

Old Buckenham High School

Abbey Road, Old Buckenham, Attleborough, NR17 1RL

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough students have made the progress they are capable of and their achievement varies too much between subjects, particularly that of boys.
- Achievement in English was lower than expected in 2013 and students' writing skills need improvement.
- While students feel safe, behaviour is not as good as it should be. In lessons, students do not always apply themselves as well as they should.
- Teaching is not consistently good and requires improvement because lessons are not demanding enough and students do not have enough opportunities to work and learn by themselves.
- Teaching is not always matched to the needs of different students and time is wasted when teachers talk for too long.
- Teachers' marking and other guidance are not always precise enough to help students improve their work.
- The steps taken by leaders and governors to improve students' achievement and teaching have not had sufficient impact.
- Although improved, leaders' past judgements about the quality of education at the school had been too generous. As a result, governors' views of the quality of education at the school have not previously been accurate.
- While teachers and leaders take effective action following concerns raised by parents, there are instances when responses are not reported back to parents rapidly enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The achievement of students who currently attend the school is improving.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress.
- In mathematics and history, students' achievement is at least good.
- Effective leadership from the current headteacher is helping the school to improve.
- Governors now have a more accurate view of the school and are able to challenge leaders and staff to do better.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 28 lessons, of which six were seen jointly with the headteacher or senior staff. Inspectors also made a number of short visits to lessons and classrooms to study students' work.
- Inspectors studied a range of documents and information about students' progress, attainment, behaviour and attendance. They also studied the school's development plan, self-evaluation document, assessment information, behaviour logs, records about the quality of teaching and documentation relating to safeguarding.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, teachers, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and members of staff who lead subjects or hold areas of responsibility.
- Meetings were held with over 70 students so that inspectors could discuss their progress, behaviour and the quality of their work.
- Inspectors took account of the 76 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own surveys of parental opinion. They also considered responses from the 39 members of staff who completed an inspection questionnaire. Inspectors spoke with a small number of parents who contacted them during the course of the inspection.

Inspection team

David Turner, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Paul Bartlett	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Angela Podmore	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled students or those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need is also below the national average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority and for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below average.
- Currently, five students attend alternative provision to support their achievement in a range of applied and work-related studies, on a part-time basis. They study at City College and Easton College.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- At the time of the inspection, the school was temporarily led and managed by the deputy headteacher. A new headteacher is due to take up his post in November 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching consistently good or better across the school within three academic terms by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of what all students can achieve, particularly boys and in English lessons
 - lessons capture all students' interest quickly and keep them engaged throughout, especially boys
 - all lesson planning takes into account students' current standards, so work and learning activities are demanding enough and matched to students' ability
 - time is used well to allow students to work more independently and quickly apply their skills and knowledge, to keep them engaged and interested
 - all marking is clearly focused on what students need to do next in order to improve and provides them with time to respond to teachers' comments
 - questioning promotes deeper understanding and learning by requiring students to give extended, well-reasoned answers.
- Ensure that all year groups, including the current Year 11, make good progress from their starting points by summer 2014 by teachers in all subjects focusing on improvement of writing skills for all students, particularly boys, so as to improve their examination performance.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - all self-evaluation and review work is accurate so leaders and governors have a realistic view of the school's performance when setting targets for improvement
 - improvement plans focus on fewer, manageable targets to address the biggest challenges facing the school, with clear and timely arrangements for checking progress
 - senior leaders hold all leaders and staff more closely to account

- subject leaders have a much clearer role, with a greater focus on evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and learning and sharing the best practice found in the school
- governors make more systematic checks on how well actions taken to improve teaching and achievement are working, and hold leaders more to account for the impact of their work
- when any parent contacts the school with a concern, ensure that information about the action taken is shared with the parent.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **requires improvement**

