

The Grange School

Wendover Way, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP21 7NH

Inspection dates	15–16 December 2015
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils who took their GCSE examinations in 2015 and 2014 did not make enough progress from their starting points.
- Gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others were too wide in 2014 and 2015. They currently remain wider in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3.
- The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment is too variable. Although some teachers have high expectations of pupils, this is not a consistent feature of teaching, learning and assessment across the school.
- Leaders in the sixth form are not analysing information received from their monitoring of learners' progress effectively enough.
- Learners do not make enough progress in the sixth form. Some sixth form learners' targets are too low.
- Pupils, including those in the sixth form, do not have a good enough understanding of how to express their ideas articulately both in writing and through oral communication. This impacts unfavourably on their progress.

The school has the following strengths.

- The headteacher has successfully ensured that the school's inspiring mantra is threaded through all aspects of its work. It empowers staff and pupils to work together to make the school better.
- Newly appointed curriculum coordinators are improving the quality of teaching in the subject areas that they manage, notably in English and humanities.
- The school effectively promotes enterprise skills.
- The quality of teaching in mathematics and business studies, and in vocational subjects, is effective, and so pupils' progress is stronger.
- Safeguarding is strong, especially the school's work to protect pupils from radicalisation.
- Governors have an in-depth knowledge of how well the recent changes are working. They use this to challenge school leaders to do even better.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is all as effective as the best in the school by:
 - ensuring that teachers' expectations of pupils are equally high across all subjects and year groups
 - making sure that teachers use information from their assessment of pupils' work to plan activities that will enable pupils to gain the skills that they need to succeed
 - monitoring the impact of teachers' questioning to ensure that questions are sufficiently challenging and whole-class question and answer sessions help all pupils to make strong progress
 - ensuring that pupils know how to demonstrate their subject knowledge and understanding in writing effectively by using appropriate academic language and formal writing structures.
- Ensure that gaps between groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and others, close rapidly across all subjects and year groups, by:
 - insisting that teachers set work that is challenging enough to enable targeted pupils to make the rapid progress needed to reach their more challenging targets
 - careful checking that the better progress disadvantaged pupils are now making is maintained.
- Improve the achievement of learners taking academic qualifications in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that leaders have a clearer view of learners' progress from their starting points by analysing tracking information more rigorously
 - making sure that the work set is suitably challenging so learners have to give of their best.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher places the development and well-being of each pupil at the heart of his vision for the school, which is wholly embraced by the entire school community. The school's mantra, 'We can', and the values that underpin it, are avidly reinforced by staff at every opportunity. Consequently, an inclusive and enabling culture permeates through all aspects of the school's work and has a positive impact on pupils' sense of self-worth.
- The school's leaders have effectively implemented the recommendations from the section 8 monitoring visit carried out in May 2015, which focused on disadvantaged pupils. For example, leaders are now carefully tracking disadvantaged pupils' progress from their starting points. This has led to improvements in the progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school, in English and mathematics.
- Following weak examination results in 2015, the headteacher accurately identified areas of the school's work that needed to improve further, including aspects of leadership. The headteacher's strong sense of what the school stands for enabled him to ensure that the right things were changed as rapidly as possible. For example, he ensured that investment was made in staffing through the creation of new roles and broadening the remit of curriculum coordinators, but maintained opportunities for targeted pupils to participate in memorable learning experiences, including the opportunity to work with creative professionals.
- Leaders and governors have successfully strengthened leadership at the school: a new rung on the leadership ladder above subject leader, and beneath senior leaders, was created two years ago (curriculum coordinator). Since then, the role has been built up so that curriculum coordinators make a stronger contribution to improving the school, for example by focusing on improving disadvantaged pupils' progress in a more strategic fashion.
- Curriculum coordinators and subject leaders make effective use of information on pupils' progress to ensure that pupils who are falling behind receive the additional help they need. The curriculum coordinators keep a sharp eye on the progress that different groups of pupils make and ask the subject leaders they manage to make improvements where some pupils' progress is not strong enough.
- Leaders rigorously evaluate whether staff meet the performance targets that they are set. These targets are linked to pupils' achievement. So last year, a number of leaders and teachers did not progress within their pay band. Following leaders' effective monitoring throughout the year, some teachers who were eligible to move onto the next pay band were told that the weak progress of some of the pupils they taught meant they were no longer eligible to do so.
- Teaching is rapidly improving, especially in subjects where new curriculum coordinators have been appointed, such as English and humanities. Leaders swiftly identify staff who need extra support and ensure that they receive the help they need, including effective additional guidance about how best to teach their subject. The lead practitioner role has been introduced to ensure that teachers learn successfully from each other. This approach is new and has not yet had impact on raising the standards that pupils achieve.
- The curriculum effectively meets the needs of the pupils. The curriculum incorporates well-planned opportunities for pupils to strengthen their learning and enterprise skills, known as The Grange Enterprise and Learning Skills Programme (GELS). The school has piloted a new approach to assessing pupils' work, using the same scale for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 3 assessments. Leaders have rightly sought to ensure that assessments using the new scale are accurate before implementing it throughout the whole school. However, in some years where national curriculum levels are still being used, there is a 'disconnect' between the curriculum being delivered and the means by which pupils' progress is assessed.
- Leaders ensure that this is a highly inclusive school where pupils are well cared for. Pupils who join the school in Year 7 make a good start. One parent commented that her daughter was 'thriving' because her transition to secondary school has been handled with 'care and consideration'. Leaders ensure that this is a school free from discrimination, in which values of tolerance and equality and other British values are successfully championed through curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, including working with homeless charities.
- Fundamental British values are delivered effectively through subjects such as religious education and history. They are also promoted well through assemblies, the well-thought out personal development programme, and as part of the 'GELS' programme. The school does not shy away from engaging pupils

