

Meridian School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117539
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358155
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Joan Hewitt HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	503
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gary Glover
Headteacher	Michael Firth
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2007
School address	Garden Walk Royston SG8 7JH
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors, including one who focused for half a day on the school's provision for safeguarding students. Inspectors observed 26 teachers teaching 26 lessons and conducted one series of brief lesson visits focused on boys' engagement. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff and with the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors also observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's development plan, data and analysis, policies, the school's monitoring records and the minutes of the governing body. They considered the responses to questionnaires from 283 parents and carers, 99 students and 53 members of staff.

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

- How effective is the school in promoting attendance so that all students achieve well and develop effective workplace skills and personal qualities?
- Does teaching consistently meet the needs of all students, particularly boys, those who struggle to attend regularly and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- Is achievement even across all subjects?
- Do leaders effectively monitor and evaluate the school's performance and use their evaluation to secure sustained improvement?

Information about the school

Meridian school is a smaller than average school. It gained specialist status in mathematics and computing in 2003. Most students join the school from two local middle schools. The very large majority of students are of White British heritage although many other ethnic groups are represented. The proportion of students that speak English as an additional language is below that found nationally and all speak English fluently. Eligibility for free school meals is lower than average. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average but the number of students with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average. The school has achieved Healthy Schools status.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Students behave well and feel happy in this good school. Since the last inspection, there have been clear improvements in the quality of teaching, which is now good, and this has led to students making good progress. A key strength in the school is the way adults care for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, including the few who struggle to attend regularly. A few students take holidays in term time and this affects their progress in the short term. Until recently, attendance was low and effective work by the school has had a marked impact so that it is now average.

Students' progress in mathematics and in English has been consistently good over the last three years so that the large majority of students gain five A* to C grades including these subjects. The school has taken effective steps to deal with underachievement in other subjects, including science, and pupils' progress across the school is now consistently good. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress. In recent years there was some unevenness in the progress made by boys. Effective teaching and well planned interventions for individuals have been successful so that boys now make good progress. The few students who struggle to attend school regularly make slower progress but, by the time they finish Year 11, they have made the progress expected nationally. This is because teachers and senior staff make the most of the time students are in school and make good efforts to ensure communication is maintained. When students do return they are supported very well and they swiftly settle back into school life.

The impact of the school's specialist status is clearly seen in students' consistently good skills in information and communication technology (ICT), numeracy and literacy across all subjects.

Leaders and managers have been markedly successful in supporting teachers to improve their practice. Three quarters of lessons are good or better because teachers plan exciting and interesting activities. Consequently, students are engaged and motivated. In the very best lessons, students develop high levels of independence because teachers match the work to meet precisely their needs. In these lessons, questioning is of a high quality and the feedback students get helps them to identify exactly how they can improve their work. This best practice is not consistent in all lessons.

Leaders and managers know the school's strengths and weaknesses well because of the robust monitoring systems. The school has a wealth of information and data about the academic and personal development of students from accurate tracking of their performance.

The school has effective relationships with many partners and this has enhanced the

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opportunities for students to develop their role in the community. As a result, they take their role as citizens very seriously and many take on voluntary work in the community. Students' personal skills develop well during their time at the school. They are confident and articulate, qualities which support them well in their learning. Students enjoy their lessons and break times are relaxed affairs in which students socialise well together. They have a well developed sense of fairness. This results in them feeling safe and looking after each other.

The improvements in students' progress and the clear improvement in the quality of teaching demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve the school further. It offers good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance to above average by:
 - developing recent improvements in challenging casual and holiday absences.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - sharing existing good practice so that all teachers consistently use high quality questioning and develop effective oral feedback to students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students have good attitudes to learning, especially when they are given tasks which foster independence. Consequently, they make good progress. During lessons, they maintain their concentration and collaborate well together and this helps them to develop skills which will support them in the workplace. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those returning from absence, also make good progress because of the effective support they receive. Boys make good progress because teachers meet their individual needs.

Students' attainment on entry is broadly average and all achieve well during their time at the school. Progress has improved over the past two years and the school's data indicate that all groups are making good progress. Gaps in progress, that had been evident for boys and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have closed.

Students' personal skills are good. Students socialise well together and bullying is rare. Consequently, they feel very safe. Attendance is now in line with the national average and punctuality is good. Students have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy life and the majority participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. They are well aware of their responsibilities in the local and international community; an example of this can be seen in the work students do with the Stroke Association. The overall quality of students' behaviour has improved since the last inspection and now is good. Students have a keen sense of fun aligned with responsibility and self-discipline.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have high expectations and plan activities that engage students. This approach to active learning results in students becoming increasingly independent. In a mathematics lesson, lower attaining Year 9 students remained motivated throughout and moved on in their understanding of area through using different materials to explore space.

