

Maharishi Free School

Cobbs Brow Lane, Newburgh, Lathom, Lancashire, L40 6JJ

Inspection dates 3–4 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good and especially strong in Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils make good progress and attain well at GCSE.
- Good teaching underpins the good progress. The best teaching is built on strong subject knowledge and the ability to tailor learning to pupils' capabilities.
- Teachers get to know pupils extremely well and provide good personalised support. Class sizes are small.
- Pupils of all ages say they find daily meditation helps them to settle. Pupils in Year 10 and 11 have a particularly mature approach to learning.
- There is a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, which helps pupils grow in confidence and ensures they feel entirely safe.
- Leaders and governors are successfully steering the school through a period of change. As pupil numbers have increased, the talents and support needs of pupils have become increasingly diverse, this has been well-managed.
- Governors use their expertise well to identify strategic direction and hold leaders to account for reaching their goals.
- Parents feel their children are safe, happy and making good progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not always take into account pupils' prior learning so that pupils of all abilities reach their full potential in lessons.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, some learning activities are not stimulating enough to make sure children always make rapid progress.
- Pupils' written work is sometimes poorly presented because teachers do not have consistently high expectations of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Systems to analyse and assess the quality of teaching do not give sufficient consideration to the progress that pupils make over time.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all primary classes except the Year 3/4 class, where the teacher was absent, and in the majority of subjects in the secondary phase. They observed 12 lessons taught by 11 teachers. One lesson was jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the two deputy headteachers, the Early Years Foundation Stage teacher, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and three members of the governing body, including the Chair. An inspector had a telephone conversation with a local authority adviser who has provided advice and support to the school.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils and inspectors spoke with other pupils in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including the school’s self-evaluation, monitoring records, information about pupils’ progress, improvement planning, records of governing body meetings, safeguarding and behaviour policies.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 20 staff who returned inspection questionnaires and of 77 parents who had responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Jean Olsson-Law, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Maharishi Free School opened in September 2011, designated as an all ability inclusive school. It is a non-religious, non-denominational school for pupils aged 4 to 16 years, situated on the outskirts of Skelmersdale. The curriculum includes Transcendental Meditation and 'consciousness-based education' as well as traditional subjects.
- Its predecessor school was the fee paying independent Maharishi School, which opened in 1986.
- The number of pupil places has increased from 70 to 192. There are currently 158 pupils on roll, increasing to full capacity in September 2013.
- The school operates from two sites – with the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 located in the original premises and Key Stages 3 and 4 in a newly converted building, half a mile away.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is similar to the national average. There are few pupils speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is well below average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided to the school based on the number of pupils in local authority care, from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils identified as having a disability or special educational needs and given extra support through 'school action' has increased significantly in the last year and is now above the national average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or given extra support through 'school action plus' is below average.
- No pupils attend any alternative or off-site provision.
- Before and after school clubs are provided.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for student's attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it always good or better by ensuring that teachers:
 - assess pupils learning more thoroughly in all key stages, and use the information to plan and adapt teaching so that pupils of all abilities make rapid and sustained progress
 - expect consistently high standards of pupils in the presentation of their work, paying attention to layout, handwriting, spelling and punctuation
 - make sure the learning activities for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage provide enough challenge to help them get off to a flying start
 - receive appropriate professional development to continue to adapt to the increasing roll and pupils' more diverse learning needs.
- Sharpen self-evaluation and improve the way the impact of teaching is measured over time by:
 - revising the way criteria are used for lesson observation, ensuring sufficient focus on pupils' learning and development of skills, knowledge and understanding in each lesson
 - linking the progress pupils make over time more closely to the quality of teaching they receive.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils enter the school with varied prior experience and levels of attainment. Due to the increased number of pupil places, there has been an influx of pupils into each year group since the school opened two years ago. They have been integrated well, so that pupils make good progress in the vast majority of lessons.
- Pupils make good and often better progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 and achieve well at GCSE. The most recent school assessments show that the vast majority of pupils in Year 11 are on track to achieve five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, including English and mathematics. All pupils are planning to go on to sixth form.
- Pupils make good progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2 but their progress is variable across year groups. A scrutiny of pupils' work indicated that pupils make more rapid progress in Years 2, 5 and 6 than they do in Years 1, 3 and 4.
- Results from the most recent standardised assessments show that pupils in Year 6 achieved well in reading and writing but did not do as well as expected in mathematics. Pupils in Year 2 achieved the levels expected for their age in reading and mathematics and better than expected in writing. These results have been moderated but are not yet validated or benchmarked nationally.
- Pupils enjoy reading for a range of purposes. Writing has improved across the primary school following well-targeted support to help pupils improve their writing skills. The content of their written work is often of high quality but shortcomings in handwriting, spelling and punctuation are more common in a minority of subjects and classes.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements, particularly when they excel in competitions such as the nationwide 'Junior Maths Challenge' and the 'Salter's Festival of Chemistry'.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make at least expected progress from their starting points. Some make rapid progress, particularly in their language and literacy skills. However, they do not always make the best progress in other areas because activities are not challenging enough to extend their skills.
- The school receives a small amount of pupil premium funding, which is used to provide additional support for pupils. The pupils who receive this support make good progress and achieve equally as well as other pupils.
- Pupils who are supported through school action and school action plus and those speaking English as an additional language make good progress in both their academic and personal development. Pupils who have joined the school recently have been supported effectively to settle in to their classes so that they achieve as well as others. The caring, nurturing approach helps to build pupils' self-esteem and develop good attitudes to learning.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good, resulting in good outcomes for pupils particularly at the end of Year 6 and Year 11. There is also some outstanding teaching. There are a few aspects of teaching that require improvement, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary phase.
- Teaching is characterised by warm relationships and an encouraging approach, which provides equal opportunity for all pupils to grow in confidence and make good progress. Good personalised support helps pupils develop a confident and mature approach to learning so they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Teaching is most successful at Key Stages 3 and 4, where teachers have strong subject knowledge and adapt teaching effectively to the needs of each pupil. The best quality teaching builds successfully on pupils' knowledge and skills in each subject and develops reading, writing, communication and mathematics.
- Pupils are highly motivated and productive as a result. This was seen in a geography lesson

where good quality questioning and effective use of technology developed pupils' understanding of earthquakes and their consequences.