in discussions about the way British values are not always fully embraced by some members of our society. The skilful way in which teachers ensure that these challenging issues are discussed openly and sensitively has enabled staff to identify pupils who may be at risk of radicalisation.

- The school has received support from the local authority through Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT). Last year it participated in the 'narrowing the gap' project led by BLT. The impact of this support on current pupils' progress is greater than on those who took their examinations in 2015, when gaps between disadvantaged and other pupils widened. The review of science conducted by BLT was sharp and incisive and, consequently, school leaders commissioned BLT to carry out further work in science. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this additional support.
- The school is part of a trust with a local infant school and primary school, based on the cooperative values of equity, equality and solidarity. The impact of the trust has strengthened recently as leaders and governors have worked more closely together to plan trust-wide improvements that focus on pupils' learning. However, there are further opportunities for effective collaboration planned but not yet actioned.
- The new sixth form leader is not clear enough about the quality of teaching and its impact on achievement because information from recent monitoring of learners' progress has not been analysed in detail or with sufficient rigour.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - has improved in two distinct phases and is continuing to improve owing to the resolve of the Chair of Governors
 - the first stage of improvement was two years ago, when a significant number of new governors joined the governing body, including the governor with responsibility for pupil premium funding. As a result, governors started to challenge the school's leaders more confidently. This led to changes being made, such as the creation of the curriculum coordinator role
 - the second stage followed the poor examination results in 2015, when governors rightly insisted that further changes were made promptly. Following this, governors improved the rigour with which they hold school leaders to account. They now make better use of information on pupils' progress, especially the progress of disadvantaged pupils. They sensibly require subject leaders to present reports on their actions at governing body meetings, and follow this up by asking them to account for the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others. The Chair of Governors has developed her expertise by undertaking accredited training and all governors have benefited from closer collaboration with governors from other schools in the trust.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and a strength of the school because of the way the school understands the specific safeguarding needs the students have. For example, the school works closely with agencies to safeguard those who leaders believe may be at risk of radicalisation. This aspect of the school's work is especially strong because of the expertise leaders have developed in this area. The school has referred a small number of pupils to 'Prevent', and has very effective links with the police and the local authority who work on this agenda.
- There is a wide range of effective support available to pupils so that they can succeed at school. There are mentors on site who can give advice to pupils who can self-select to receive it. Where individual pupils need further guidance from external experts, such as experts in helping children stay mentally healthy, the school ensures that the pupils concerned receive it. Dedicated leaders monitor the impact of this targeted support to check that it is as effective as it possibly can be.
- All statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching is improving but is too variable to be good.
- Curriculum coordinators have made changes that in a short period of time have improved teachers' practice, but these changes are recent and not fully in place in all lessons. For example, not all teachers are making good enough use of the individual plans that have been implemented in English to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs.
- In science, teaching is getting better than in previous years, but not as rapidly as in humanities and English because some teachers are not following agreed approaches to assessing pupils' work. This means that pupils are not always clear enough about how they need to improve their work so that they

meet their targets.