- Students start at this school with knowledge and skills in line with the national average. In the last two years, their achievement has varied widely across the different subjects, while that in some subjects has declined.
- In 2012, the proportion of students achieving five or more good grades at GCSE including English and mathematics fell to 50%, because English results fell. In 2013, English results were similar to those of 2012, so the proportion of students achieving five good grades is likely to be below average in 2013 when national comparisons are published. The development of writing skills, especially for boys, has been a key factor. However, inspection evidence shows marked improvement in achievement in the last twelve months. Inspectors saw some highly effective writing development taking place and an improvement in several subjects including English, geography, citizenship, religious education and modern languages. One example was in a GCSE English lesson, where students quickly developed the written approaches needed to comment on the impact of a writer on his audience. In history in Year 9, students rapidly applied their written skills to comparing and contrasting sources about the slave trade. In Year 8 citizenship work, students wrote clearly about the ways in which Britain has become a multicultural society.
- Students' achievement in mathematics is above average. Students normally join the school with average attainment in this subject but learn quickly and develop an effective range of mathematical knowledge and skills which they apply well in several subjects in real-life situations. Teaching is consistently good or better so, by the time they leave this school, their progress and results in mathematics compare very favourably with that found nationally for students from all starting points. Results in mathematics have remained above average for several years, as have the results for history. Standards in science improved in 2013, along with those in modern languages.
- The school has made careful use of early entry for GCSE mathematics. Only those students considered capable of a higher grade have taken examinations early and results have been high.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make at least the progress they should and, in some cases, their achievement is good. The organisation of their teaching in smaller groups or by individual support is generally effective and these approaches, along with careful target setting and monitoring, contribute to their achievement.
- The progress of those students in Year 7 eligible for additional help with reading as part of the government's 'catch-up' premium is good. Effective teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) helps them to read and comprehend with increasing confidence.
- The attainment of those students eligible for support through the pupil premium improved slowly in recent years in GCSE examinations. In 2013, the gap has closed to a grade behind in English and a grade behind in mathematics. However, the gap is reducing for all students currently attending the school.
- The achievement of those students educated off-site is similar to that of other students and sometimes better. This is because their placements are thoughtfully planned, assessed and monitored and their courses are well matched to their needs.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- Over time, the quality of teaching is not good because it has lacked consistency across different subjects and the learning experiences of students have been too variable. There have also been significant changes in staffing. Recent appointments have strengthened teaching, as shown by inspectors' observations of lessons in English and other subjects. However, over a third of teaching seen still requires improvement.
- Teaching has not been sufficiently matched to the different abilities of students because teachers' expectations have not been high enough and the use of assessment information to plan lessons has not been effective. Many students have joined the school with standards similar to national levels or higher but work is sometimes too easy for them. Work is sometimes pitched at the same level for the whole class, particularly in English and citizenship.
- Time is not always used well. Teachers sometimes talk for too long or activities do not allow students to work by themselves or with each other, so opportunities are lost for all students to take their learning further, especially the most able. As a result, students lose interest or depend on the teacher for too much guidance and direction. This has prevented some students from showing their best behaviour in lessons.
- Teachers' use of questioning is not yet securing sufficient learning and understanding. Frequently, questions are used to check on what students know but do not drive them on to explain themselves as fully as they are capable. This is because students are often given insufficient time to think through their answers before being required to speak. However, there are examples of good questioning, such as seen in a Year 7 history lesson where students were commenting on the Roman armed forces and were helped to reshape their answers and thinking through highly skilful questioning.
- The quality of marking varies across the school and within departments. Marking takes place regularly but is not precise enough to help students improve their work as well as they can. In some examples, students are not provided with the time to respond properly to comments made by teachers.
- The work of teaching assistants to support students' learning is generally effective owing to clear student support plans, though this can vary according to the teacher.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers make good use of their subject knowledge and information about students' achievement so as carefully to match activities to the full range of ability in the class. Activities are also interesting, well paced and keep students engaged. An important feature of these lessons is the way students learn to apply their knowledge quickly. One good example was in a Year 9 science lesson, where students were required to talk about habitats and deploy an impressive scientific vocabulary.
- Mathematics and history are taught consistently well over time because lessons in these subjects are generally well planned and demanding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- Behaviour is variable. In the last academic year, behaviour declined, particularly among older students, following several years of apparent improvement. At the point of inspection, it was improving in response to new approaches by the current headteacher and senior leaders.