- The teaching of art is excellent across the school, giving pupils in-depth understanding of art and superb technical skills. Pupils of all abilities produce creative and highly accomplished artwork which is a joy to see around the school.
- Where teaching is highly effective, teachers assess pupils' prior learning thoroughly and plan different activities so that pupils of all abilities work at the right level. This was seen in Year 2 where pupils made good gains in learning to write speech because the teachers' questions were directed effectively to probe the understanding of different groups.
- However, assessment is not always used so effectively. In some lessons, the activities are not challenging enough for some pupils, so they do not make the best possible progress.
- Pupils' work is usually marked well so that pupils know how to improve their work. It is most effective where pupils have time to follow up the comments that are made, as in the Year 2 and Year 5/6 classes, for example. However, teachers are not always meticulous enough in marking presentation of work and handwriting.
- Reading is taught well and consequently pupils make good progress. The teaching of writing is effective in enabling pupils to produce pieces with well-constructed and meaningful content but teaching does not always expect high enough standards of presentation, handwriting, spelling and punctuation.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, clear explanations and good questioning helps children learn well in the sessions led by the teacher. However, the follow-up activities and those that children can choose for themselves do not always give children opportunities to find things out for themselves or apply their skills to challenging tasks.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- There is a harmonious, orderly, relaxed and friendly atmosphere, which helps pupils grow in confidence and ensures they feel entirely safe. Pupils of all ages say the daily meditation helps them to 'settle' and 'relax'. Older pupils report that it gives them 'a more focused approach' to learning.
- Pupils have a keen awareness of spiritual, moral and cultural themes and issues. They are self-reflecting and understand how their behaviour can add to or detract from the well-being of all people. As one young pupil said, they try to 'spread kindness' throughout the day.
- Pupils develop excellent social skills as they get older and their positive attitudes make an increasingly strong contribution to their learning and to the whole atmosphere in the school. In the lessons observed in the inspection, pupils' contributions were always good and sometimes exemplary particularly in Key Stage 4.
- Pupils' behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary phase is good most of the time and pupils always do as they are told by the teacher. However, there are times when pupils find it difficult to concentrate and they sometimes become restless. This happens most often when teaching does not capture their imagination fully or the tasks set do not interest or challenge them.
- Pupils are punctual and their overall attendance is in line with national levels. None of the pupils are persistently absent.
- Pupils feel free from bullying. They are aware of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and the negative effects of homophobic and racist views.
- There have been no permanent exclusions in the two years since the school opened. Temporary exclusion is used rarely, in response to specific incidents.

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders and the governing body are managing the transition of the school and the increase in pupil numbers well. They have responded rapidly to advice arising from external monitoring and are continually seeking to support the professional development of staff.
- Leaders have made a number of good appointments to strengthen leadership and bring new skills to the school. The two deputy headteachers, an experienced special educational needs coordinator and new class teachers have enhanced teaching and learning.
- Teachers have benefitted from professional development introducing them to more varied teaching methods. School leaders have recently implemented appropriate training to ensure that teachers continue to develop their skills as pupils enter the school with more diverse needs and ability. However, the full impact of this is still to be realised and leaders are wisely planning further training to improve teaching.
- Leaders have introduced a number of new and effective procedures to manage the performance of staff. All teachers have plans which are focused on the most important aspects they need to improve and are supported with professional development.
- Self-evaluation has developed significantly over the last year, but is not sharp enough. The evaluation of teaching focuses too much on what the teacher is doing and not enough on its impact on pupils' learning in lessons and over time. The use of a checklist has led teachers to over generous self-evaluation, as they focus on 'ticking all the boxes'.
- There is limited information about pupils' prior attainment but leaders have taken appropriate action to make sure they can assess pupils' progress accurately from now on. For example, they have introduced national standardised assessments tests (SATs) and tests to measure pupils' cognitive ability.
- The curriculum has a strong and clear focus on the development of pupils' literacy, mathematical, creative and personal skills at all key stages. Although the subjects studied at GCSE are limited, the older pupils feel they meet their needs and the small number who have left so far have gone on to a sixth form or further education.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed extremely well through 'interdisciplinary subjects' which include daily meditation and personal, social and health education. It is integral to the school's ethos and effectively promotes equal opportunity.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a wide range of expertise, knowledge and educational experience. They make good use of external advice from national advisers, Lancashire local authority and independent consultants to evaluate the school's performance and develop effective plans for improvement.
 - Governors carry out a wide range of activities to check how well pupils are learning. They know how well pupils are doing and where teaching could be better. They have driven through the use of standardised testing so that they can measure pupils' progress more accurately.
 - The small amount of pupil premium funding is spent appropriately to provide expert and personalised support for pupils who need it.
 - All necessary safeguarding checks and policies are in place and staff training in safeguarding is up to date and relevant.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137498
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	400309

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

Type of school	Academy free school
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	158
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Birnbaum
Headteacher	Derek Cassells
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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