- In other subjects across the school, the quality of teaching varies too much between teachers and subjects. However, in business studies and vocational subjects, teaching is consistently strong. This is because teachers have high expectations of the pupils and insist that pupils complete tasks to a high standard. In mathematics, more effective teaching approaches, such as setting work that closely matches pupils' needs, is leading to better outcomes.
- Groups of teachers have worked together to develop new approaches to questioning and assessment. These new approaches are not always being implemented effectively. For example, in some lessons teachers' questioning is not effective because teachers spend a lot of time asking questions to the whole class that a very small number of pupils answer. While they do so, other members of the class do not listen to the answers being given and become disengaged. In addition, occasionally teachers do not ask questions that are probing enough.
- In some lessons, pupils do not express their ideas coherently in writing. Teachers do not always provide pupils with enough guidance about the way they need to structure the points they make or the level of formality required to write examination answers successfully.
- Teaching in the sixth form does not always result in strong progress for learners. This is because some teachers are not specific enough in the feedback they provide and not enough focus is placed on teaching learners how to write effectively in the academic style required to succeed at A level.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils wear their uniform smartly and are proud of their school, which is tidy and free from graffiti. Pupils show respect for each other's backgrounds and value the diverse nature of the school community.
- The enterprise culture of the school which links to the 'Yes, we can' ethos makes a positive contribution to pupils' attitudes to learning. Enterprise skills such as problem solving are taught effectively through curriculum subjects as well as a dedicated programme within personal development. This means that pupils leave the school with work skills, as well as confidence and positive attitudes.
- Pupils receive effective careers guidance from Year 8 onwards as part of the personal development programme and then through one-to-one interviews with an independent careers adviser. Disadvantaged pupils are provided with a careers mentor, to ensure that they are fully briefed on the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in their next steps.
- The school ensures that pupils have strong knowledge about the risks they might face both in school and beyond and how best to avoid them through relevant topics that form part of personal development lessons. These focus on providing pupils with easy to remember advice about staying safe online and child sexual exploitation.
- As a result of senior leaders raising the profile of good attendance, it is now in line with the national average.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils has improved since a year ago when staff and pupils agreed it required improvement, and is now good. Pupils from diverse backgrounds mix well and show respect for each other and the majority show respect for their teachers. Teachers deal well with the rare occasions when pupils are unable to resolve any differences they have amicably. Consequently, the number of times pupils are excluded has fallen since last year.
- There are a small number of pupils who have significant emotional needs in the school and are therefore highly vulnerable. In response to this, the school provides them with the maximum level of external and internal support available. This small group has not coped well with moving up from Year 7 to Year 8 and as a result their behaviour has deteriorated. The school has helped them extensively. Despite the support they have received from the school, some will take up placements at the local pupil referral unit, where their needs can be more accurately assessed and met on a daily basis.
- The pupils who attend alternative provision make progress in developing the skills they need to make a successful return to mainstream education. Their attendance is closely monitored through the effective partnership that exists between the school's leaders and the provisions' leaders.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- GCSE results were below average in 2014 and 2015. Pupils' progress was not good because they entered the school with Key Stage 2 scores that were below average and left with below average GCSE grades.
- In 2015, gaps widened between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others in both English and mathematics. Gaps were widest for pupils who entered the school in the middle ability band, which was the majority of the year group.
- In 2015, there was a big difference between the results teachers predicted pupils would achieve in their GCSE examinations and the results they got, most notably in English. Consequently, some pupils who should have been targeted for additional support were not. The new curriculum coordinator for English has prioritised ensuring that predictions are more accurate by asking other schools to standardise their marking.
- According to current predictions based on more accurate information, in 2016 pupils' progress in mathematics and English will improve. The gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others will close considerably. In English, the gap remains between pupils who enter the school with Level 3 in their Key Stage 2 assessments because they are not making up lost ground from their primary education.
- In Key Stage 3, the gaps between the progress that disadvantaged pupils are making is improving and gaps are closing. In a number of non-core subjects in Key Stage 4, gaps remain wide. However, subject leaders and curriculum coordinators have robust plans in place to ensure they close before pupils take their GCSE examinations.
- Pupils are now set challenging targets based on making greater than expected progress, alongside targets based on average progress. Form tutors work closely with pupils to ensure that they understand the difference between the 'flightpath' where progress is steady and the one where it is rapid. Subject leaders and curriculum coordinators use the more challenging 'flightpath' to identify pupils who are not making enough progress. Teachers and subject leaders carefully monitor the progress disadvantaged pupils make towards meeting their more challenging targets. Pupils who are failing to meet their challenging targets are identified and provided with additional support.
- Pupils who enter the school in Year 7 with lower than average reading levels make good progress on well-thought out reading and mathematics small group teaching programmes.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress on the additional programmes they access, including a programme for improving levels of reading. This programme has enabled all pupils participating to develop their reading skills and a number have developed them substantially.
- Pupils are supported in pursuing qualifications in their home languages. They achieve well in these qualifications. This adds to their overall confidence and promotes an ethos in which all pupils are equally valued.
- Through the GELS programme and individualised guidance and support, pupils are well prepared for their next stages. The vast majority leave the school to join education, training or the world of work.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- Although new leaders are keen to raise standards rapidly, the leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet well developed. This is because leaders do not have a clear enough view of the quality of teaching overall and what differences their actions have made so far.
- Some teaching is very effective with high levels of challenge, expert questioning and planning that stretches learners well because teachers have excellent subject knowledge and know the requirements of their courses thoroughly.
- However, some teaching is less skilful, leading to learners not making enough progress. Some planning is not sharp enough so that the activities learners do are not sufficiently matched to their different starting points. Also, teachers are not robust enough in checking how well learners do over time and as a result are not always giving learners helpful advice on what their next steps should be.
- Leadership of assessment in the sixth form is still at an early stage. There is a new target system, but this is setting targets that are too easy for some learners, who reach them too easily. Without providing appropriate challenge, the targets are not helping learners make rapid progress. Consequently, teachers are not clear about what standards learners should reach by the end of the year. This is especially the case for the more-able learners, many of whom reported that the work teachers set is not demanding

