

John Mason School

Wootton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1JB

Inspection dates

21–22 May 2019

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| 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 |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and governors are ambitious for the future of the school. Parents and carers, staff and pupils told us how the school has improved in recent years. The reputation of the school has been transformed within the community.
- Leaders accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have a clear plan to bring about improvements where needed.
- Leaders have created an ethos where the relationships between staff and pupils are extremely caring and respectful. Pupils feel very safe and confident that there is an adult they can talk to if they have any concerns.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils' behaviour is mature and they enjoy working with their peers. In the majority of lessons, pupils remain focused and low-level disruption is rare.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and most plan lessons that engage pupils and extend their learning. Pupils use teachers' guidance well to help them improve the standard of their work.
- Pupils' progress has improved so that it is now similar to the national average overall. Pupils' GCSE results last year were below expectations in some subjects. As a result, the curriculum was revised to better meet pupils' needs.
- Leaders' actions to improve attendance have quickly led to pupils, especially those who are vulnerable, attending school more regularly.
- Leaders and governors spend the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils appropriately, and the differences in outcomes for these pupils are diminishing in many areas.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), especially those with social and emotional difficulties, are expertly supported. In some lessons, teachers do not plan skilfully enough to help pupils overcome their learning difficulties.
- Students' examination results at the end of the sixth form were well above the national average last year and the current group are on track to greater success.
- Sixth-form students are a credit to the school. They all engage with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. In 2018, an extraordinarily large number of students achieved the gold award.
- Leaders have encouraged students in the sixth form to be aspirational and ambitious. As a result, the proportion of students moving on to higher education is increasing.
- Pupils are fully prepared for their next steps. They value the thorough, impartial and timely careers information and guidance provided.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is consistently strong so that:
 - all pupils with SEND make progress that is similar to others with similar starting points
 - pupils achieve as well in all subjects as they do in those where teaching is strongest
 - the difference in the rates of progress between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school continues to diminish.
- Review the curriculum for pupils in key stage 3 to ensure that it provides pupils with opportunities to fully develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across a wide range of subjects before they choose their GCSE options.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, ably supported by the leadership team, has worked tirelessly to improve the school since the previous inspection. She has enhanced the school's reputation in the local area and gained the confidence of parents. One parent, typical of many others, commented:

‘I really think John Mason is a good school, with excellent leadership and staff who care about the children and are passionate about delivering great education. Overall, I feel that the school is an asset to our community.’
- Staff share leaders' ambitious vision for every child to have access to high-quality learning opportunities which encourage them to become academically successful, happy, resilient, enquiring young people.
- Leaders are knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have widely researched plans in place to bring about improvements where needed. Leaders are quick to harness the support of trusted professionals and visit other schools to seek good practice. Consequently, changes made are most usually successful. For example, leaders recognised that pupils' progress in English was below their expectations last year. Leaders scrutinised the effectiveness of those responsible, supported leadership and strengthened teaching. As a result, pupils are now making much improved progress.
- Teachers who responded to our survey told us that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support their improvement. Subject leaders routinely measure the effectiveness of their colleagues and provide effective bespoke support when needed. In addition, teachers are willing to share and demonstrate their skills to those who need help or are inexperienced.
- Leaders reviewed the curriculum to ensure that all pupils are given appropriate opportunities to excel from their different starting points. The revised curriculum includes additional opportunities for the most able pupils. A small number of vulnerable pupils follow vocational programmes with alternative providers. Leaders have extended the key stage 4 curriculum to three years, with the intention of deepening pupils' knowledge in chosen subjects. Pupils and teachers are enthusiastic about the opportunity to gain more expertise by spending additional time on fewer subjects. Leaders are about to embark on a thorough review of the curriculum for Years 8 and 9.
- Leaders have given careful thought to where British values, character education, opportunities for leadership, creativity and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development fit into the curriculum, ensuring that the curriculum remains broad and balanced in all years.
- Leaders are now using the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively. Consequently, in the majority of pupils' books, there were no noticeable differences between the standard of work produced by disadvantaged pupils and others. Pupils who join the school in Year 7 with low literacy skills quickly catch up because of the use of valuable interventions that support them well. A continued focus on reading across the school leads to the majority of pupils being confident and fluent readers.

