

The Buckingham School

London Road, Buckingham, MK18 1AT

Inspection dates

11–12 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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:

- The number of students attaining five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics was well below the national average in 2013 and results in English declined.
- The trend in achievement at GCSE in science has been significantly below national expectations over the last three years.
- Not all teachers challenge students enough because their expectations of what students can achieve are not high enough, leading to slower rates of progress.
- The sixth form requires improvement because too few students make good progress across all subjects.
- Teaching requires improvement because there is too little focus on securing high levels of attainment in academic subjects.
- On occasions, teachers praise work that is not good enough.
- Students behave well around the school but attitudes towards learning are too passive.
- Several middle leaders are relatively new to post and their impact on implementing changes to their subject areas is limited because it is at an early stage.
- Until recently the governing body has not focused enough on academic achievement in the core subjects.

The school has the following strengths:

- Achievement in vocational subjects is good and in the sixth form it exceeds national standards.
- The number of students moving on to high-quality employment or further and higher education is increasing year on year as a result of good career support and guidance.
- Opportunities for students to take on leadership roles are well developed. Students' views are taken seriously in helping to move the school forward. This has a positive impact on raising students' self-esteem.
- The headteacher and senior leaders share an ambitious vision for the future. They are proactive in responding to the need for improvement and changes in education by working collaboratively with other schools and outside agencies.
- Parents and carers are positive about the quality of care the school provides. They support the school and are keen for it to do well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 parts of lessons in all years and ability groups in practically all subjects.
- Many of these lessons were jointly observed with the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with groups of students including sixth formers and the student leadership group. Further meetings were held with two representatives of the local authority, the Chair of the Governing Body and parent governors.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, took account of its development plans and securitised its performance data. Inspectors looked at records of behaviour and attendance and incident logs for racism and bullying.
- A detailed work scrutiny took place with senior leaders. Inspectors observed behaviour and safety in and around the school.
- The inspection team took account of 126 responses to the online Parent View survey together with 55 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Kevin Morris, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Carol Morris	Additional Inspector
Marian Prior	Additional Inspector
David Wolfson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Buckingham School is an average sized 11 to 18 upper school in area where there are selective schools.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families) is low.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is low, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Around one in five students in Year 7 benefit from the nationally funded catch-up programme.
- Currently a small minority of students attend alternative off-site provision at Blueprint. When needed for short periods of time, this is run by the local authority for students at risk of exclusion.
- There have been significant staffing changes since the previous inspection and several middle leaders are new to post.
- The school community is largely of White British heritage and the number of students who do not stay in education or move into employment or training is extremely low.
- The retention rate into Year 12 and the numbers in the sixth form are both rising.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to match the very best so learning is good in more lessons by:
 - developing and adapting teaching so that students eligible for receive pupil premium and catch-up funding make as much progress as all other students
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations for all students and encourage stimulating and high-quality discussion, dialogue and debate so that they are less passive in lessons
 - promoting spiritual, moral and social education more often in lessons to help students to have more confidence to express their opinions and ideas both orally and in writing.
- Accelerate progress and levels of attainment at GCSE so that they consistently match or exceed national averages by:
 - focusing more on subject-specific content in lessons, including in the sixth form, which stretches and challenges the most able
 - supporting less-able students by posing questions that they can easily understand and answer with confidence
 - paying greater attention to the importance of accuracy in students' writing
 - increasing the opportunities for students to work independently
 - ensuring that all teachers mark students' work consistently and give them a clear understanding of how they can improve it.
- Continue to develop middle managers' leadership skills so that they can hold teachers to account more readily by:
 - carrying out frequent lesson observations, checking students' books and homework and planning jointly with teachers
 - providing more opportunities for middle leaders to observe outstanding schools and

