



# Buckingham School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 110484  
**Local Authority** Buckinghamshire  
**Inspection number** 288689  
**Inspection dates** 10–11 January 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Janet Mercer HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)	<b>School address</b>	London Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Buckingham
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		MK18 1AT
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01280 812206
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	929	<b>Fax number</b>	01280 822525
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	113		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Mike King
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Christine Jones
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 November 2002		

<b>Age group</b> 11–18	<b>Inspection dates</b> 10–11 January 2007	<b>Inspection number</b> 288689
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors

## Description of the school

Buckingham School is a mixed, non-selective secondary modern with a small, but growing sixth form. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. There are a small number of students from minority ethnic groups. The school gained Sports Specialist College status in September 2004 with the aim to 'raise attainment through motivation'.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

The school's overall effectiveness is inadequate because too many students do not make as much progress as they should between Years 7 and 11. Students join the school with broadly average attainment, but by the end of Year 11 standards are below average. The proportion of students achieving 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE has been below average for each of the last 4 years. Students' attainment at the end of Year 9 has also been below average for several years but in 2006 the proportion of students achieving Level 5 improved to reach the national average. Achievement and standards are not rising quickly enough, and too many students, particularly boys and more able students, are underachieving. While students with a statement of special educational need make the expected progress, many of those identified as having behavioural difficulties, do not.

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than, in all the circumstances, it might reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to raising achievement and standards.

School leaders and governors have worked hard to deal with some significant difficulties in the last few years and have achieved some notable successes since the last inspection. The school has successfully managed a large financial deficit and is expected to have achieved a small surplus by the end of this financial year.

There have been significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified and experienced teachers, resulting in high levels of staff turnover. Frequent changes of teachers in the school and some weak teaching have had a negative impact on students' achievement and behaviour over recent years. Managers have worked hard to improve this situation and staffing is now more stable.

However, there is still too much variation in the quality of teaching. Students and parents comment that the amount of progress made is too dependent on which teacher students have, and that teaching ranges from excellent to poor. Initiatives implemented to improve behaviour are also having a positive impact. Behaviour is improving, although a minority of students still cause some disruption in lessons.

The school has made reasonable progress addressing most weaknesses identified at the last inspection. These include raising standards in modern foreign languages, improving students' ICT skills, improving behaviour and the school's financial position. However the attainment of boys through the school remains an area of concern. There have also been improvements in the sixth form curriculum and in opportunities for students to work independently.

Good partnerships with local schools and a further education college provide a broad range of opportunities for students, including vocational and work related courses. The sports specialist status, gained in 2004, is having a positive impact, particularly in improving standards in PE and increasing participation in sports courses and

extra-curricular activities. More students are staying on in the sixth form, where around half of them take a sports course.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall but there are important areas for improvement. Leaders and managers are now making better use of detailed information to set more challenging targets for student and whole school performance. Managers are working with teachers to ensure they know what their students can be expected to achieve and that they monitor progress towards achieving targets closely. Staff in the school are well focussed on the need to raise achievement and the school demonstrates capacity to improve. Although the school has introduced appropriate improvement strategies, they are not always implemented fully across the school which limits their impact.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The school has an inclusive sixth form and many students join with below average prior attainment. They make good progress and pass rates on A-level and vocational courses are at or above the national average. Much good teaching enables students to work independently and take personal responsibility for their work and progress. Tutorials in Year 12 support the acquisition of independent learning skills. In Year 13 students receive good advice and guidance to help them progress to higher education or employment. Students speak very positively about the good support they receive from teachers, tutors and external agencies such as Connexions. The school has introduced improved systems for monitoring student progress. The quality of sixth form provision is evaluated separately through each subject area and does not yet provide a comprehensive evaluation for the sixth form as a whole. Management information is not yet used as well as it could be to monitor the quality of provision.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning to that of the best to raise achievement.
- Use data and tracking processes better to raise teachers' expectations, especially of boys and more able students, so that all students achieve as well as they can.
- Ensure that improvement strategies are fully and effectively implemented across the whole school, through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of their impact.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Standards in national tests in English, maths and science in Year 9 are improving so that the proportion reaching Level 5 is now at the national average in each subject. There was a particularly marked improvement in level 5 mathematics in 2006. Fewer students achieve Level 6 or higher than expected. Progress is best in English but the proportion of students achieving the higher levels below that expected.

Standards by Year 11, while showing improvement in some subjects, remain well below the national average for the achievement of 5 or more A\*-C grades. However the proportion achieving 5 or more A\*-G grades improved and is now above average.

By Year 11 students' achievement is significantly lower than expected. Boys make less progress than boys nationally.

Standards in the sixth form are satisfactory but many students make good progress from a lower than average starting point. Students' average points scores are increasing year on year, but remain below the average.

The school met several of its achievement targets in 2006 but some of these were not high enough. Very challenging targets are now being set and these are feeding through to more challenging targets for students and higher teacher expectations.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The personal development and well-being of the students are satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. Relationships throughout the school community are improving. Many students enjoy coming to school and attendance has improved to the national average.

Students are increasingly aware of reasons for adopting a healthy lifestyle. While growing numbers of students take part in sports activities they acknowledge the need to take more responsibility for choosing healthy food options. In general students feel safe in school although some are still unsure about how well reported incidents of bullying are dealt with. Students willingly take responsibility through the school council and peer mentoring. Many take part in fund raising activities to support local and national charities, and sixth form students work very well with local primary schools on dance and sports initiatives.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory. Most students have improving moral and social skills and participate in activities which helps develop their cultural awareness. Opportunities are not always taken to develop students' spiritual awareness. Behaviour is improving and is satisfactory. However, students and parents confirm that the disruptive behaviour of a significant minority of students in lessons has a negative impact on the achievement of other students. New systems of reward and sanctions for misbehaviour are not always applied consistently.

