

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Marlborough School

Marlborough Park Avenue, Sidcup, Kent DA15 9DP

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 June 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Marlborough School is a wonderfully nurturing school, where pupils are kept safe by well-qualified and caring staff. Pupils are happy here and rise to meet the high ambitions staff have for them. Every moment is seen as a learning opportunity for all. Pupils' extremely varied and individual needs are carefully reviewed, considered and met through a broad and interesting curriculum that enables them to thrive. Throughout the day, staff teach pupils a range of different ways to communicate their choices and to have a say in what happens to them.

The school uses a highly effective and thoughtful approach to help pupils manage their feelings and respond positively to their environment. This helps pupils to navigate different activities, including those they find difficult, with increasing confidence. This means that with time pupils become more comfortable and successful. Pupils are rewarded for their positive behaviour and achievements.

Pupils are given the opportunity to participate in a huge range of enriching activities. This helps pupils to understand what interests and motivates them, as well as develop skills that will prepare them well for their next steps. For example, pupils participate in creative arts weeks and residential overnight stays and complete work experience in a local park, football club and café.

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

The education provided is of an extremely high quality. The school has ensured that learning is carefully thought out and tailored to meet pupils' different needs and starting points. The curriculum prioritises communication, well-being, health and independence for

each pupil. It is taught through a range of subjects, including mathematics, language, communication, the creative arts, physical education and food technology.

Pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are carefully considered and reviewed in conjunction with advice from experts, health specialists and therapists. As a result, some pupils will have hydrotherapy, sensory work and physiotherapy built into their day because this is part of their education and health care (EHC) plans. Staff are highly trained and expert at maximising the learning at any given time. For example, during snack time, pupils are encouraged to communicate choices about what they want to eat, how much food or if they have had enough.

Pupils are deliberately taught how to communicate through a range of strategies. These include eye contact, gesture, referring to significant objects, using photographs and symbols as well as through speech and writing. These strategies are adapted according to individual pupils' needs, preferences and starting points. For example, some pupils are taught to indicate requests for the toilet, or a walk, by using switches. Others have been taught to read and write using a combination of evidence-based approaches, including phonics.

Pupils are taught important mathematical concepts, such as big and small numbers, counting, calculations and how to use money. They practise and apply these skills in everyday situations, such as measuring out ingredients when following recipes and in shopping role plays.

Teams of staff work together to explain things clearly to pupils, assess what pupils are capable of and to ensure that targets are ambitious and appropriate. Teachers are highly knowledgeable about the strategies that help pupils to achieve these targets. They ensure that pupils repeat and apply new knowledge, so they remember it over time.

The school's approach to managing behaviour is exceptional. Staff adapt each classroom environment thoughtfully, so pupils feel secure and capable of learning. Routines are well established and support safe movement around the school. Staff use a range of techniques to reinforce expectations, such as symbol supported stories, countdowns, or visual guides, depending on what works best for each individual pupil.

Pupils' wider development and preparation for adulthood are highly successful parts of the school's work. For example, pupils are taught appropriate ways to keep themselves healthy and safe and with as much independence as possible. Pupils experience beneficial educational visits off site, for example to the theatre and museums.

Leaders have improved standards at the school since the last inspection. Much of this work has centred around harnessing and developing the expertise of staff at all levels through a range of well-considered development and training opportunities. Leaders are at the forefront of shaping the SEND provision in their local area and beyond. They also learn from leading practitioners in SEND nationally as they pursue excellence for their pupils.

School leaders empower and support staff. They are considerate of their well-being and have taken steps to reduce workload. Staff report high levels of satisfaction and feel proud to work at this school. Staff, governors and leaders have a deep passion for working with the pupils and students. The school's work is valued by parents and carers, who typically feel their children's needs are well met and supported.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the third ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2013.

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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	101487
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10379097
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of trust	Sue Formolli
Headteacher	Dr Elizabeth Smith
Website	www.marlborough.bexley.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	15 and 16 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school operates on two sites. Marlborough Park Avenue, Sidcup, Kent DA15 9DP and Marlborough Legacy Site Marlborough Legacy, Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar School, Hurst Road, Sidcup, Kent DA5 9AQ.
- The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, specifically profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism.
- All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- The headteacher took up their post in June 2022.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- 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

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of the 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with school leaders, some members of the governing body including the chair, and spoke with representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, met with some pupils and looked at samples of their work. They also observed breaktimes and the start of the day.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and the responses to Ofsted Parent View and Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Una Buckley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tom Canning

Ofsted Inspector

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