

Lord Grey School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110531
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	288705
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Emma Ing HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1478
6th form	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Madeline Carrington
Headteacher	Mrs Jill Coughlan
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2003
School address	Rickley Lane Bletchley Milton Keynes MK3 6EW
Telephone number	01908 626110
Fax number	01908 366139

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Inspection number	288705

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

Lord Grey is a large school serving an area of established housing in south west Milton Keynes. Although the proportion of students with special educational needs is in line with national averages the attainment of students entering the school is below average. Around one sixth of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds with no one group predominating. Lord Grey was awarded specialist languages status in 1998 which it has maintained whilst adding a second specialism of humanities in 2006. The school has been led by an interim headteacher since September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Lord Grey School is emerging from a period of considerable instability of both leadership and staffing which has slowed the rate of school improvement. Nevertheless the school is satisfactory and now improving. Although it has not yet been possible for governors to appoint a substantive headteacher, a strong interim headteacher is in now place. She is well supported by both governors and the senior leadership team. There is evidence of sound planning and in many areas of the school's work, improvements are being made. These indicate that the speed of progress is picking up but it is not uniformly secure across the school. There are insufficient systems in place to ensure middle leaders share a consistent approach to improvement.

Students say that in recent months the ethos of the school has improved. One stated that, whilst she is now proud to be a student of this school, this would not have been the case in the past. The personal development and well-being of students is good; they approach their education in a calm and purposeful manner. They are respectful of each other and contribute well to the community. However, at all ages, students are too reliant on their teachers and do not have sufficient skills to find things out for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. This slows their progress and leads to difficulties for some of those embarking on advanced courses in the sixth form.

Because teaching in the school is satisfactory students make satisfactory progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and relationships with students are good. The standards reached however are below national averages. Teaching needs to be better in order to enable students to catch up from their below-average starting points. Some lessons lack variety and opportunities for students to participate fully. In addition, the assessment of students' work does not identify for them what they are doing well and what they need to work on in order to improve their work.

Students feel well cared for by the school. Their progress is effectively tracked by senior and middle leaders who intervene appropriately to support any student who is struggling. Recently, good systems have been introduced to manage the rare occurrences of unacceptable behaviour. These are already ensuring that those who need it are supported so that they cause less disruption to others' learning but do not miss out themselves. The progress of some students with learning difficulties is a little slower than the cohort as a whole. The recently appointed leader of this area has good plans to improve the quality of provision for these students.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Around half of Year 11 students join the sixth form, most of the remainder choosing to attend vocational courses at Milton Keynes College. The attainment of those staying on is below average, and as a result of satisfactory teaching, they make satisfactory progress. The rate of progress made varies significantly between different subjects however, which is an issue that the school is seeking to address. The standards reached are below national averages. Around half of those who complete A-level courses go on to higher education.

Relationships in the sixth form are good and students feel comfortable but not fully challenged. They are well supported by staff, particularly in making university applications and decisions about their future. However they do not feel well prepared for the independent learning that sixth form studies require. Lessons are often teacher dominated and too often students' learning is not well developed by questioning. As in the school as a whole teachers do not give sufficient feedback on students' work to enable them to make appropriate next steps.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement systems to ensure clear leadership and a consistent approach to improvement across the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.
- Support students to become more effective independent learners.
- Develop the quality of assessment of students' work across the school to ensure that students know what they have to do next to make progress and improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall when students enter the school, their attainment is a little below the national average. They make better progress in Key Stage 3 than they do in Key Stage 4, but satisfactory progress overall, leaving with standards a little below national averages. In both key stages their learning in the very important subjects of mathematics and English is good. In subjects such as information technology, where results were below the school's average last year, careful work has been directed at improvement. The school's tracking data indicates that this will enable students this year to perform better. Whilst they also make satisfactory progress, the progress of students with learning difficulties is slightly slower than others. The picture of slightly below-average attainment but broadly satisfactory progress is mirrored in the sixth form. At this level too the progress made varies a good deal between subjects which the school is seeking to rectify with some success.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students are courteous, calm and responsive around the school. A small minority of parents express concerns about behaviour but the majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school. Their social and moral development is good. Students generally enjoy their education and the many and varied extra-curricular activities in which they participate. Students say that both bullying and racism are infrequent and dealt with effectively by the school. As a result they feel safe and secure. Art, drama, music, media studies and other areas of the curriculum provide good opportunities for students' cultural development which is good. Assemblies ensure satisfactory spiritual development.