outstanding departments

- showing teachers how use data to plan lessons that match students' levels of attainment, including for disabled students and those with special educational needs
 - evaluating to what degree the professional in-house training which teachers receive helps students to make progress and achieve well in examinations.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- From starting points that are broadly average, the proportions of students making as much progress as is seen nationally are not good enough in English and science. The average points score in English was well below average in 2013.
- In science, the progress students make has been significantly below the national averages for the last three years and progress in mathematics has not improved since 2011. In mathematics, students eligible for pupil premium funding do significantly less well than others and the gap between their progress and that of others, as in English, is too large.
- The school has not closed the gaps in attainment between those known to be eligible for the pupil premium and other students. In 2013 those in receipt of pupil premium funding performed less well compared to other students in English and mathematics.
- Pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding is used to support students through a range of support measures but so far, its impact on these students' progress is not good enough. Notwithstanding that some students have very complex individual needs, the school is making every effort to further refine its analysis of students who are underachieving so that more students make rapid progress. The predictions based on robust internal data show a better picture for current students.
- The most able students do not achieve the highest grades at GCSE. The number of students over time achieving A* and A grades continues to be below national averages in the vast majority of subjects.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make broadly the same progress as other students because teaching assistants support them well. Those students who attend the off-site provision do so for short spells and their achievement is in line with that of their peers.
- The school has entered some students early for GCSE in English and mathematics. Some students were entered again to improve their grade where necessary. This has worked well for higher ability students in Mathematics and has led to increased numbers at A level.
- Most students read well and with fluency but lower-attaining students sometimes struggle. In a Year 8 assembly, a few students were unable to confidently read some of the text they were presenting.
- A more positive picture is the overall progress students make between Key Stages 2 to 4 taking vocational subjects, and not just GCSEs, into account. Students do well in vocational subjects.
- Sixth form students' very good Level 3 diploma and BTEC results have led to good progression for these students into further study in higher education or training.
- At A level, results were above average in photography, business studies and applied sciences but less successful in French and the performing arts.
- Students attain high standards in vocational subjects which involve a large amount of practical and project work. Students are less successful in courses where essay writing is important and where the concepts and ideas that underpin the subject are more difficult, requiring different skills, knowledge and understanding.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching across the school is variable. In a significant number of lessons that require improvement too much teaching is undemanding and does not challenge students, particularly the most able.
- Teachers overemphasise activities without focusing on developing students' understanding of the key concepts and ideas that underpin the subject or topic. Students' understanding of the bigger picture is often absent. In many lessons teachers spend long periods of time discussing what they want the outcomes of the lessons to be rather than getting on with new learning. They also

stop the flow of the lesson to set group tasks that do not move students' learning forward; many students do not make the progress that they should make.

- Students can be reticent and the less successful teaching does not craft lessons in ways that get students engaged and involved, often because the teachers talk for too long. The better teaching recognises the strategies needed to encourage more contribution.
- Teaching is strongest in the sixth form because teachers display good levels of subject knowledge and support individuals to help them develop and make good progress.
- In the good and outstanding lessons observed during the inspection, teaching was imaginative and well paced so that students made good, and sometimes outstanding, progress. Teachers planned for the range of ability and matched work to students' different levels of ability and used effective questioning to illicit and probe deeper understanding from students' contributions.
- Not enough use is made of data about students' standards to accurately target their individual needs. The school is rich in data but their use in lesson planning is limited. Some teachers are not always clear about how to plan lessons in the light of what the data are telling them.
- Students with special educational needs are well supported by teaching assistants who adapt materials for lower-ability students.
- Most teachers mark students' work regularly and purposefully, writing comments to explain what is good and what could be improved. Marking is particularly good in history. On occasions, some teachers do not comment on students' mistakes or show how and why something is not right. Overall, the focus on developing students' writing skills is not strong enough and lower attainers do not receive enough support to improve their reading.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- Around the school at lunchtime and at break students behave well. They are polite and courteous and show respect for their teachers and each other. There is a positive climate in the school which allows students to feel safe and secure. The school fosters good relationships between staff and students.
- In lessons, attitudes to learning require improvement because too few students volunteer opinions and ideas unless really pushed by their teachers. Students are very accepting of what is presented to them and rarely challenge the opinions of their teachers or their peers.
- There are very few examples of bullying or racism or prejudice. The school promotes equality well and does not tolerate any discrimination. Students talk confidently about different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, homophobia and e-safety; they feel safe in school.
- Opportunities in lessons to explore topical issues in depth, to support the promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, are not as strong in execution as they were in teachers' planning.
- The school has steadily reduced the number of persistent absentees. The exclusion rate has declined year on year and is now below average. However, persistent absence for those students eligible for pupil premium funding was above average in the past but is reducing in the present year. Revised systems in place to track attendance are now beginning to have impact.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- The school's evaluation of its current position is too generous; it uses headline figures to present a better picture of progress and attainment than is the actual case. An over reliance on the success of vocational courses over time and in the sixth form has prevented a sharper and more incisive understanding of the weak attainment in academic subjects.
- Leadership and management require improvement because the progress of pupil premium students has been too slow and standards have not risen enough overall. Initiatives in place,

