,' was typical of many. Increasingly productive home-school links have led to significant improvements in parents' involvement in their children's education, including better attendance at parents' evenings. The school works extremely effectively with a wide range of external agencies to provide tailored intervention programmes for vulnerable students. These include the local youth team's accredited intervention schemes, which build self-esteem. The school runs regular health clinics which provide good advice and support for individual students. Academic monitoring and guidance are effective in promoting students' progress. Strategies are in place to help students who are at risk of failing to reach their targets. These include early identification of problems, out of class support, and mentoring. Good guidance is given at key transition points such as from primary to secondary school, and in the period of preparation for GCSE choices. Child protection and staff vetting procedures are robust.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders and managers at all levels have succeeded in bringing about improvement, although there is some variation, which the school recognises, in the effectiveness of middle managers. This is being successfully addressed through the federation structure which enables staff to benefit from high quality support. The school principal and leadership team are all relatively new in post but they have already gained the respect of staff and students. The executive principal guides and supports the team well. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Leaders and managers have set and are meeting, and in some cases exceeding, challenging targets for performance. Self-evaluation is good. Leaders have a realistic and self-critical view of the school's strengths and what needs to improve. The school's monitoring of teaching and learning has become more rigorous and, consequently, school leaders have a good understanding of where teaching is most effective. They evaluate lessons accurately and suitable systems have been put in place to share good practice, for example through the federation.

The school's promotion of equality of opportunity and elimination of discrimination is outstanding. This is exemplified by the progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It enables students to learn about different faiths and traditions, but they do not have enough opportunities to learn about life in more diverse areas of the United Kingdom. The school is developing increasingly close links with the local community, in which its reputation is growing. An example of its commitment to promoting inclusion is its successful hosting of regional disabled games which students helped to organise. Governors know their school well and are active in setting priorities for the future. They have helped to ensure that the school makes good use of resources, and have successfully appointed key members of staff who are serving the school well.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

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.

The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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 learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	

Annex B



1 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Malling School, East Malling ME19 6DH

All the inspectors who visited your school recently would like to thank you for helping us to get to know your school. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing what you had to say. I am writing to you to tell you about what we found.

The Malling is a good school, and it is well led by the school and executive principals and their senior staff. You are rightly proud of the new buildings and you treat them well. You make good progress, especially those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and you are well prepared for life after school. Teaching is good, and you say you feel staff are approachable and helpful. You benefit from courses that are really well suited to your needs. The quality of the care and guidance you receive is excellent.

We were very impressed by your behaviour during the emergency evacuation. We know this is typical of the way you behave around the school and in lessons. Your good attendance shows you know how important it is to attend school regularly. You feel safe in school and you are not worried about bullying because it happens rarely and is dealt with well. Your high level of participation in sport shows you understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. You say you like coming to school, especially when the lessons include activities which keep you interested. You make a good contribution to the school community through the school council, which you say really makes a difference. We think you would benefit from being able to learn more about how people elsewhere in the country live.

In order to make it even better, we have asked the school to concentrate on the following improvements.

- Include activities in lessons that provide a closer match to all your individual needs and abilities.
- Make sure all the teachers give you enough detailed written advice in their marking to help you know what you need to do to improve your work.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully
Robin Gaff
Lead inspector