

Inspection of The Marches School

Morda Road, Oswestry, Shropshire SY11 2AR

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 September 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

The headteacher of this school is Alison Pearson. This school is part of The Marches Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Sarah Finch, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alex Fry.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils and all students in the school's sixth form, enjoy coming to school. Relationships with staff are respectful and trusting. Pupils feel safe and are well cared for. They are enthusiastic about the many experiences and opportunities that the school provides. These opportunities help to prepare pupils well for their next steps.

Teachers have high expectations of how and what pupils and students will learn. Most classrooms are calm spaces that support learning, where pupils work hard and try their very best.

The school has established high expectations of behaviour that pupils understand and are keen to meet. The few pupils who do not meet those expectations are actively supported to understand why they need to modify their behaviour.

Pupils and students are polite and respectful to adults and to each other. They are very confident that if they have a problem, there will always be someone to help. However, a small number of pupils feel that they are not always kept informed about the actions leaders take when they report a bullying incident.

Pupils recognise assemblies and daily tutor sessions as a vital part of the curriculum. As part of these sessions, pupils learn about becoming responsible citizens.

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

The school's curriculum is well designed and ambitious. In all subjects, 'learning journeys' identify the most important learning and how that will be built upon, over time, to reach the planned end points. In nearly all subjects, teachers follow the subject plans closely. Most pupils are interested and keen to learn. Nonetheless, following a period of significant staffing issues, results in national tests at the end of Year 11 do not yet reflect these positive features of the curriculum. Furthermore, very occasionally plans are not implemented well enough. This is often where teachers' subject knowledge is not secure. As a result, pupils do not learn as much as they should and do not always remember what they have learned.

Assessment across the school is well thought out and the purpose of different kinds of assessment has been carefully considered. The school's policy of 'live' assessment in lessons ensures that teachers are quickly identifying where pupils have gaps or misconceptions. Formal assessment checks where pupils are in their learning but also identifies any patterns in underachievement. Teachers use information from these checks well. They adapt their teaching to better meet pupils' needs.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are very well supported. Their needs are identified rapidly and carefully considered plans put in place to meet these. Equally, vulnerable pupils at risk of exclusion, have dedicated support to access an extensive range of opportunities designed to ensure that they

stay in school, attend well and re-engage with learning. Leaders monitor the impact of their actions for each pupil very carefully. However, leaders are aware that the next step is to develop a whole-school overview of all pathways and support to ensure that patterns of strengths and weaknesses can be identified.

Reading is a high priority in the school. Daily reading is a feature in key stage 3 classes. Pupils make good use of the school's library. Those who find reading difficult are quickly identified and are given support by well-trained teachers. Leaders provide carefully targeted support with very well-trained teachers. As a result, most of these pupils catch up rapidly.

Sixth-form students play an integral role in the school. They are actively involved in the life of the school and are strong role models. Many act, for instance, as mentors for younger pupils or support those who struggle with reading.

Leaders have a strong focus on improving behaviour and most pupils behave very well. Pupils are kind to one another and most actively demonstrate their understanding of respect and tolerance for those who may be different to them. However, a small number struggle to meet the school's high expectations of behaviour. The school supports these pupils well, so that disruption is minimised quickly.

The school's programme for personal development is comprehensive. It embeds the school values of 'Integrity, Empathy, Equality, Excellence, Creativity'. There is a focus on character development and resilience alongside fundamental British values. The School Pride March is now an established annual feature in the town. Pupils and students enjoy the half-termly focus weeks, including a 'faith and diversity' week and 'peace' week.

School, governors and trust leaders work together effectively. They keep parents and the community well informed. The local governing board know the school well and understand their role in holding school leaders to account.

School leaders take staff workload and well-being very seriously. Staff feel valued and they are proud to work at this school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Very occasionally, curriculum plans are not implemented well enough. In these cases, pupils do not learn and remember what they should. Leaders should

ensure that all teachers have the training and support they need to develop the subject and pedagogical expertise to successfully deliver the planned curriculum.

- Pupils do not always know what action has been taken when they report a low-level incident of bullying. As a result, pupils can lose confidence in the anti-bullying process. Leaders should ensure that actions taken are always shared with and understood by pupils.
- The school does not routinely analyse information from the many support structures and interventions that leaders make available to pupils at whole-school level. As a result, leaders are not able to quickly identify patterns in what is working well and what is less successful. The school should ensure that monitoring systems enable them to take this information into account to inform their school development priorities.

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	136979
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10285040
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1392
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	201
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alex Fry
Headteacher	Alison Pearson
Website	http://marchesschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2018

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Marches Academy Trust.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provider.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a 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 of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector held a meeting with the chief executive officer and the director of education of the trust. She also met with two trustees, the chair of the local governing board and three other governors.
- Deep dives in English, mathematics, science, business studies, modern foreign languages and performing arts were completed. These included discussions with subject leaders and teachers, visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils’ and students’ work. Inspectors also met with pupils and students to discuss their learning in these subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed the personal, social and health education curriculum plan, spoke with the curriculum leaders and visited tutor time in form groups and an assembly. Inspectors also reviewed the support provided for pupils at an early stage of reading.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including leaders’ plans to improve the school and their self-evaluation of the school’s work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.

Inspection team

Mel Ford, lead inspector	His Majesty’s Inspector
Helen Reeves	Ofsted Inspector
Ed Leighton	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Byatt	Ofsted Inspector
Sultanat Yunus	His Majesty’s Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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