Students participate in a good deal of physical activity with evident enjoyment. They have good knowledge about health issues. Students develop literacy and numeracy skills well and are well prepared for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

There is some inspiring teaching and across the school relationships between teachers and learners are good. In many lessons learning activities capture the enthusiasm of students and they are appropriately challenged. Strong support is provided to learners preparing for examinations. Teaching overall however, while satisfactory, sometimes lacks variety and challenge. Some teachers dominate lessons by talking too much and some set routine learning activities rather than giving students the opportunities to become involved and active in their learning. Many teachers are not using their knowledge of students' current abilities to plan different activities to meet their needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's specialism in languages has enabled them to ensure that many students take two languages at GCSE and all take one. This represents a very good take up and results are generally good. Students are also encouraged to be strongly aware of foreign cultures as many learning activities in the school include reference to these, such as those recently undertaken by students as part of enterprise training. The school is aware that the curriculum as it stands has weaknesses because the banding arrangements are not allowing sufficient flexibility to enable all students to attend courses appropriate to their needs. Plans are far advanced for implementation in September 2007 of new arrangements which will address this issue. There are many opportunities for enrichment through a variety of extra-curricular activities such as the recent opportunity that students had to participate in a mock trial and the Readathon. Performing Arts is a strength of the school and students not only perform but undertake a range of supporting activities for school productions. The school sports teams perform well and older students can train for sports and community leader awards thus developing their coaching skills. The preparation of students for the world of work contributes strongly to their economic well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students feel well cared for. Most know who they can turn to for support. They are particularly appreciative of the support that they are given in determining their future career path both in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Child protection arrangements are secure. Careful records are kept of all aspects of students' behaviour and progress and appropriately analysed in order to yield information to help leaders plan for the support of different groups.

Academic tracking is in place and used effectively by middle and senior managers to identify underperformance and trigger appropriate intervention. The school actively seeks to involve parents in such cases. Although regular formal assessments of students' work are taking place, the feedback teachers give is inadequate and fails to indicate what they need to do next to improve the quality of their work.

At the moment support for students with learning difficulties is rather haphazard. The recently appointed leader of this area has good plans for improvement. Equally, whilst there is support for students who speak English as an additional language this has not yet been embraced by all teachers and therefore is less effective than it could be.

Recently, effective systems have been introduced to manage the relatively rare instances when students' behaviour is unsatisfactory. A series of sanctions coupled, when appropriate, with time for reflection, support and mediation, has enabled the school to reduce internal exclusions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Although not fully recorded, the interim headteacher has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has had positive impact in rebuilding the ethos of the school and securing positive relationships. She has a convincing understanding of the way forward for the school but her ability to make long-term decisions and plans has been hampered by the short term contract to which she works. She is well supported by her senior leadership team but they are insufficiently involved in strategic planning for long-term improvement across the school as a whole. The leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory but rightly ambitious. The difficulties that the school experienced in retaining staff have been resolved and indications are that the school is entering a period of relative stability.

The quality of middle management is very variable. There are some outstanding leaders but some need support from the senior leadership team. Systems to ensure a consistent approach to school improvement and clear leadership are lacking. Faculties are engaged in seeking to drive up standards but are employing too many different methods and thereby reducing the impact of their work. New procedures and initiatives are being introduced in a number of areas to secure improvement but these processes are not far advanced and too little time has passed for them yet to have impact. The school has developed good links with other local education providers through its work in modern foreign languages.

The governing body has supported the school well and taken difficult decisions in so doing. They are beginning to play an effective role in monitoring the progress of the school and in strategic planning.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
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

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
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?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Lord Grey School, Rickley Lane, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK3 6EW

Thank you for welcoming me and my team during our recent inspection of your school. We very much enjoyed watching you at work and talking to many of you. We agree with those of you who told us that it is a satisfactory school but also with the many students who told us that it is improving.

As you know there have recently been rather a lot of changes in leaders and teachers. Things are now settling down and the interim headteacher is leading the school well. Many new and useful initiatives are being put in place which will serve to ensure that you get an even better education. We have asked her specifically to make sure that systems are in place to ensure strong and consistent leadership throughout the school.

One of the improvements that you told us about was your behaviour. We were impressed by this and by your participation in school events and activities. You contribute well to school life and are given lots of opportunities to develop skills and understanding outside lessons. Some of you told us however that you have not developed good independent study skills, which is making sixth form work difficult. We have recommended that the school works to improve this aspect of your education.

We have also recommended that they improve the quality of teaching. It is currently satisfactory, but the teaching needs to be more varied and allow you to participate more fully in lessons. We are also concerned that teachers need to give you more detailed feedback when they mark your work so that you know what you have to do to improve. You can help with both of these things by sharing with staff what helps you learn and what sort of lessons and assessment are best for you.

I wish you all a successful future and look forward to hearing about the further improvements at your school.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Ing, HMI