- Leaders' use of funding for pupils with SEND is targeted to provide specialist help to overcome their difficulties, especially social and/or emotional difficulties. However, teachers' support for pupils' specific learning needs in lessons is inconsistent. Therefore, some pupils with SEND are not making as much progress as others.

Governance of the school

- Governors bring a wealth of expertise from a variety of professional backgrounds that they use in their delegated roles and responsibilities. Governors' support for leaders has had a positive impact, for example in restructuring staffing and strengthening leadership in modern foreign languages.
- Governors know the school well. They are able to challenge the leaders precisely because of the useful information provided by staff. Governors stringently monitor the budget to ensure that the school operates within its means.
- The trust supports the headteacher well through the deployment of a school improvement partner who regularly reports to the trust's chief executive officer (CEO).
- The relationship between the trust board and the local governing body is developing but there is not yet a clear definition of how the work at both levels is harmonised.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. A culture of safeguarding permeates the school. All members of the school's community are committed to keeping pupils safe. Pupils feel safe, and parents are confident that their children are looked after well.
- Leaders are vigilant in checking the records of staff who join the school, and have secure systems in place to validate visitors entering the site. Thorough and up-to-date records are held securely.
- Staff are regularly trained on all aspects of safeguarding, and are frequently briefed when new guidance needs to be implemented or issues arise that need to be shared.
- Staff quickly communicate with parents if there are safeguarding concerns, and work together with external agencies to resolve problems and ease difficult situations for vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe. They told us that there is always an adult they can talk to if they need help. Underlying pupils' confidence are the excellent relationships between the staff and pupils across the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers foster excellent relationships with their pupils, encouraging mutual respect. Pupils are confident that the majority of teachers will help them to succeed. Pupils have less confidence when they are taught by short-term temporary teachers.
- In lessons where teaching is most effective, teachers clearly explain their expectations of the standard of work pupils should achieve. Teachers ask pupils specific questions, targeting them knowingly at the right level and probing as far as possible to have a

high impact on pupils' learning.

- Pupils respond well in lessons where the teachers consistently enforce clear routines. With little exception, teachers engage pupils with challenging activities that keep them focused throughout lessons. Pupils keep neat records of their work that are useful when they are preparing for assessments.
- Teachers understand the structure of examination syllabuses and the assessment objectives of their subject. Teachers skilfully use their knowledge to help pupils in a variety of ways with their preparation for examinations. Teachers use different approaches depending on the needs of the pupils. Most-able pupils are given tools to help them independently find their preferred style of revising, while pupils who need more support practise with the close supervision of their teachers.
- Teachers use their research to risk trying out new approaches to teaching and share their experiences with others, for example in science, mathematics and history. Mostly, pupils enjoy the variation in teaching styles and work with their teachers to refine methodologies that deepen knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils who have low ability and/or those with SEND are supported well by additional adults in some lessons. However, teachers do not consistently use the guidance provided by the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) to help pupils with SEND make rapid progress. As a result, some pupils with SEND are slow to catch up with their peers.
- Teachers effectively use the school's agreed 'pupil premium pledge' to motivate disadvantaged pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make good progress in most lessons and have positive attitudes to learning.
- Teaching in the creative subjects is exceptionally strong and recognised by pupils and parents. Pupils are proud of their work in art, textiles and three-dimensional design, which is of an exceptionally high standard.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils from all year groups that we met informally were overwhelmingly positive about their school. They wear their uniforms with pride and are keen to talk about the lessons they enjoy most. Pupils talk warmly about their teachers and, in particular, the supportive relationships pupils have with their tutors.
- In the main, pupils are confident, self-assured learners but will ask for help when they need it. Most pupils independently access resources, including the school's library, to further their learning. Pupils sometimes seek help in breaktimes or after school if they have not understood the topic in lessons.
- Leaders encourage pupils to become valuable members of their community. Consequently, there are numerous examples of older pupils supporting younger pupils, and pupils volunteering and representing the school on behalf of other organisations, including charities.
- Pupils relish the many opportunities the school provides to develop their interests and

