

The Radcliffe School

Aylesbury Street West, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, MK12 5BT

Inspection dates

3–4 November 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	Require improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school requires improvement because developments in teaching, learning and assessment have not yet secured good achievement for all, especially pupils who are disadvantaged, the more able, and those with special educational needs.
- In 2014 outcomes were poor. Despite improvements, pupils' progress in the GCSEs they took in 2015 was not good.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress across a range of GCSE subjects was not strong enough in 2015. The gap in this group's progress when compared with their better-off peers widened in 2015.
- In the current Year 11, some gaps remain too wide between the progress disadvantaged pupils make when compared with their peers who have similar starting points.
- Pupils with disabilities or special educational needs, who have not got a statement, do not make as much progress as their peers in both Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Teaching in science is weaker than in other subjects and does not lead to strong achievement for all pupils and groups of pupils.
- Some teachers do not make good enough use of information about pupils' prior learning to ensure the work they set is sufficiently challenging.
- Teachers' marking and feedback does not always lead to good progress for all pupils.
- Teachers do not always ensure they set tasks that enable Key Stage 3 pupils to deepen their knowledge so they can meet their challenging targets.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, supported by an effective senior leadership team and a dedicated staff, has determinedly made many changes that have improved the school.
- Subject leaders' monitoring and evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment have led to some good improvements in teaching.
- The school's work to safeguard pupils is strong.
- Pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour are good.
- Governors rigorously hold the school's leaders to account. They effectively combine high levels of support with keen scrutiny and challenge.
- Strong leadership is ensuring that pupils make good progress in most subjects in 16–19 study programmes.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement by:
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points to close the remaining gaps between their progress and that of their better-off peers.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, especially in science, so it is as good as the best practice in the school, by ensuring that:
 - teachers' feedback and marking has a greater impact on all pupils' progress, including disadvantaged pupils, those with disabilities or special educational needs, and the more able
 - teachers set work that is challenging enough to enable all pupils, especially the more able, the disadvantaged and those with disabilities or special educational needs, to make the rapid progress needed to reach their challenging targets.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The school's mantra, 'inspire and achieve through the pursuit of best practice, best progress, best performance – always' is effectively transmitted to the pupils by the highly visible headteacher, a strong team of senior leaders and a dedicated staff. Together they have created a culture in which academic success is promoted, and in which pupils show respect for themselves, their teachers and their school community.
- Since joining the school, the headteacher has made a number of effective changes. For example, he has insisted that pupils are set challenging targets and strengthened the way the senior leadership team works together. The deputy headteachers have effectively promoted more collaborative ways of working. This has resulted in better teaching and has had a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Senior leaders, including the leader of 16–19 study programmes, make good use of information about pupils' performance to identify those who are not on track to meet their challenging targets. Leaders ensure targeted pupils are given the help they need, including pastoral support. In Key Stage 3, the reading and numeracy 'catch up' programmes are well organised and have resulted in improvements in pupils' basic skills. Targeted pupils are now better able to access the learning required in the subjects they study.
- Subject leaders' rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment enables them to effectively identify teachers who need additional support. They provide bespoke training, which includes effective guidance about the best approaches for promoting pupils' subject knowledge and fluency. Senior leaders and subject leaders make thorough checks to test whether this support has worked well, providing additional guidance and stronger monitoring where necessary. This has recently led to good improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The additional resource base for pupils on the autistic spectrum is well led and managed. The resource base coordinator ensures that pupils benefit from the wider opportunities provided by the school, including work experience and trips abroad. The coordinator monitors pupils' progress effectively, including visiting pupils who attend the base in their lessons to check how well they are learning. Additional, successful support is provided for pupils who are struggling in their academic studies. Pupils who need to improve their communication skills receive a variety of well-planned and effective interventions, including starting each day with one-to-one discussion with their key worker about potential problems and how best to tackle them.
- Leaders' effective monitoring of the impact of the curriculum on pupils' achievement, and how well they understand the world and their place within it, has led to changes such as the introduction of 'modern Britain' lessons and a three-year Key Stage 4. It is too early to identify the impact of a longer Key Stage 4. However, pupils told inspectors that they found the 'modern Britain' lessons stimulating and informative.
- The school successfully promotes fundamental British values through a range of effective approaches. In 'modern Britain' lessons, pupils are taught about the values that have shaped Britain and debate how these values can help them to make the right choices. These lessons also promote pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development because they learn about other cultures, and have the chance to openly discuss social and moral issues that concern them.
- The large majority of parents who expressed an opinion praised the quality of leadership and management, and nearly all would recommend the school to other parents. Leaders have responded well to a small number of parental concerns over bullying by creating a dedicated space where pupils can get support from their peers and share concerns (A2B).
- The headteacher has ensured that leaders have carefully thought through the new system for assessing pupils' learning. To ensure a seamless transition, the old methods of assessment (using levels at Key Stage 3 and GCSE grades at Key Stage 4) link well to the new approach. The new system helpfully assesses all pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 using the same scale; it places a greater focus on ensuring pupils gain a secure mastery of the topic they are studying. Most subject leaders have improved planning to ensure topics covered are demanding enough to allow pupils to progress each year. However, some teachers are not yet setting rich tasks that enable pupils to gain the concepts needed to master a topic.
- The targeted support provided through additional funds for disadvantaged pupils did not enable this group to make the rapid progress they needed to catch up with their peers in 2015 GCSE examinations. However, leaders have used additional funds effectively at Key Stage 3. Consequently, these funds are

