

Little Heath School

Little Heath Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 5TY

Inspection dates 15–16 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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 has improved since the last inspection and in 2013, GCSE results were above the national average. Current students make increasingly good progress in their learning.
- School leaders have made systematic and deep-rooted improvements to teaching and learning. Staff training is highly effective.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are supported well to make good progress.
- There is increasingly effective support for disadvantaged and underachieving students to help them catch up in their learning.
- The school's focus on developing excellent literacy skills is raising standards, particularly in writing.
- Students behave well, feel safe and enjoy their learning. They are polite and respectful to others, care about their community and are proud of their school.
- The sixth form is good in all respects.
- The headteacher leads the school with significant determination and purpose. He is ably supported in his drive for improvement by senior and middle leaders.
- Governors have improved their skills and knowledge and contribute substantially to the vision, direction and success of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Improvements to teaching are not yet fully embedded to secure outstanding learning for all students.
- Students often make good rather than outstanding progress because occasionally, they lose momentum, spending time on work that is not stretching enough. This is because some teachers do not use time effectively.
- Students do not always act upon their teachers' feedback after marking. Their progress is therefore limited to good rather than outstanding because they have not corrected, extended and reflected upon their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 44 lessons, some of which were observed jointly with senior leaders. They also observed an assembly and the activities associated with the Year 5 space and science day led by the sixth form and Year 7 students.
- Meetings were held with five groups of students and inspectors also talked to students in lessons and in breaks.
- There were discussions with school leaders, staff and governors so that inspectors could explore how well the school is run, the success of improvement strategies and the school's plans for the future.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents including information about students' progress, safeguarding records, a variety of policies and the minutes of governing body meetings.
- The views of 84 parents and carers who responded to the online Parent View survey were taken into account along with two letters and a telephone discussion with a parent.
- The views of 78 members of staff were taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Goodall, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jackie Jones	Additional Inspector
Richard Kearsey	Additional Inspector
Marian Prior	Additional Inspector
Joseph Skivington	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Little Heath School is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form of over 350 students.
- Most students are of White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those supported through school action is below the national average as is the proportion of those supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives additional government funding known as the pupil premium is below the national average. This funding is for looked after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups.
- Just over one in ten students joining the school are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding, which is for those who did not achieve the expected levels in reading and mathematics at the end of primary school.
- A very small number of students attend Reading College for vocational courses or are registered on short-term work experience placements.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that more students make rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - the consistency of marking improves so that all students have a clear understanding of how to develop their work and are able to demonstrate to their teachers that they have understood and acted on the advice given
 - all teachers use time effectively to get the most out of every student in their class in every lesson.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- GCSE results have improved since the last inspection and in 2013 were higher than the national average. Over a quarter of all students achieved high grades in the English Baccalaureate subjects (English, mathematics, science, a language and a humanities subject such as history or geography). This is a higher proportion than that found nationally.
- The progress of students who left Year 11 in 2013 was not consistently strong for all subjects but the reasons for this have been identified and quickly addressed. Both attainment and progress have improved sharply. Detailed information presented by the school provides firm evidence to show that all groups of students now make good progress across all year groups.
- The proportion making at least expected progress in English is above the national average. Achievement in mathematics is less strong but is improving rapidly.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good in nearly all subjects and sometimes outstanding.
- Good examination results in Year 11 and in the sixth form mean that most students go on to university and colleges and follow their chosen careers. The number who do not go on to further education or training is very small.
- The achievement of students in Years 7 and 8 is particularly strong because of the improved curriculum and teaching. Those joining the school with low levels of achievement are given extra support through the extra funding and, consequently, their rate of progress is good.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress because of the highly effective support they receive, particularly from teaching assistants.
- In recent years, students who are eligible for extra funding have often achieved less well than others. In 2013, on average, they achieved just over one GCSE grade lower than others in both English and mathematics which is above the national average. Gaps in achievement are reducing rapidly however and as a group, current students eligible for extra funding now make much better progress. This is because teachers use more precise ways to help them catch up.
- The most able students in the school are challenged, supported and encouraged to reach high levels of achievement and this group now make better progress than in previous years.
- The whole-school focus on raising literacy levels has been successful in raising the quality of students' writing skills particularly. Students are encouraged to read a more extensive range of books and reading materials.
- The very small number of students who attend Reading College or work experience placements achieve well. Their courses motivate students and give them a taste of real life employment.
- The school does not enter students early for English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good

- Since the last inspection the school has researched and implemented a range of teaching methods to raise levels of student achievement. The school's 'Great Teaching and Learning Strategy' involves both staff and students. Student researchers (STARs) have enjoyed and valued the opportunity to improve how they are taught. The positive outcomes have resulted in the award of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Research Mark.
- Training for staff is of a high quality and is a strength of the school. It has not yet secured outstanding student achievement, especially at GCSE level, but is equipping teachers well to raise standards further.
- There is a focus on improving literacy skills in all subjects. Higher expectations of writing have particularly raised standards. Numeracy development is not yet at an advanced stage but coordinated activities between mathematics, science and geography are already having a positive impact.
- Strong literacy development features strongly in the support and catch-up activities provided for

students with special educational needs and those who are underachieving.

- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together to pinpoint ways to help individuals make better progress. Extra funding is used with increasing effect to reduce any disadvantage and provide opportunities to succeed.
- Teaching is sometimes highly effective and memorable. For example, sixth form students developed their leadership skills as they transformed the school into an alien crash site for a Year 5 space and science day. Year 7 students were charged with giving the younger pupils 'alien careers advice' thus advancing their own research skills and knowledge of careers.
- Teaching in the sixth form is typically good. Students are supported in developing mature and independent learning skills, ready for the next stage in their education or training.
- Teachers' marking and feedback to students, although very effective in some classes, lacks consistency across the school. Not all teachers provide clear enough advice for students about how to further improve their work. Teachers do not always make sure that students follow up this advice by applying it and showing their teachers that they have understood.
- Relationships between staff and students are usually very positive. Teachers plan well-structured activities that typically motivate students, engage them in interesting tasks and give them clear milestones of achievement.
- In most lessons, students are eager, show great enthusiasm for their learning and try hard when faced with difficult problems.
- This is not always the case and sometimes students' progress is hindered as they waste time waiting for others to catch up with them or are given extra work when they complete a task which does little to extend their thinking or strengthen their skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Students enjoy school life and most behave considerately. They are proud of their school and attendance is above average. Despite the school being large, movement around the site is calm and orderly. Sixth formers set an example to younger students.
- Students mostly arrive at lessons ready for learning and get on with their work without fuss. Increasingly, students are more proactive and ask more searching questions of their teachers and this is contributing to their more rapid progress. This type of active participation is not widespread practice so student attitudes to learning are not yet outstanding. The six Little Heath Learning Skills introduced into Key Stage 3 to make this happen are already having an impact, however.
- Behaviour systems work well in the management of incidents and the new same-day sanction system, trialled this year, has been effective in reducing the number of exclusions and disruptive behaviour. Students say that school leaders usually sort out any problems quickly.
- Bullying occurs rarely because of the focus on anti-bullying within the community. Students know that prejudice-based bullying is wrong and the number of incidents have reduced. Partnerships with the police have increased awareness of cyberbullying and the Stonewall Champion programme has helped to combat homophobic bullying.
- The range of leadership and volunteering opportunities for students is extensive. These include the teaching and learning research group, the SMILE group that enables older students to mentor younger ones and the trip to Nicaragua which includes charity project work at an orphanage.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Safeguarding is given a high priority and overseen rigorously by senior leaders and governors.
- Students have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe in a wide range of contexts including when they are online.
- The safety, behaviour and progress of students who attend off-site courses and placements are monitored regularly and systematically. Because they enjoy and value these opportunities, students typically behave very well.

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership of this school is underpinned by a relentless drive to improve teaching and learning and thus the life chances of students. The headteacher is rigorous in his pursuit of this goal and has radically changed school systems and teams to achieve significant improvement since the last inspection.
- The local authority has been proactive in supporting the school in its improvement work and this has been welcomed.
- Senior leaders are ambitious and purposeful in bringing about school improvement. They model effective leadership skills for subject and other team leaders who are now more proactive in raising standards within their teams.
- Subject leaders value the support provided by their line managers to enable them to build their leadership capacity. These middle leaders share in the monitoring of teaching and most have clear plans in place to drive improvement.
- The sustained improvement in leadership at all levels inspires confidence in the school's capacity to improve further. Although higher standards in teaching are not yet sufficiently embedded across the school to secure outstanding achievement, there is firm evidence that 2014 and 2015 GCSE results will show a marked increase in student progress.
- All students follow GCSE courses in Key Stage 4. Some students also study vocational courses in addition to their GCSE subjects. Students are encouraged to aim high and the school actively promotes equal opportunities in all respects to combat disadvantage and discriminatory factors that may inhibit progress.
- Following the focus on learning skills introduced in Years 7 and 8, a two-year Key Stage 3 is now in place. All students must master a group of learning skills and demonstrate that they are ready to move on to more difficult work before they 'graduate' to Key Stage 4.
- Traditional academic subjects are extended and enriched by a range of opportunities to challenge and develop personal, social, creative and practical skills. Art, music and drama are particularly strong in this school. After school activities include many opportunities for sport, a soul choir, sailing, drama and participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.
- Activities that help students reflect on life and the world around them are presented in meaningful contexts such as involvement in a First World War commemoration service and undertaking local multicultural studies.
- Partnerships with other organisations also contribute directly and indirectly to students' learning. Links with Reading University provide a wealth of benefits, including teacher recruitment. The school's partnership with parents underpins the success of its work to raise achievement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - A full review of governance has resulted in significant change to the composition and effectiveness of the governing body. Governors now know what their role entails and have taken steps to improve their practices. They scrutinise achievement information rigorously, ask searching questions of leaders and check that improvement work is really having an impact. This is particularly true of their monitoring of the school's work to close achievement gaps for those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable in any way.
 - Governors oversee competently the work of senior leaders to secure high quality staff performance. They have ensured that systems to track performance and link it to pay are comprehensive, fair and understood by all.
 - The school is now more secure financially because governors manage the budget judiciously, including the use of additional funding to boost the performance of certain groups of students.

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	110063
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	430295

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
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	1638
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	343
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wilma Grant
Headteacher	David Ramsden
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2012
Telephone number	01189 427337
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