



Burnt Mill Comprehensive School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115219
LEA ESSEX LEA
Inspection number 279545
Inspection dates 12 December 2005 to 13 December 2005
Reporting inspector Mr. Stephen Abbott LI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	First Avenue
School category	Community		CM20 2NR
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01279300555
Number on roll	1089	Fax number	01279307234
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Pat Fox
Date of previous inspection	11 December 2000	Headteacher	Mr. Stephen Chamberlain

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 12 December 2005 - 13 December 2005	Inspection number 279545
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Burnt Mill Comprehensive School is an average sized 11-16 community school, situated in Harlow. It has Arts College status, specialising in performing arts. A new headteacher was appointed in April 2005. The proportion of students who have reached the expected standard when they join the school in Year 7 is below average. One student in six is known to be eligible for free school meals, which is in line with the national average. Nearly a quarter of students have been identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities, including 3% with Statements of Special Educational Needs. Both of these figures are above the national average. Less than 3% of students have a first language which is not English.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Burnt Mill Comprehensive School has a number of strengths, but is not fully effective because of weaknesses in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Although results in the national examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 overall are above the national average, progress in the core subjects is below expectations for significant numbers of students. Only one student in five passes both English and mathematics at grade C or above. In addition, many of the most able students make inadequate progress in Key Stage 3 English and science. This underachievement occurs because the quality of teaching and learning in the core subjects is too variable and management of these areas has not been strong enough. However, the school has the capacity to improve and has begun to tackle these issues. The headteacher is widely respected and provides good leadership. The ethos of the school has already improved, something welcomed by parents and students. There are good pastoral systems and effective partnerships to promote students' well-being. Attendance has improved. The school has strengths in information technology and its specialist area of performing arts. Senior leaders identify the school's strengths and weaknesses through careful monitoring and analysis of performance data. There is an effective strategic plan to improve teaching, learning and achievement and the role of governors. Challenge and support from senior staff and local authority consultants, coupled with professional development, are helping to improve the quality of middle management. The inspectors confirm the senior team's assessment of the school's strengths but do not agree that the school is effective. It does not provide satisfactory value for money. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than, in all the circumstances, it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the students' achievement and the quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve provision in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. - Raise achievement in the core subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4, intervening early to ensure that students develop the literacy and numeracy skills they need for learning and for later life. - Improve the opportunities for able students to tackle more challenging work that will enable them to achieve high standards. - Continue to strengthen the contribution of middle managers to school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Judged on their overall results at Key Stage 4, Burnt Mill students make much better progress than others from similar backgrounds. Those who have learning difficulties or disabilities progress as well as other students. However, achievement is inadequate

because not enough students make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science. On average, students currently in the school were about a term behind the nationally expected standard when they joined the school in Year 7 and recent leavers were further behind. Despite this nearly 60% of students achieved 5 or more GCSE passes at grade C or above in 2005, a figure that is above the national average. The main reason is the success of intermediate GNVQ courses. The information technology course, in particular, accounted for more grade C passes than all the other subjects put together last year: around three quarters of the students achieved the equivalent of 4 GCSEs at grade C or better on this course. However, basic skills in other core subjects are not developed strongly enough. For example, only 21% of students gained passes in English and mathematics at grade C or above, and less than 1 in 5 students achieved grade C or better in science. In Key Stage 4, progress was below average in mathematics and science but good in English, where GCSE results improved in 2005. Standards in mathematics and science remain well below the national averages, and below average in English. Overall, standards in these core subjects are lower than in 2003. Among older students whose Key Stage 3 levels put them on the borderline for achieving C grades in GCSE English, mathematics and science, fewer than expected have succeeded in the last two years. The standards achieved in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are significantly below average and students' progress is below average in English and mathematics. The most able students do not progress as well as expected in Key Stage 3. They are expected to gain at least one level during Key Stage 3 but over the last two years a third of the most able students at Burnt Mill have not improved their level in science and nearly half of them have failed to improve by one level in English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most students enjoy school, are positive about their work and try hard in lessons. Their personal achievements are increasingly celebrated. Students feel safe and swift action is taken on any incidents of bullying. They have confidence in staff and feel happy to approach them to discuss any problem. Younger students particularly value the peer counselling available from some of their colleagues in Year 10. Behaviour throughout the school is satisfactory and improving because new procedures provide clear rules and routines. Attendance has improved and is close to the national average. Most students arrive punctually. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, with strengths in the moral and social aspects. All students have good opportunities to take part in physical exercise and the school successfully teaches them how to lead healthy lives. Students consider they are given good opportunities to bring about changes to the school through the work of the school council. They contribute well to the community, both within the school and locally. Parents have recently started to receive regular newsletters. Their questionnaire responses show that their views about the school are predominately positive. The students' development of basic skills in literacy in Key Stage 3 and numeracy