having a greater impact on closing gaps between disadvantaged and other pupils in this Key Stage than in Key Stage 4. Leaders and governors fully acknowledge shortcomings in this area and have good, detailed plans to ensure that funding leads to improvements for disadvantaged pupils in the 2016 GCSE examinations. It is too early to tell whether these planned actions are having the anticipated impact.

- Leaders have strengthened the way they monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so subject leaders play a greater role in checking teaching in the departments they manage. Recently, further improvements have been made so these checks place greater emphasis on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other key groups, such as the more able. This new approach has not yet had sufficient impact on improving the progress made by key groups, especially disadvantaged pupils in Key Stage 4 and those with special educational needs in both key stages.
- The local authority's most recent review of teaching, learning and assessment, while accurately identifying areas of strength, did not pay enough attention to the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others or other gaps when evaluating areas for further development. The local authority has also recently supported leaders by checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments. As a result, the school's predictions were more accurate in 2015 than in 2014. However, too many predictions remained too generous.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is strong and effective.
 - Governors have sensibly focused their penetrating scrutiny on analysing information on the progress that pupils make, especially disadvantaged pupils. In 2014, they rightly judged that it was not good enough and robustly challenged leaders to improve. Consequently, in 2015 GCSE examinations, pupils' progress was better.
 - Governors have high ambitions for all pupils. For example, they stalwartly judge that despite improvements, leaders need to do more so the gaps in progress between disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers close.
 - Governors have effectively ensured that there are good links between this overarching priority and teachers' pay.
 - Governors accurately identify where strengths and weaknesses lie in teaching. They use the detailed knowledge they gain from the range of effective monitoring activities they undertake, including meeting subject leaders and looking at pupils' work, to recommend improvements. Many governors have relevant experience that they use successfully to hold leaders to account for the speed and effectiveness with which these are implemented.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders' actions to keep pupils safe are well targeted and robust, including those of the family support worker, who has significant local knowledge which she and other leaders use to good effect.
- Leaders rigorously monitor the progress of pupils the school refers to the local authority's social care services. They have a very good knowledge of the authority's referral processes and have, on occasion and where appropriate, successfully requested a higher level of support.
- Staff have astutely identified the unsafe behaviours from which the pupils at this school are most at risk. They monitor these closely. To ensure pupils are knowledgeable about potential risks, as well as how to protect themselves, leaders have introduced highly informative study programmes on online grooming and 'sexting' as part of 'modern Britain' lessons.
- The school has benefited from the additional expertise brought by senior leaders' involvement in authority-wide approaches to prevent radicalisation. For example, leaders have created an effective checklist which they use to identify pupils who are showing signs that they may be becoming radicalised. This checklist ensures pupils are identified systematically, using a set of well-considered, wide-ranging indicators and that subsequent actions, including referrals to the local 'Prevent' team, are taken promptly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- Leaders' actions have led to improvements in teaching. However, the quality of teaching is not consistently good across all subjects or within some subject areas, such as science, to secure good progress for all pupils. Although becoming stronger in mathematics, pupils' progress in English and some non-core subjects is inconsistent.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not had a big enough impact on closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others at Key Stage 4, nor gaps in progress between

pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs and their peers in Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Some teachers are not making good enough use of the information they have on pupils' starting points to ensure the work they set is sufficiently demanding, especially in science. In some science classes, pupils are not being required to explain key concepts or link scientific ideas. In addition, teachers do not insist that pupils complete the tasks they set and this further slows pupils' progress. The new subject leader has plans in place to strengthen science teaching; Year 11 science teaching is now better but more improvement is needed for other year groups.
- Teachers do not always set work that will enable pupils to master a topic so they can reach the challenging targets they have been given. For example, in Key Stage 3 English, while pupils in some classes were inferring hidden meanings in figures of speech, in another class less-able pupils were playing memory games. The work these pupils were doing was too easy and was not helping those in the class with special educational needs to make rapid progress.
- The quality of teaching varies too much between teaching groups and years in non-core subjects, especially in humanities, PE, technology and art. In some lessons teachers set rich tasks that promote progress, capture pupils' interest and enable them to deepen their skills; for example, creating arguments to use in debates about the impact of key historical events. However, this is not the case across all classes.
- The impact of teachers' questioning is variable. Some teachers, especially in mathematics, demonstrate good questioning skills that help most pupils to engage, and this has facilitated good progress in their work over time. However, in some classes pupils' progress slows because teachers spend too long posing questions to the whole class that a minority of pupils respond to.
- Most teachers follow agreed approaches to giving feedback on the work they mark. This is starting to have an impact on raising standards. Some pupils' books clearly evidence how this approach has helped them to improve their work, for example in mathematics. However, because some teachers do not always use this approach consistently well, it is not resulting in improved progress for some, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Teaching in 16–19 study programmes is effective; teachers set pupils regular tests using examination questions from previous years. They provide detailed feedback for pupils on how to improve their performance, which pupils make good use of in subsequent tests. Teachers modify their plans to ensure they incorporate any misconceptions brought to light by pupils' responses to test questions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. In most lessons pupils display positive attitudes to learning and try hard. The majority of pupils spoken to by inspectors are keen to succeed and relish the high ambitions the headteacher and the staff have for them.
- Pupils are explicitly taught the attitudes and approaches they need to succeed in their studies. In most lessons, inspectors observed pupils demonstrating these. For example, a pupil in an English class added to the advice given by his teacher on how they could best work independently by confidently suggesting to his classmates that they should make use of the quotations from Shakespeare displayed in the room. The teacher further developed his and the class's understanding by asking him to explain precisely why this would help pupils to become more confident learners.
- Leaders ensure that good, independent information about careers is provided for all pupils from Year 7 upwards. Presentations from Buckingham University and visits to top universities have successfully raised aspirations. Pupils wishing to pursue vocational pathways receive valuable information from local apprenticeship providers and businesses. Consequently, only a very small proportion of pupils do not go on to further education, training or employment.
- Leaders have effectively enhanced their understanding of how pupils feel about themselves, their studies and their community by conducting extensive questionnaires. Leaders have analysed responses and have used them to identify pupils at risk of the negative influence of very low self-esteem, in order to provide them with special support.
- Inspectors spoke to a wide range of pupils and the vast majority said they felt the school was free from prejudice. To promote tolerance and to show everyone is equally valued, the dining room displays the flags of all the nationalities within the pupil body. The headteacher has ensured that flags from countries currently in conflict are situated close together to signal that in this school everyone is treated with respect.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In the majority of lessons, disruption is minimal and pupils respond well when teachers follow agreed procedures for managing low-level disruption.
