

The Marlowe School

Hartpury Old School, Gloucester Road, Hartpury, Gloucester, Gloucestershire GL19 3BG

Inspection dates

10–12 July 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils receive the personalised support they need to succeed. Staff work successfully to meet pupils' academic and pastoral needs.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, in part because of the effective leadership of the lead teacher.
- Pupils benefit from a rich and varied curriculum, which promotes an enthusiasm for school.
- Exclusions are low. There have been no permanent exclusions in the past few years.
- Pupils who complete their time at the school as planned are well prepared for their next steps once they leave the school.
- The tracking and analysis of attendance are not as precise or detailed as the monitoring of behaviour, which is monitored very well.
- The most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently to make the progress of which they are capable in some subjects.
- Leaders know the school well. They have a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. They have ensured that the independent school standards are met in full.
- The school's non-confrontational approach to behaviour management has a positive impact on pupils' development.
- The headteacher has strengthened leadership throughout the school. Different staff take responsibility for various aspects of the school's work, which has increased their expertise and professionalism.
- There is little formal governance in place, which limits available support and challenge for school leaders.
- Pupils do not routinely act on the feedback they receive from teachers to improve their work.
- Strategies to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils are not evaluated fully for impact.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - more formal, systematic governance structures are in place to strengthen support and accountability for school leaders
 - leaders fully evaluate the impact of strategies to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - pupils act on the feedback they receive from teachers to improve their work
 - the most able pupils are challenged sufficiently to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Improve the tracking and analysis of attendance to help reduce absence further.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has strengthened leadership throughout the school. As a result, systems and routines are more established, which has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pastoral care for pupils. The independent school standards are met in full.
- Leaders are highly committed to the school's pupils, as are all other members of staff. Pupils attending the school have acute behavioural, emotional and social needs and many pupils have had previous negative experiences of school. Staff are resolute and determined in their efforts to ensure that pupils feel they belong, know they are cared for and are able to thrive.
- Leaders know the school well and are able to articulate the unique qualities of the provision. They have a detailed understanding of its strengths and also the immediate areas for improvement.
- Pupils benefit from a rich and varied curriculum. English and mathematics are studied on a daily basis in order to develop key communication, literacy and numeracy skills. Alongside these subjects, pupils also have daily timetabled opportunities to explore humanities and arts subjects, studying topics and themes which interest them. Every afternoon, pupils engage in physical or practical activities, such as outdoor or vocational education. Activities within the school are also complemented by those offered by alternative providers. For example, some pupils visit a music studio in order to write, create and record their own music.
- The leadership of teaching is strong. The lead teacher works effectively with other members of staff to develop their subject knowledge and improve aspects of their practice. She ensures that staff plan and deliver their teaching to a high standard and are able to do so with confidence. The lead teacher monitors the quality of teaching closely and is objective and accurate in her evaluation. Consequently, she knows which aspects of teaching require improvement.
- Staff work with common purpose because they understand, and commit to, the ethos of the school. They are mutually supportive of each other and work successfully as a tight-knit, efficient team. Each member of staff understands their role in the school and feels trusted and empowered to get the job done. The headteacher values his staff and they, in turn, value the trust he places in them.
- The school improvement partner provides useful advice and guidance to the headteacher. Her relevant experience enables her to provide an accurate and insightful perspective on the effectiveness of the school.
- Although the number of responses to the online Parent View survey was low, they were very positive. All respondents agree that their child is happy in the school, well taught and makes good progress. All respondents agree strongly that the school is well led and managed. Moreover, they would all recommend the school. One parent stated, 'Marlowe School has supported my child to make good progress throughout his education. My child feels safe at this school and looks forward to going there.'

- Strategies to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, supported in part by additional funding, are not evaluated fully in order to determine how successful they are. Consequently, leaders are not sure which strategies make the most difference. Nevertheless, leaders have costed and put in place a number of strategies which are extending the range of support available to pupils. For some eligible pupils, the school does not receive additional funding but makes the funding available in any case.

