

Parmiter's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	136899
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	384802
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1262
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	319
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Glossop
Headteacher	Nick Daymond
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 47 lessons, taught by 38 different teachers. In addition, they held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and four groups of students. They observed the school's operation, talked to many students informally, and looked at a wide range of documentation, including students' assessed work in lessons. In addition to returns of 246 parental questionnaires, inspectors considered responses from 68 staff and 147 student questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The progress made by students in lessons, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and all students in core subjects.
- The impact of the school's three specialisms on the students' experiences, motivation and achievement.
- The extent to which the school evaluates all aspects of its work.

Information about the school

Parmiter's School is a larger-than-average, partially selective school, with a large sixth form. The school has held specialist technology college status since 2000 and specialist status in music since 2005. It gained specialist status in languages in 2009. The majority of students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. Around a third of the school's students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, with the largest group being of Indian heritage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much-lower-than-average. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is much-lower-than-average. The school became an academy in July 2011. A new headteacher was appointed in 2010.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Parmiter's is an outstanding school with an outstanding sixth form. It has maintained very high levels of attainment, strengthened its curriculum, improved significantly achievement in science and gained greater consistency in student achievement across all subjects. Provision in mathematics remains exemplary. Consequently, leaders, managers and governors demonstrate an outstanding capacity to improve.

Students are rightly proud of their school and their high levels of attendance reflect how much they enjoy their education and time at Parmiter's. The extensive array of clubs, activities and events contributes very effectively to the development of students' personal qualities, including their leadership and social skills. Students' behaviour is exemplary. The good or better teaching that students receive, together with their excellent attitudes to learning, result in most students making very good progress over time. In several subjects teaching and learning is inspirational and in these cases students make truly exceptional progress. This very best teaching and assessment practice, including the use of teaching assistants to support students with special educational needs in lessons, however, is not yet fully consistent across the whole school.

The school uses its specialist subjects well to enrich its broad curriculum. High quality care and guidance ensures students are supported academically and personally, and prepared very well for life after Parmiter's.

The school's headteacher provides very strong leadership and, along with his senior management team and the governing body, has a clear vision for the school in its very recent move to academy status. Detailed and frequent reporting of all aspects of student performance has aided the school's unremitting pursuit of improvement. The quality of teaching and learning is improving, although in a few cases the evaluation of teaching and assessment does not focus sufficiently on the impact of all actions taken to improve. Most areas of the school's work are evaluated and analysed in meticulous detail. In a few areas the quality of evaluation and monitoring is less comprehensive. The school recognises this issue and plans are in place to strengthen the review of these areas this academic year. The promotion of equality and diversity within the school is outstanding and contributes very positively to students' attitudes and their awareness and appreciation of others' cultures, beliefs and viewpoints.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve lesson planning and delivery to the level of the very best lessons in the school and sixth form so that students of all abilities make even better progress by:
 - further sharing and embedding the most effective teaching and assessment practice
 - ensuring that all lessons provide every opportunity for students to develop their independent learning skills and creative responses
 - ensuring the best use of learning support staff in all lessons.
- Ensure that the rigour and focus with which the school evaluates most aspects of its work is consistently applied to all areas so that the impact of all actions taken to improve can be measured easily.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enter the school with levels of attainment higher than that found nationally. By the end of Year 11 most make very good progress and leave school with at least five A* to C grades at GCSE. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades at GCSE continues to be significantly above average and the proportion of students gaining five or more A to A* grades at GCSE rose in 2011 for the third consecutive year to remain exceptionally high.

Inspectors' observations confirmed that students make very good progress and achieve outstanding results across the vast majority of subjects. Inspectors observed students applying their analytical thinking and demonstrating good teamwork skills. Overall, the progress made by the small number of students with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities is good and improving. Inspectors observed highly effective support by learning support staff in some lessons, although in others the support was less effective and opportunities to maximise these students' learning were reduced.

The school scrutinises the performance of different groups of students in great detail at both whole-school and department level. Differences in student achievement in most cases, including by ethnic heritage and gender, are negligible. The school's own analysis identified an increasing number of girls gaining five or more A* to A grades than boys, although the school's in-year data indicate this is very likely to reduce for the current Year 11. Students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children achieve very well.

The impact of Parmiter's values and ethos are very evident on students' moral, social and spiritual development. Students show a very high awareness of social justice and are respectful to others. Students feel incredibly safe in the school community and

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conflicts are rare. Students make an excellent contribution to the community through the wide range of opportunities available to contribute their ideas and make a difference, such as the Sustain Club which focuses on how students can contribute to environmental issues.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Most lessons are good or better, and, in conjunction with students' excellent attitudes and behaviour, this contributes to the vast majority of students making at least good progress in lessons. Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and develop a very positive rapport with students. Several lessons are inspirational, often because the students are encouraged to learn independently and teachers' careful, thoughtful questioning extends their understanding and engages them fully in their own learning. In these lessons the progress made by students is exceptional and their enjoyment is significantly enhanced.

The very best teaching and assessment practice that exists in the school is not, however, consistent across all subjects. In a minority of lessons, where learning is less rapid, the planning and delivery of the lesson does not take sufficient account of the range of students' abilities. In a few lessons observed by inspectors, teachers talked for too long and students' active participation was minimal. As a result, the pace of learning was slowed and not all students were able to make the maximum progress they are capable of in the lesson time.