- Leaders carefully monitor the amount of low-level disruption in the school. Effective approaches have led to a reduction in low-level disruption since last year, including for disadvantaged pupils.
- Through a careful combination of one-to-one guidance and well-thought-out sanctions, the school's own facility for pupils who display challenging behaviour (the PLC) is having a positive impact on improving the poor conduct of a minority of pupils.
- Last year, the school's leaders and governors made greater use of exclusion than in the year before. They did this to send out a message that behaviour which had a negative impact on other pupils' well-being and learning was not acceptable. Consequently, the school's own records indicate that incidents of challenging behaviour are now reducing.
- Leaders have sought feedback from pupils and parents about bullying, and they have taken notice of suggestions made. Incidents of bullying are reducing because highly visible peer mentors are available at break and lunchtime and there is a dedicated place (A2B centre) where pupils who are concerned about bullying can receive guidance. Pupils say they feel safe and that teachers deal well with the small number of bullying incidents that still occur.
- Attendance has improved since 2014 and is currently more in line with the national average. Leaders carefully track the attendance of different groups. As a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved since 2014.
- Pupils who attend the alternative provision known as The Bridge behave well. Their behaviour and attendance are closely monitored. To ensure pupils engage fully, they are offered a wide range of vocational placements. Close partnerships with parents, the school and leaders at The Bridge mean pupils benefit from the success they enjoy while attending the provision.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' outcomes, despite improvements, are not good. 2015 examination results showed improvements on the year before; however, some gaps between disadvantaged pupils' progress and others' widened. Currently, in Key Stage 4, although some gaps are narrowing well, others are not closing quickly enough.
- In Key Stage 3, better teaching in English and mathematics has led to gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils narrowing more consistently than in Key Stage 4. Nevertheless, in both key stages, gaps between the progress of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs and their peers currently are not narrowing at a fast enough pace.
- Better teaching led to improved GCSE results in 2015. Pupils who took their GCSE examinations in 2015 joined the school with Key Stage 2 English and mathematics levels that were significantly lower than average. Effective additional help and closer monitoring led to better progress for them than for pupils in 2014. However, pupils' progress was still not good as it remained below 2014 minimum expectations for English and mathematics. Information for the current Year 11 shows that this is improving.
- In the past the school's predictions, based on their tracking, have not been consistently accurate. Last year, they were more accurate than previously. However, almost half of the GCSE predictions for different subjects were too high compared with actual scores; some, such as business studies, by as much as 30%, for example. Leaders have robust plans to strengthen the accuracy of predictions further.
- Due to a variety of effective approaches, including regular mock examinations, pupils' progress in a range of GCSE subjects improved in 2015 compared to 2014. However, disadvantaged pupils' progress did not improve as much as that of their better-off peers. Consequently, in 2015 the gap between their progress and that of others widened across a range of subjects.
- In 2015, the gap between the progress of middle-ability disadvantaged pupils in mathematics and others who entered the school at the same level widened. However, in 2015, improvements in English meant that middle-ability disadvantaged pupils made strong progress and the gap narrowed compared with 2014.
- Information on pupils' current progress in Year 11 in English and mathematics indicates gaps are closing for higher- and lower-ability disadvantaged pupils compared to their better-off peers of similar ability. However, the gap in progress persists with middle-ability pupils.
- Improvements in teaching mean that more-able pupils are making good progress in mathematics. Progress for this group is not yet as consistently good in English or science because the work teachers set