enough in some subjects.

- Learners do not consistently make good progress in their academic qualifications compared to similar learners nationally, but they do make good progress in their vocational subjects. The gap between disadvantaged learners and others has narrowed recently and this year leaders have developed new approaches to raising standards, but the results of these are not yet clear. Teachers are beginning to share ideas about the most effective teaching but inspectors found that these strategies are not yet used by all sixth form teachers.
- Learners are ambitious and want to do well. As a result of recent changes made by leaders, learners are developing suitable skills that will help them gain employment and stay employed. They attend well and arrive on time. Learners are very successful ambassadors for the school. They undertake community service in the school and with other local businesses locally. This promotes their leadership skills and gives them valuable work experience.

School details

Unique reference number	110488
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10000538

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1327
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Myra Dobbie
Headteacher	Mr Vincent Murray
Telephone number	01296390900
Website	www.grange.bucks.sch.uk
Email address	vmurray@grange.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 November 2011

Information about this school

- The Grange School is a larger-than-average secondary school with a sixth form delivering 16–19 study programmes.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is slightly above average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below average. Some students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is either not English or believed not to be English is above average.
- The school uses two providers for off-site education: 12 students attend Aspire, and one attends Haydon Training.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which are minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- Since the last inspection a new Chair of Governors has joined the school and the school has formed a trust with Ashmead Combined School and Turnfurlong Infant School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 28 lessons. They also conducted a number of short visits to classes in mathematics, science, humanities, English, personal development lessons and the sixth form. Inspectors were accompanied by senior and subject leaders for some of these visits. Inspectors visited Stapleton House, where pupils receive support to manage their feelings and behaviour. Inspectors also visited the onsite provision for supporting pupils with special educational needs. Inspectors made telephone calls to Haydon Training and Aspire, which is the alternative provision, attended by 13 pupils in total, a representative from Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, who provide support for the school and the Local Authority's Designated Officer (LADO).
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, leaders responsible for safeguarding, subject leaders, along with curriculum coordinators, the leader of 16–19 study programmes, representatives of the governing body, NQTs and trainees, as well as seven small groups of students from Key Stages 3 and 4, and a group of Key Stage 5 learners on two separate occasions.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including the school's records relating to behaviour and attendance, safeguarding records, performance information, development planning, self-evaluation documents and policies. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in books, focusing on a sample of humanities and science books.
- Inspectors took into account the 118 responses to Parent View, 224 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and the 91 staff survey responses received, as well as comments received via the free text facility on Parent View.

Inspection team

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