The good curriculum meets students' needs. Leaders have developed flexible choices through good links with partners so that students of all abilities can access vocational choices. This enables the school to provide a breadth of choice to meet students' aspirations. The school's specialist status has had a marked impact in developing students' ICT skills across the curriculum. Younger students benefit from a close focus on literacy and numeracy skills in the 'Learning to Learn' programme. This provides a strong foundation and, consequently, they make good progress. The school is able to respond well to changing needs by tailoring the curriculum for some individuals.

The pastoral care for students is good and the recent move to mixed age tutor groups has had a positive impact on students' personal development in enhancing their sense of community. The school has positive relationships with outside agencies. This enables them to ensure students have access to the right support. The school has strong systems to promote good attendance. Despite the school's best efforts improvements in raising attendance have been slow. Recently the school has taken a much firmer

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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approach to students taking holidays in term time and this has had a marked and positive impact. Academic and personal guidance at key times is good and this can be seen clearly at the end of Year 11 when the vast majority go on to further education, employment or training. This good quality care, guidance and support results in students who feel valued and know adults care for them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior and middle leaders have been very successful in improving the quality of teaching and subsequently the progress that students make. The high quality professional development is tailored to meet the individual needs of teachers. Systematic processes to support improvements in teaching have strengthened the quality of lessons. This, along with improvements to behaviour and strong self-evaluation processes, demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve.

Leaders are ambitious and they are effective in gaining the support and enthusiasm of all staff and students. Morale is good and this is further supported by the good work of the governing body. Governors have strong systems to evaluate the work of the school and meet with parents, carers and pupils to gain an accurate picture of their views.

Teachers know students very well and rigorous systems to track students' progress ensure that any underachievement is swiftly addressed on an individual basis.

Consequently, the school has a purposeful and inclusive ethos. Occasionally, leaders' use of information about the progress of different groups of students is not quite as sharp. Improvements in the progress of boys have not been as rapid as for other groups. Nevertheless, all groups now make good progress and have equal opportunities to succeed.

The school has robust systems to ensure students safety. These are implemented and evaluated rigorously. Engagement with parents and carers is good because the school uses a wide range of approaches to communicate and enable them to support their children's learning. Community cohesion is promoted well; students socialise well, creating a friendly atmosphere, and they also work well with pupils in local primary schools. They have a good understanding of their place in the world and they are well prepared for their future.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Over half the students stay on to the sixth form. Attainment is above the national average and students make good progress because of the good teaching they receive. Recent changes to the guidance for students as they choose their course has also helped to strengthen progress. The very large majority of students stay on into Year 13 demonstrating their enjoyment of sixth form life. The mixed age tutor groups have strengthened sixth form students' role in the main school and they are good role models for younger students. Students play an active role in the school and local community, supporting charities and working with local primary schools.

Lessons are lively and interesting because, as in the main school, teachers provide a range of activities that support students' learning so that they make good progress. As a result, students are articulate and independent. The curriculum effectively meets students' needs and the school provides access to some distance learning modules which adds further breadth. The majority of students go on to secure university places. The care and guidance for students are good and tailored to their individual needs. Students speak warmly of the support from the sixth form co-ordinators.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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Views of parents and carers

Over half the parents and carers responded to the questionnaire and a large majority agreed with all 13 statements. They were positive about the experience their children had at school. A few raised concerns about behaviour of students in lessons. Inspectors observed good behaviour in lessons and around the school. They also found the school had effective systems to deal with unacceptable behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Meridian School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 283 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 501 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	70	25	184	65	26	9	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	70	25	204	72	6	2	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	77	27	178	63	23	8	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	68	24	155	55	35	12	11	4
The teaching is good at this school	52	18	174	61	36	13	6	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	50	18	165	58	53	19	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	13	182	64	51	18	4	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	62	22	173	61	18	6	6	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	20	180	64	30	11	6	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	14	161	57	47	17	17	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	12	177	63	31	11	10	4
The school is led and managed effectively	58	20	178	63	26	9	7	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	69	24	172	61	30	11	9	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Meridian School, Royston, SG8 7JH

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We appreciated being able to talk to you, visit your lessons and look at your work. We were impressed with your behaviour and friendliness.

You are right to be proud of Meridian School. It is a good school and most aspects of its work are good. The main strengths are:

- the good improvements in your progress since the last inspection.
- the good quality of teaching and your learning
- the work of senior and middle leaders in improving the school and making sure you are each known well and supported to do your best.

It is clear that your small school has big ambitions for you and staff are looking for ways to make the school even better. We have asked the headteacher and all the staff to:

- continue to help you to attend school regularly and avoid holidays in term time
- increase the number of good lessons by making sure teachers learn from each other so that all lessons are as good as the best.

You can also play your part by attending school every day and continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt

Her Majesty's Inspector

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