throughout their time at school, do not secure adequately the students' future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching is uneven and inspectors do not confirm the school's view that it is satisfactory overall. The school has some very effective teachers who provide good role models but there are too many inadequate lessons and not enough good teaching to enable students to progress well in English in Key Stage 3, science in Key Stage 4 and mathematics at all levels. Some aspects of teaching are good or outstanding. Students are well motivated when the purpose of the lesson is made clear so that they understand what is expected of them. They apply themselves well, learning independently and through co-operating with each other. Teachers use probing questions to assess and improve students' understanding. More often, students' progress is held back by teachers' expectations not being high enough. Assessment information is not sufficiently exploited to plan tasks in lessons that are challenging for students of all abilities, especially the more able. Subject leaders recognise a need to improve schemes of work, including a systematic approach to planning for more and less able students. While there are examples of good practice in reinforcing literacy and number skills across the curriculum, these are not consistently emphasised, so that errors persist in the work of some students. Unsatisfactory behaviour, often among small groups of students, unsettles and distracts some classes and holds back learning when teachers lack effective class management skills. Students who have learning difficulties progress well when they receive individual support. Too often, however, the most able students coast in lessons. In older years, boys sometimes answer questions more readily than girls. The school has not tackled the weaknesses in mathematics noted at the last inspection. The pace of lessons is slow and learning is sometimes superficial, reinforcing misconceptions. Students are rarely expected to find their own solutions by adapting or combining ideas they have previously learnt. Because there is currently no coordinator for personal and social education, its teaching by form tutors is variable.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Since the last inspection the school has provided more religious education and given greater choice for students in Years 10 and 11. The provision of vocational courses has increased, including information and communication technology, a subject in which the students achieve well. The school has gained specialist status for performing arts, an area of strength. Students are particularly proud of provision in the arts. Participation in extra-curricular activities stemming from these subjects is high. The school provides a good range of other activities before and after school and at lunchtimes. There are many links with other schools, colleges,

local groups and theatres, which enhance students' personal development and academic progress. Older students can choose vocational courses, including some at the local further education college. A few students attend extended work placements. These are planned so that all have access to their basic curriculum entitlement. Planning for personal and social education satisfactorily covers required aspects of health education but citizenship lacks rigour. The development of literacy and number skills is not effectively coordinated across the curriculum. This limits students' progress and readiness for the world of work. In other ways their preparation for the next stage of learning and for work is satisfactory and supported well through careers education, work experience, enterprise activities and liaison with employers, including local health service providers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The arrangements for care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The pastoral systems are strong but students' academic progress is monitored inconsistently. Procedures for ensuring students' safety and well-being are secure. The school works closely with a wide range of external agencies to support vulnerable students. Child protection arrangements are good and all staff are fully trained. Students who have learning difficulties or disabilities are fully included in all aspects of school life. They achieve well when they are effectively supported in lessons and through the work of the student support centre. Tutors and heads of year know their students very well and respond promptly to issues. Staff monitor students' performance and provide advice on how to improve their work, behaviour or other aspects of their personal development. However, assessment information is not used consistently enough to help students attain higher standards because some teachers have not adopted recently introduced arrangements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. Previously, during a period of several changes at senior level, there had been an over-optimistic view of achievement which resulted in too little attention being given to raising standards in core subjects. The school has shown it has a satisfactory capacity to improve. The headteacher and the new senior team have a clear vision and the determination to make the school successful. They have effectively tackled the important priorities of behaviour management and have gained the strong support of staff, pupils and parents. They have taken a number of steps that are beginning to have an impact. They have created structures to support self-evaluation and redefined the role of subject leaders, introducing robust systems to hold them accountable for standards. The local authority is increasing its support. Although the staff are mostly appreciative of the new approach, the impact on improving standards of teaching and learning is not yet consistent. There is still variability in monitoring of teaching and in the accurate use of data on pupils' achievements to identify where learning needs support. Some subject

leaders clearly know the strengths and weaknesses of their departments and go about improving learning in an organised way but, until recently, departments worked in isolation and did not learn from each other. The recent introduction of cluster groups is changing this culture. The subject leaders in English, mathematics and science are working with senior managers and local authority consultants to improve teaching, learning and achievement. In English, results have improved at GCSE but there has been insufficient emphasis on introducing and driving through the curriculum changes needed to raise standards at Key Stage 3. The governors were slow to realise that the school was not tackling all the weaknesses identified in its last inspection but they are now better informed about how the school is performing. They are beginning to question why a significant number of students are underachieving and to challenge the school to do better.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. I would like to thank you all, on behalf of our team, for your politeness, co-operation and assistance during our visit. We enjoyed listening to your comments and opinions. You told us how much your school has improved since Mr Chamberlain took charge. We agree with you that he is a good leader and that the school has some good features. The school now has a really good atmosphere. It has effective pastoral systems and works well with other organisations to look after your needs. It is strong in information technology and its specialist area of performing arts. Last year, the overall GCSE results were above the national average. However, you need to do better in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. For many jobs and college courses, you need to pass GCSE English and mathematics at grade C or above. Last year, only one student in five managed this. We have asked the school to make improvements and will inspect it again in one year. We found that your lessons had a rather mixed quality. In the best lessons, your teachers make sure you know what you need to learn and how it relates to other topics. They ask good questions, listen to the answers and have high expectations of you. You work hard in these lessons and learn well. Teachers get you to think for yourselves. Your teachers are working hard to plan more of this type of lesson. In other lessons your teachers sometimes try to help you by making the work easier or by giving you step by step instructions. When the work is too easy or too slow, or if you can't see its purpose some of you get restless and then everyone learns less. The senior leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses because they look closely at lessons and school procedures and analyse your results carefully. For example, they have discovered that some students who do well in primary school get stuck at level 5, and get the same result in the Key Stage 3 tests. They have good plans to help the school to improve. We also found some important areas that the school needs to improve. We have asked the school to: - improve lessons in English, mathematics and science - improve results in the core subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4, making sure that you all have the literacy and numeracy skills you need for learning and for later life - plan more challenging work for able students so they can achieve high standards - help subject leaders to run their departments better. We wish you all well in the future.