such as a more challenging and balanced curriculum which has a stronger emphasis on GCSE subjects, have not yet had time to show a sustained and positive impact on students' attainment.

- Nevertheless, the headteacher and the senior leadership team have a good grasp of the issues the school faces. They have made some good strategic decisions based on a careful analysis of the strengths of the school.
 - Several middle leaders are new to their roles or have recently taken on posts of responsibility. They have made a good start in strengthening the systems to monitor and evaluate the school's effectiveness but they lack experience to have made a real difference to students' achievement.
 - The systems for performance management and the introduction of the new pay policy have been fully consulted upon and well documented. Staffs are very clear about their roles and responsibilities and senior leaders' expectations. The headteacher has tackled underperformance robustly, working with governors to use capability procedures when necessary.
 - The quality of teachers' professional training is good through a good variety of in-house and external provision.
 - The school benefits from its partnership with the local community, with business partners and the police. The school has an informal relationship with two other local schools but this is not well developed and formalised so that leaders and teachers can benefit from drawing on the strengths of best practice in other schools. The local authority has provided light touch support for the school.
 - The school has an accurate picture of teaching. However, the feedback senior leaders give to teachers is more about classroom procedures rather than focusing on students' progress. Senior leaders do not refer to the Teachers' Standards when discussing teaching.
 - The curriculum has been reviewed and a more balanced option system is now in place for both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 with a better mix of subject options and better balance between GCSEs and vocational courses. In the sixth form there is a reasonable balance of vocational and academic pathways but the advice and guidance students receive do not steer them all towards the best courses for their career choices nor are they matched to their abilities. In the past, entry requirements to AS- and A-level subjects have not been as high as they should have been.
 - Leaders and managers continue to engage parents and carers more in their children's education. Those who responded to the questionnaire show much support for the school in all areas. Combined with the improving picture of teaching over time, shows good capacity to bring about further improvement.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors' are fully committed to the school and appreciate how it can help to raise the aspirations of the local community. They visit the school regularly, provide support to the senior leadership team and are working hard to engage parents and carers. They are rightly proud of the school and of everyone connected with it.
 - The governing body has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths but is less focused on academic achievement in the core subjects. Governors have in the past been less actively involved in analysing and evaluating data in relation to students' achievement and tend to accept what is presented to them. Governors are aware of the links between students' achievement and salary progression.
 - Governors now ask searching questions of the leadership in relation to the school's performance but have taken too long to implement actions that will remedy areas of weakness. They now recognise that performance in science has not been good enough since the previous inspection and, along with the senior leadership team, have established strategies to ensure that achievement in this subject improves.
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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	110484
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	426541

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

Type of school	Community
School category	Modern
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1051
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	136
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr David Gamble
Headteacher	Angela Wells
Date of previous school inspection	November 2011
Telephone number	01280 812206
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