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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The curriculum is broad and balanced, and meets the needs and aspirations of students very well through an increasing range of courses. The school's newest specialism in languages has added further to breadth of curriculum offer. The school's other specialisms continue to benefit students through the range of linked events, including national maths challenges and musical events. The school promotes the importance of its core subjects very well and the take-up of science and mathematics subjects in the sixth form has increased markedly as a result. The curriculum is reviewed frequently, and the opinions of parents and students help shape and customise the curriculum for individuals and groups. The extensive and hugely popular programme of extra-curricular activities, which includes frequent sporting and cultural events, provides a varied and rich entitlement for all students.

Students cannot speak highly enough of the support they receive. Transition arrangements for Year 6 into the school are very comprehensive and allow students to settle into a large school very quickly. Partnership work with other agencies is strong, ensuring those students with specific special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported fully, and any potential barriers to education are removed. Procedures for monitoring the progress of individual students are well embedded and enable managers to put in place swift intervention and support for any student at risk of not achieving their target grades.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

A culture of high expectations continues to be embedded across the school. The use of data to monitor and review performance has improved significantly. This has resulted in more detailed, frequent reviews of students' performance at whole school and department level. In addition, it has supported the thorough monitoring of different groups of students to ensure all students achieve equally well. Managers monitor the quality of teaching and learning regularly through themed observations, such as assessment for learning. While the quality of teaching is steadily improving, the actions taken to improve these themed observations are not always revisited swiftly, or in detail, to evaluate the impact and check the consistency of implementation across subjects. The school recognises this and has revised its observation programme this academic year.

The governing body provides a wide range of expertise and is fully engaged in setting the strategic vision for the school. They attend many of the school's events,

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such as the recent Speech Day, an annual whole-school celebration of student achievement over the last year. The governing body committees have been recently revised to provide a more focused and efficient reporting structure. The promotion of equality and diversity is a key factor in the school's values. The school undertakes a considerable range of activities to promote equality of opportunity including initiatives such as the Chit-Chat club, which supports students who are vulnerable, due to their circumstances and the Diversity Group, set up for students to discuss a whole variety of social, cultural and moral issues. The promotion of other equality strands, such as sexual orientation, is equally very good. The school's promotion of community cohesion across the school and local Garston community is positive but its evaluation of the impact of its work is not sufficiently detailed.

Safeguarding arrangements are very comprehensive. Collaboration with external agencies is outstanding and ensures students facing challenging circumstances are particularly well supported. Reports of bullying are extremely uncommon.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students thoroughly enjoy their studies and demonstrate outstanding attitudes to learning. They make very good progress in the vast majority of subjects and the number of students who successfully achieve or exceed their target grade at GCE A level is high. The proportion of students gaining high grades continues to be significantly above that found nationally. Achievement in mathematics at both GCE AS level and A2 level has been consistently outstanding over time. On leaving the sixth form, most students progress successfully onto higher education. The maturity, conduct and self-confidence of students in the sixth form are impressive and make them excellent role models for younger students and, indeed, overall ambassadors

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for the school.

As with the main school, the quality of teaching and assessment is mostly good with very positive features. In several instances it is outstanding. In the best lessons observed by inspectors, teachers were an equal participant with the students in developing their thinking skills, their ability to work independently and in groups, and in developing their academic confidence. Sixth form students greatly value the positive relationships that they have with their teachers and the management of the school, and frequently communicate their ideas to the staff for the continuing improvement of what the school has to offer.

The very wide sixth form curriculum is based around a comprehensive range of AS and A level subjects. The range and quality of extra-curricular opportunities, including those related to the school's specialism, is a significant strength and is a key contributor to students' personal development. The well established liberal studies course, for example, provides further opportunities to cover topics such as living with a disability, the courts system, and the European Union.

All aspects of students' progress are closely monitored and support systems closely aligned with students identified needs, whether academic or personal. Students are especially complimentary about the support they receive. Leaders and managers, as well as class teachers, relate exceptionally well to students in the spirit of mutual trust and respect.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

A slightly higher-than-average proportion of questionnaire returns was received during the inspection. The questionnaires revealed that an overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded were highly supportive of the school's work. The vast majority of written comments were positive and expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the school. Inspection evidence supports the majority of parents and carers views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Parmiter's 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 246 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,262 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	166	67	76	31	4	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	183	74	61	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	142	57	88	36	5	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	170	69	64	26	1	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	149	60	91	37	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	110	45	103	42	21	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	101	41	129	52	4	4	0	0
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)	155	63	81	33	9	1	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	157	64	79	32	3	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	141	57	84	34	3	1	1	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	117	47	103	42	5	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	181	73	61	25	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	199	81	46	19	0	0	0	0

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 all 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



23 September 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Parmiter's School, Watford, WD25 0UU

I would like to thank you all for welcoming me and my four colleagues to your school. Your courtesy, behaviour and self-confidence impressed us from the outset. We found the overall effectiveness of your school and sixth form to be outstanding. We noted several impressive features of your school, including its provision in mathematics. You told us that you receive excellent levels of support and that your school provides a wide array of activities and events for you to get involved in which enriches your educational experience. We also found this to be the case.

There are two areas we felt the school could improve further.

- Improve lesson planning and delivery to the level of the very best lessons in the school and sixth form so that students of all abilities make even better progress.
- Ensure that the checks the school makes on all aspects of its work are consistently applied so that improvement can be measured easily.

Your headteacher, along with his team, is doing an excellent job in ensuring your school's continued success. You can help the school maintain its high standards by continuing to work as hard as you can and by using the student congress to let the school know your views.

Thank you again for your help in this inspection and we would like to wish you all the very best in your studies and every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector

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