Governance

- Currently, governance is limited and rests largely in the hands of the proprietor. A management board, with governance responsibilities for The Marlowe Child and Family Services Company, does exist, but its oversight of the school has been limited. Leaders acknowledge that formal governance structures are not in place, as they should be. This features as a priority in the school development plan.
- Notwithstanding the need for formalised governance arrangements, the proprietor and the headteacher communicate regularly to stay abreast of key issues. They regularly discuss pupils' needs and progress, provision for pupils and arrangements for their transition out of school. The proprietor ensures that these discussions are an opportunity to provide the headteacher with support and to hold him to account.
- The proprietor takes a keen interest in the school and has contributed to the shaping of its ethos and purpose. His view is that placements at this school need to work because so many placements at previous schools have broken down for pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headteacher, as designated safeguarding lead, is appropriately trained and ensures that all other staff know the procedures to follow should they have concerns about a pupil. Detailed records are kept recording chronologies of events, staff involvement and actions taken. The headteacher typically contacts external agencies and local authorities when necessary to secure support and keep appropriate parties informed. Staff meet on a regular basis before and after school to discuss particular pupils who are potentially vulnerable or at risk.
- Thorough risk assessments are in place for individual pupils and different aspects of the school's work. For example, every time there is a visit out of school, various considerations are taken into account to establish risk. An assessment is conducted for the visit itself, the venue, the transport arrangements, the transition from transport to venue and the pupils who are attending. They are 'live' documents and updated regularly to reflect changes.
- Pupils report that they feel safe in the school. This is because they form, over time, trusting relationships with staff and each other. Pupils who spoke with the lead inspector said that, although bullying might occur, it is dealt with effectively by staff.
- Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are in place. They are comprehensive and up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use assessment well to establish what pupils know and can do. The assessment system is underpinned by 'learning ladders' in each subject, which break learning down into measurable component parts. Using this system enables staff to plan coherent sequences of learning. Both staff and pupils can see what has been learned and what needs to be learned next. In the main, this means that staff pitch work and activities at the right level for pupils and, as a result, most pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- Staff are keen to develop their practice and are receptive to the support and training they receive, notably from the lead teacher. They work hard, and successfully, to prepare interesting lessons and plan bespoke support for pupils. They willingly share ideas with each other and practise in order to improve what they do.
- Pupils' good attitudes to learning reflect the efforts of staff to make lessons interesting and provide the right support for individuals. In the main, and given the high level of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties that pupils face, they behave well. They pay attention when the teacher or other pupils are talking, follow instructions and set to the task in hand. When pupils are enthusiastic, it is because the work or theme stimulates them and they are curious to find out more.
- Teachers are well supported by teaching assistants, who know what is required of them without the need to be directed. Pupils require, and receive, specialised support, which is informed by a patient and non-confrontational approach. Staff use their expertise to motivate pupils who have had negative experiences of education in the past.
- Classrooms are well kept and resourced. Colourful and up-to-date wall displays provide pupils with information that can help them learn, such as how to apply basic punctuation in their writing.
- Parents and carers receive detailed reports about pupils' progress in all areas of school life. Reports describe pupils' academic achievement across the curriculum. Information is also provided about attendance, behaviour and the extent to which pupils have developed certain character traits and qualities.
- Staff typically have high expectations of pupils' academic achievement. Although pupils face numerous barriers to learning, staff expect them to apply themselves and produce their best work. High expectations are evident in the well-presented work that pupils produce. However, the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in some subjects, such as mathematics. Some tasks set are too easy and do not push pupils to think more deeply.
- Staff are diligent about providing feedback to help pupils improve their work. However, pupils do not routinely act on this advice to identify where they have gone wrong. Consequently, pupils repeat errors in successive pieces of work.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders and staff understand that pupils arrive at the school disillusioned with education and contending with difficult, often traumatic, home lives and past experiences. Many children are looked after or live with foster families. Staff know that these young people are highly vulnerable and that their vulnerability is expressed in different ways, such as aggression and self-harm. Staff adopt the PACE approach (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) to help these pupils settle into school and move forward, in spite of their difficulties. In their dealings with pupils, staff are consistently calm, good-natured, patient and understanding.
- As a result, relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Both staff and pupils invest emotionally in each other, because trust is imperative to ensuring that the placement does not break down. Pupils benefit typically from a high level of individualised support, often one to one. Staff assist and supervise pupils, both in lessons and in social time. Such is staff commitment to the school and its pupils that staff turnover is very low.
- Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral and social education is developed well at the school. Activities in lessons frequently encourage pupils to reflect on different values, such as kindness and respect. For example, pupils were asked to review each other's art work in a constructive way. They did so, pointing out what they liked about each other's paintings.
- British values are also explored in lessons. For example, in the topic-based creative curriculum, primary-aged pupils learn about democracy in the context of wider political institutions. They are taught about the difference between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Pupils also learn about the role and purpose of the prime minister.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are tracked very well. The headteacher has a very precise and incisive understanding of patterns of behaviour and the reasons that lie behind these patterns. This is because behaviour is monitored regularly and incidents are recorded meticulously. This enables the headteacher to analyse the information and draw up strategies for improvement. Consequently, behaviour continues to improve over time.
- As a result of improved behaviour, exclusions have reduced significantly over time. There have been no permanent exclusions in a number of years.
- Pupils treat the school environment with respect. During the inspection, the lead inspector observed no vandalism, graffiti or litter. The premises are well kept and pupils' toilets are clean, hygienic and tidy.
- Levels of attendance fluctuate above and below the national average, given the very small numbers of pupils and their circumstances. Staff use all measures at their disposal to work with parents to improve attendance, which are successful in the main. Staff do not have as detailed and precise an overview of overall attendance, nor do they analyse it with the same incisiveness, as they do behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The prior attainment of most pupils who join the school is well below average across the age range. This is because pupils have failed to achieve in previous school settings and/or have had long periods of time out of education. From these low starting points, pupils make good academic progress during their time at the school.
- An increasing number of secondary-age pupils are sitting public examinations and achieving qualifications, such as GCSEs. Leaders recognise the importance of qualifications in supporting pupils once they leave school. They encourage pupils to follow accredited courses where they have a particular interest or aptitude.
- Pupils take pride in the work they produce. Work in books is well set out and neat. Pupils' handwriting improves as they move up through the school because staff have made this a priority. Neater handwriting encourages pupils to reflect more positively on their work, because it is well presented, which boosts their self-esteem. Leaders' focus on literacy and communication skills enables pupils to access other areas of the curriculum successfully and to write for different purposes and audiences. Pupils' art work continues to be of high quality, as was recognised at the time of the previous inspection.
- The length of pupils' placements at the school varies, depending on when they join. The average placement is approximately three years. Staff are keen to reintegrate younger pupils into mainstream school as soon as possible. The school is largely successful in this aim: primary-aged pupils who re-join mainstream school are more resilient, self-assured and academically prepared. Older pupils leave the school equipped with qualifications that assist their next steps. Very few do not go on to some kind of further education or employment.
- Leaders understand the importance of preparing pupils adequately for life after school, particularly the few post-16 students who have left the school recently. Planned transition has helped older students to cope with living independently and establish themselves on BTEC training courses, such as brick laying or hair and beauty.
- The school prepares pupils well for the world of work. Vocational experience is a prominent, well-established part of the curriculum and begins in the primary years. Pupils have the opportunity, for example, to experience horticulture, work with animals or develop carpentry skills. As they progress through the school, staff set up work experience placements for pupils. These take place one day a week for six months, leading, if appropriate, to two days a week for six months. In addition, pupils are taught to write curriculum vitae and learn from outside speakers, such as ex-prison offenders.
- Leaders have detailed destination information for all the pupils who left the school in a planned way. They know that many of these pupils have gone 'from strength to strength' and follow their progress closely, such were the attachments that developed. Where leaders do not know what has happened to pupils who have left the school, this is because pupils have left the school abruptly in an unplanned way. Primarily, this is because home placements have broken down for children who are looked after.
- The most able pupils are not achieving their academic potential in some subjects. The work in their books shows that some tasks are too easy and that pupils are not sufficiently stretched.