skills. Many pupils participate in the sports and music clubs, as well as other clubs, including the 'games workshop', 'literature and philosophy' and those where pupils can receive support to help them with different subjects. All pupils in Year 8 spend a residential week on a farm. Pupils told us that the experience taught them skills of teamwork, resilience and leadership.

- Leaders provide a strong structure of support for helping pupils with social and emotional or mental health difficulties. Vulnerable pupils are happy to talk to adults if they have difficulties, confident that they will be supported in school or signposted to more specific help.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Through the programme of character education, teachers ensure that pupils are aware of the risks and potential dangers in wider society.
- A very small number of pupils receive some aspects of their education off-site, including at a local pupil referral unit, the local further education college and a vocational provider. Staff liaise closely with the providers to ensure that pupils are safe, attending regularly and making appropriate progress in their learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around school and in lessons, contributing to the school's calm and orderly atmosphere. At social times, pupils behave maturely, congregating in small groups and enjoying one another's company. In most lessons, pupils remain focused on learning, and low-level disruption is rare.
- The minority of pupils who have difficulties in managing their own behaviour are appropriately supported. Consequently, incidents such as bullying and verbal and physical abuse are unusual.
- Leaders have driven the school's ethos and values to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions year on year. Pastoral leaders reinforce appropriate behaviour with praise, encourage a sense of belonging and provide opportunities for pupils to develop and practise leadership skills.
- Overall attendance is in line with the national average and is improving. Leaders and governors are aware that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND have contributed disproportionately to absence levels in the past. Leaders have appropriately focused resources on improving attendance and, while there are still some gaps, staff are not complacent. Staff are quick to identify vulnerable pupils who are becoming too frequently absent and work with them to ensure that they attend more regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Overall, pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 11 have slightly improved over the past couple of years. There has been some variation across subjects because of historic difficulties in recruiting high-quality staff, for example in modern foreign languages. However, leaders have worked hard to improve teaching and, for the majority of pupils, in most subjects, progress is accelerating.

- Pupils are currently making stronger progress in key stage 4 than they are in key stage 3. However, there are some subjects and lessons in which the younger pupils make very good progress, including English, mathematics, German, creative subjects and physical education.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress because of a school-wide determination to support the pupils in lessons and provide them with suitable additional activities. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils' attendance and engagement have improved. The standard of disadvantaged pupils' work in books is not distinguishable from that of other pupils with the same starting points.
- Teachers have raised the expectations of most-able pupils in key stage 3 by engaging them in aspirational activities known as 'the symposium', for which pupils are invited to apply. Successful pupils work with academics, people from industry, writers, philosophers and teachers, depending on their choice of subject. Pupils present a dissertation based on their learning to staff and students at the University of Oxford. Leaders and teachers attribute the improvement in pupils' progress by the end of Year 11 to their involvement in this.
- Teachers' engagement with the symposium has also raised their expectations of most-able pupils in key stage 3. Pupils' work in some subjects is of a very high standard, and has challenged pupils in lessons and beyond the classroom.
- Teaching support assistants, as well as some teachers, support pupils with SEND well and the pupils are making good progress. Very effective practice exists in some subjects but practice is insecure in others. Therefore, the progress of some pupils with SEND is not as strong as that of others. Leaders are strengthening the role of the SENCo to monitor more closely the quality of teaching for pupils with SEND.
- Careers information and guidance are a strength of the school. Pupils receive highly effective and impartial advice in small groups, and individually if needed. Further support is provided for vulnerable pupils. Pupils were keen to tell us how the support helped them to make the right decisions at each stage when choices were available.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Leaders ensure that the provision in the sixth form meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme by working in a consortium with a local secondary school and a college of further education. A wide range of subjects is available. Currently, all courses offered at this school are at A level.
- Leaders have high expectations for the students. Staff and students share an agenda for 'pursuing excellence'. Students make excellent progress in the sixth form, and examination results at the end of the sixth form in 2018 were in the top 20% in the country. The standard of work produced by current students suggests that the results will be at least as good this year.
- Teachers adapt their teaching effectively so that it suits the needs of students very well. In lessons, teachers and students engage in mature conversations with challenging, high-level questions and answers. Inspectors' observations in lessons found students highly motivated when, for example, they were presented with complex texts in sociology and abstract questions in physics.