Students value the citizenship and personal, social and health education programmes. However, lessons tend to focus on content instead of developing personal skills and work is not systematically reinforced across the curriculum. This means that, while improving, students' achievements are not as good as they could be.

Careers education and guidance and work experience helps prepare students to progress to post-16 education, training or employment. Students develop good literacy skills and make good progress in English, but progress in maths is poorer.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning are improving and are satisfactory. In the best lessons teachers are very effective in engaging students' interests and motivating them to learn. They have high expectations of their students based on a detailed understanding of what they already know and their learning needs. Lessons are planned meticulously to incorporate a variety of learning activities that promote active and independent learning. In such a stimulating learning environment, behaviour management problems are few.

The school acknowledges that there is still too little good or outstanding teaching and learning. Effective teaching strategies are being actively developed within particular curriculum areas and within staff focus groups, but they will only have a significant impact on the achievement of all learners when they are implemented consistently throughout the school.

Termly achievement reviews give students an opportunity to discuss targets with subject teachers and parents. This enables them to keep a clear focus on what they need to do to improve. However, the one to one reviews with form tutors are still at an early stage so their effectiveness in helping to raise standards is yet to be seen.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and this is reflected in the better progress students make. Lessons encourage the students to learn independently and they appreciate the personalised support they receive in the small classes.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and is taking effective steps to meet the needs of all students. Good partnerships through the 14-19 Aylesbury Vale Consortium and the increasing flexibility programme enhance the breadth of courses available. Collaboration with local state and independent schools enriches the experience and opportunities for more gifted and talented students. Many students participate in a good range of extra-curricular activities.

The school has recently extended its alternative curriculum for those students at risk of not succeeding with traditional GCSE courses. These students combine the development of literacy, numeracy, work related and personal development skills with some GCSE options.

An increasing number of students are staying on in the sixth form, often combining academic and vocational courses. The specialist sport college initiative is well managed and standards are improving in related subjects. The physical education department

is beginning to use its best practice to inform and support teaching and learning across the school.

The school meets statutory requirements for information technology (IT) in years 7 to 9, but only partially in year 10 and 11 due to difficulties in recruiting specialist staff. Assessment and reporting on achievements in citizenship are not sufficiently developed.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory and good in the sixth form. Staff demonstrate a high level of commitment to the care of students and child protection arrangements are robust. Health and safety procedures are rigorous and ensure that students learn in a safe environment. Teachers support students during lesson changes, break and lunch times. This helps students to feel more secure in and around school.

Personal guidance, about choices as they move through the school, draws well on outside agencies when needed. Good links with Connexions means that students are well advised about career opportunities. Data to support the academic guidance and support of students are now in place, but this has not yet had sufficient impact on raising achievement.

The provision to support the achievement of students with learning difficulties and other disabilities is good. Students' literacy skills are improving but some students are not supported in transferring this improvement to other subjects and so do not achieve as well as they should. Those at risk are identified early and effective arrangements are in place to keep them involved in school.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The headteacher and the leadership group have established a clear direction for the school with specialist sports college status designed to increase opportunity and achievement for students.

Leaders and managers are focused on raising achievement. They make better use of information to monitor students' progress and take action when they are not reaching their potential. Senior and middle leaders recognise that achievement has not been high enough. Appropriate strategies for improvement are in place but their impact is only just beginning to show.

The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses through its evaluation processes which are making leaders at all levels more accountable. There are relevant plans in place to deal with weaknesses but monitoring is not always rigorous enough to ensure consistent implementation throughout the school. Middle



leaders are committed to the school's vision though not all are equally effective at driving it forward.

Governors have a sound understanding of the school and recognise the need to improve achievement. They have played an effective part in monitoring the school's financial recovery. In the last three years funding has been extremely tight which shows in some parts of the accommodation which varies from excellent to poor.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

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

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	4	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3	2

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

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently I would like to thank you for making us welcome and helping us with the inspection. We have taken your views and those of your parents and carers into account as well, in making our judgements. Currently, the school is not effective in ensuring that all students make as much progress as they can in school and we have issued a Notice to Improve, particularly in relation to raising achievements and standards. This means that inspectors will visit your school again in one year to see how much improvement has been made.

The main points are:

- too many of you in Years 7 to 11 do not make as much progress at school as you should and your standards by the end of Year 11 are too low
- sixth form students make better progress in their work
- while behaviour is improving, some of you still misbehave in lessons causing disruption to the learning of others
- too many changes of teachers have had a negative effect on the quality of teaching and students' progress, but this is beginning to improve
- there is a good range of courses and after school activities, especially in sports, which many of you join, even though transport can be difficult after school
- teachers and other staff give you good support in school, and new tracking and assessment systems are helping them to monitor progress better
- leaders and managers have begun to introduce strategies for improvements but these are not yet implemented consistently across the whole school.

We have asked the school to do three things that we think will help to raise achievement and would help you to achieve even higher standards:

- improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning to raise achievement
- use data and tracking processes better to raise teachers' expectations, especially of boys and higher attaining students, so that all students achieve as well as they can
- ensure that all teachers implement the school's improvement strategies so that teaching and achievement improves.

The managers and teachers in your school are very committed to bringing about further improvements. We hope that you will work with them to improve your school and help everyone achieve as much as they can.

With best wishes for the future.

Janet Mercer HMI