School details

Unique reference number	115809
DfE registration number	916/6072
Inspection number	10047180

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Marlowe Child and Family Services
Chair	Steve Miller
Headteacher	Harry Howells
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,200
Telephone number	01452700942
Website	marlowe-school.org
Email address	manager.meu@virgin.net
Date of previous inspection	2 June 2015

Information about this school

- The Marlowe School is an independent special day school providing education for boys and girls with emotional, social and mental health difficulties. The school is owned by The Marlowe Child and Family Services.
- Some pupils are looked after by their respective local authorities and live in residential care. Other pupils live with their parents or with foster families.
- The school is registered for 30 pupils aged eight to 18 years.
- There are currently no students in the sixth form. Three students have just left.

- A new lead teacher has been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school currently offers provision for 17 pupils, all except one of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Some pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding, although this is often not received, partly or wholly, by the school.
- The school currently makes use of alternative off-site provision at the CCP Music Studio in Cheltenham.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector observed pupils' learning jointly with the headteacher. He also visited an alternative provider to observe learning.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the lead teacher, a group of pupils, the proprietor, the school improvement partner and the school administrator.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children manager for education.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including information on pupils' outcomes, destinations, the school's self-evaluation and external monitoring reports. The lead inspector also scrutinised records relating to the monitoring of teaching, behaviour, attendance, exclusion and the safeguarding of pupils.
- The lead inspector took account of four responses to the staff survey.
- The lead inspector scrutinised pupils' work, jointly with the headteacher, and observed pupils' conduct during social times.

Inspection team

Steve Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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