- Students are confident, articulate learners. They conduct themselves well and are grateful to their teachers for their support. Students know how well they are doing as, following assessments and teachers' feedback, students use examination specifications to create plans to improve their work further. Plans are regularly discussed with tutors and subject teachers to check that students are on track to meet their expected grades.
- Students are excellent role models for the younger pupils in the school. All students are linked to tutor groups in key stage 3. Many students volunteer to support younger pupils by mentoring or by helping weak Year 7 readers. A group of Year 12 students are participating in mental health training to be able to support pupils in Years 7 and 8.
- Students are very positive about the quality of enrichment activities that enhance their study programmes. All students continue to participate the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and, in 2018, 47 of the 53 students achieved the award at the gold level. This year, 58 are close to achieving the gold standard. The majority of students have firm plans for a work placement to take place before the end of the term.
- Leaders provide a thorough programme of careers information and guidance that is much appreciated by the students. Students have opportunities to hear about different progression routes from current participants, visit universities and receive individual support when making applications. Students who need specialist help have the opportunity to have individual meetings with a careers expert.
- Students' retention on programmes is high. Only two students who started the sixth form in 2017 have not continued to complete their courses.
- The latest destination data presents a strong and improving picture, with all students going on to appropriate education, employment or training. More than three quarters of students go on to study at higher education institutions, with most of the rest taking up apprenticeships or art foundation courses. Most students who are planning to take a gap year have plans for higher education afterwards.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 140580 |
| Local authority | Oxfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10088168 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 971 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 140 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Barry Graham |
| Headteacher | Sarah Brinkley |
| Telephone number | 01235 524 664 |
| Website | www.johnmason.oxon.sch.uk |
| Email address | office.4126@johnmason.oxon.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 31 January 2017 |

Information about this school

- The school joined with another local secondary school and a primary school in 2018 to form a multi-academy trust, the Abingdon Learning Trust.
- Governance is provided by the board of trustees, which delegates some of its responsibilities to the local board.
- Sixth-form provision contributes to a consortium, the Abingdon Consortium for Education.
- A very small number of pupils attend one of three alternative providers – Orchard Pupil Referral Unit, Abingdon College of Further Education and TRAX – for all or part of the week.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 53 lessons and attended eight tutor periods. Almost all visits were carried out jointly with school leaders.
- Meetings were held with leaders responsible for various aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding, teaching and learning, the curriculum, behaviour and attendance, and careers.
- Inspectors also met with leaders responsible for the progress of pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and those in Year 7 who need additional help to catch up.
- The lead inspector held discussions with the headteacher, as well as with the chair and representatives of the local board and the CEO of the Abingdon Learning Trust.
- The views of staff were taken into account by holding meetings with different groups, including middle leaders, experienced teachers, newly qualified teachers and support staff, and by analysing the 67 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- The views of pupils were taken into account through informal conversations and formal meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed the 147 responses and 145 written comments to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- Inspectors scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and reviewed a range of documents made available by the school, including leaders' self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Telephone conversations were held with representatives of the alternative providers.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding procedures at the school by scrutinising documents, examining staff recruitment practices and meeting two of the school's designated safeguarding leads.

Inspection team

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|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Karen Roche, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Mary Davies | Ofsted Inspector |
| Patrick Harty | Ofsted Inspector |
| Charlotte Wilson | Ofsted Inspector |

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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