is not always challenging enough.

- The school has invested in extra staffing to support pupils with the lowest numeracy and literacy skills through a variety of coaching and interventions. This is working well: these pupils have made rapid gains in their mathematical skills and have also improved their reading skills so that they are more in line with age-related expectations.
- Pupils who attend the school's additional resource (The Base) achieve well because the support they receive is matched to their needs and allows them to play a fuller part both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.
- Other pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs do not make as much progress. Leaders are aware of this and have implemented changes to ensure the needs of these pupils are met more effectively. These improvements include extra help to improve pupils' basic reading and numeracy skills. There is good evidence that these are now closer to age-related expectations. However, targeted pupils are not yet applying their new skills well in the range of subjects they study.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision, The Bridge, make reasonable progress overall and some make good progress. For example, success in vocational learning such as bricklaying, has boosted the confidence of some learners so they are working at a much better level in their GCSE studies.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leaders of 16–19 study programmes are enthusiastic and determined and they know their pupils well. The head of sixth form carefully monitors pupils' progress in their study programmes. She ensures an effective range of support measures are delivered by subject teachers and form tutors for any pupils who start to fall behind in their learning. Consequently, pupils feel extremely well cared for and they take a pride in their sixth form.
- The school provides very effective careers guidance and a suitable range of study pathways with clear routes to further study or employment. All pupils progress to further education, training or employment in their chosen fields with increasing numbers progressing to the top universities.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge, high expectations and well-developed strategies for helping pupils to make progress. They regularly ask probing questions to help check pupils' understanding and help them think more deeply about their learning. Pupils receive helpful feedback and engage in useful self-assessment which enables them to improve their work. As a result, pupils learn well in lessons and over time.
- In previous years, pupils' achievement across academic subjects was below national averages, but in 2015 achievement improved in A-level examinations, especially for A* to E grades. In vocational subjects pupils' progress is slightly above national averages. The current Year 13 entered the sixth form with lower than the previous years' GCSE results and a higher proportion were eligible for additional funding when they were in Year 11. These pupils made strong progress in 2015 AS examinations. Subject leaders and sixth form leaders have effective plans in place to support these pupils in attaining the highest grades of which they are capable.
- Nearly all pupils who retook English or mathematics GCSEs in 2015 improved upon their grades and many successfully gained grade C. This is a notable improvement on the previous year. The school maximises their chances by ensuring they have opportunities to take English GCSE examinations from more than one examination board. Lessons are closely geared to exam success criteria and pupils' class notes provide them with a useful study aid.
- Tutor time is used well to help pupils reflect on social and moral issues and prepare for adult life. In addition, pupils said that they particularly value the wide range of enrichment activities and volunteering opportunities that the school offers. This contributes well to their development as responsible citizens.
- The conduct of sixth formers across the school is good and they provide excellent role models for younger pupils. Pupils are mature, well behaved, tolerant and respectful of difference. They understand how to look after themselves and keep themselves safe. They play a very effective role in helping to lead some extra-curricular activities.

School details

Unique reference number	110532
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10000535

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 comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,207
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barney Payne
Headteacher	Nabil Chaaban
Telephone number	01908 682222
Website	www.radcliffeschool.org.uk
Email address	admin@radcliffeschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 November 2011

Information about this school

- The Radcliffe School is a larger-than-average secondary school with a sixth form delivering 16–19 study programmes.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is broadly average. Some pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- In Key Stage 4, 12 pupils attend The Bridge as alternative provision for one day each week to follow vocational courses.
- The school has dedicated provision to support the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Fifteen pupils are currently supported in this unit.
- In 2014, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- Since the last inspection a new headteacher has joined the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 28 lessons. They conducted learning walks and were accompanied by senior leaders for some of these. Inspectors visited The Base, the specialist provision on-site for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Inspectors also visited the on-site provision for supporting pupils with challenging behaviour (PLC) and made a phone call to The Bridge alternative provision, attended by 12 pupils.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, leaders responsible for safeguarding, middle leaders, the leader of 16–19 study programmes, representatives of the governing body, a group of staff which included NQTs, a representative of the local authority, and six small groups of pupils from Key Stages 3, 4 and 5.
- 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 60 mathematics and English books. All the books belonging to a sample of pupils which included disadvantaged and disabled pupils or pupils with special educational needs were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors took into account the 121 responses to Parent View and the 51 staff survey responses received, as well as comments received via the free text facility on Parent View.

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