- Students' attitudes to learning vary because they are dependent on the quality of teaching and expectations of teachers. In some lessons, teachers' expectations are not high enough and result in students losing interest in their work, often linked to the way teachers use time. In these examples, students become bored or are too dependent on their teachers' leadership of such lessons. In the best lessons observed, students were always engaged and interested because teachers had carefully assessed their learning and work was suitably challenging. Time was not wasted and students had plenty of opportunities to demonstrate how well they could learn by themselves.
- Following improvement since the previous inspection, the attendance of students, especially older boys, fell last year and was below average. However, it has risen since and, at the time of the inspection, had clearly improved following firm action to support and challenge all students to attend school properly.
- Around the school and between lessons, behaviour is much improved. Students are normally punctual as they move between lessons. They are generally polite to each other and staff. They are generally proud of their school and take up positions of responsibility with eagerness and maturity, including prefect roles and sports leadership. Student leaders work hard with senior staff and governors to consider how they can contribute to the improvement of the school.
- Students believe they are safe, including being safe from bullying, and parents agree. Bullying of all types and relationship difficulties have been much reduced since the previous inspection. Instances of racist or homophobic bullying have also reduced. Last year, there were concerns about the behaviour of a small number of students on school bus services but this problem has been rapidly addressed. Students are confident that they can disclose concerns to an adult and the school will support them. They also express their support for the 'Friendly Face' scheme, which has helped students with worries or concerns to find support from a sensible older peer.
- Since the previous inspection, the use of external exclusion has been greatly reduced, though the numbers who are excluded still tend to be older boys; in the previous academic year there were concerns over their attitudes and conduct. Wherever possible, leaders have made good use of the school's Progress Centre to help students improve their behaviour on site, remain in school and continue to learn.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- This school improved after its previous inspection then experienced significant leadership and staffing changes in the last 14 months. It also experienced a decline in achievement, teaching and behaviour in the last academic year from which it is recovering. This has been brought about by the appointment of new teaching staff and improvement work undertaken by current leaders.
- Leaders' evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses are currently accurate but have been too generous over time, so assessments of teaching, achievement and behaviour have not always helped to drive improvement quickly enough. Target setting has lacked accuracy and improvement plans have lacked sufficient clarity.
- Subject leadership is not good owing to inconsistencies across the school and the quality of achievement, teaching and behaviour. Leaders are clearly aware of the strengths of their departments and those areas which require improvement, but some are less effective in tackling them. However, there are examples of highly effective subject leadership at the school, especially in mathematics and history.

- When evaluating lessons, current leaders are effective in linking teaching to the progress students make. This is helping to improve the quality of performance management and accountability, so that there is a clear link between students' achievement, quality of teaching and pay.
- The range of subjects studied by students is broad and balanced, and has become better matched to students' needs, particularly in science. Advice and guidance over subjects to be taken for GCSE and options after they have left the school have improved. There is a wide range of clubs and enrichment opportunities, which students value.
- Since the last inspection, the school has developed more opportunities to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students, including links to schools in other countries and awareness of how Britain is changing. As a result, students have a greater understanding of the multicultural nature of their country and the experiences of people who have different lifestyles, religions and ethnicity to their own. This has helped to reduce the number of homophobic and racist incidents.
- Leaders respond effectively to parental concerns presented to the school, and the large majority of parents clearly approve of the overall quality of education in the school. However, there are instances where information about action taken by leaders is not shared quickly enough across the school and with parents, and this has resulted in some parents being unaware of how problems have been followed up.
- While leadership is not yet good, it has secured sufficient improvements to teaching, achievement and behaviour in the last 12 months to ensure important reductions in absence, exclusion and the gap between the attainment of those students eligible for the pupil premium and those who are not.
- The local authority had a close relationship with the school up until the last inspection. Since then, it has had less contact with the school. It has not always helped leaders to make accurate judgements about school performance.
- All statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors bring a range of suitable experience to the role. They are now asking more searching questions about the performance of the school and the work of leaders but this has not always been so. Weaknesses in self-evaluation have not provided them with the information they need to hold leaders sufficiently to account. This has changed in the last eight months. Governors are now more clearly aware of the quality of teaching, students' achievement and behaviour, leadership, and the effectiveness of the use of the pupil premium. They have greater understanding of performance data, which are now more readily available and reviewed by them in a timely manner. Governors also have greater awareness of how the school is tackling the improvement of teaching, and the link of performance to pay.

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 students' needs. This ensures that students 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 students' needs. Students 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 students 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	121169
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	429550

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	604
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rebekah McNicol
Headteacher	Joy Glenister (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2011
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