

Bushey Meads School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 117580 |
| Local Authority | HERTFORDSHIRE |
| Inspection number | 290880 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 May 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Sheila Nolan |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1033 |
| 6th form | 195 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Di Hoeksma |
| Headteacher | Mr Keith Douglas |
| Date of previous school inspection | 11 March 2002 |
| School address | Coldharbour Lane Bushey Watford Hertfordshire WD23 4PA |
| Telephone number | 0208 950 3000 |
| Fax number | 0208 950 6208 |

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|--------------------------|----------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Bushey Meads School, a specialist Technology College, draws its students from an area where families have easy access to selective and independent education. Nevertheless, applications to Bushey Meads far exceed available places. Most students are from a White British background but around a fifth come from a range of minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A higher than average proportion of students has a home language other than English although few are at the early stages of learning English. Half as many as is typical nationally are eligible for free school meals. Whilst the percentage of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is average, more than double the expected proportion has a statement of special educational need. The school is designated as a centre for the integration into mainstream education of students with severe physical impairment. Sixth form provision is made jointly with the local consortium. The headteacher has been in post for 18 months.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bushey Meads is a rapidly improving school that provides a good quality of education, a judgement agreed by the school. It provides good value for money. The overwhelming majority of parents recognise the school's recent 'push for excellence'. Students' views are summed up by a Year 11 student as 'much better and a place to be proud of'.

A real strength of the school is its happy, caring ethos where everyone is welcome and relationships at all levels are very positive. As a result of well-judged care, guidance and support, particularly personal guidance, students' personal development is good. Students report that support for those experiencing personal difficulties and for those with learning difficulties or disabilities is readily available. Students with physical impairments are exceptionally well integrated into school life. Procedures to check on students' academic progress, new this year, are increasingly rigorous, although feedback to students on how to improve their work is not yet consistently good across the curriculum.

Students are proud of their school, attend regularly, appear happy and enthusiastic, and feel secure. They are keen to stay healthy, participate well in sports and have their say on many aspects of school life through the very active school parliament. They encourage each other to behave well and actively respond to the school's expectations of racial harmony. Many make a difference to others through service within the school and through fundraising for a range of charities. Very effective personal and social education, good careers' advice and enterprise projects, including executing plans for an all-weather shelter, prepare students well for future education, training and working life.

Teaching and learning are good. Standards are rising rapidly. Students reach above average standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 and achieve well from an average starting point. Nevertheless, the school is keenly aware that there is still much to be done to ensure that in all subjects students achieve as well as they do in the most successful. Standards within the specialist technology provision are not yet high enough. Students in younger years often depend too heavily on their teachers and the long-term lack of independent learning skills slows the progress of sixth form students, which is satisfactory. The school recognises it must do more to provide structured opportunities for students to respond actively to feedback on their written work.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, very well supported by the senior team, provides outstanding leadership that is enabling the school to develop rapidly. Governors support the school well and keep a watchful eye over its progress. Self-evaluation at senior level is very rigorous and generally accurate. Middle managers are increasingly well involved in contributing to the school's understanding of its strengths as well as of areas for further development. Good training opportunities are improving their effectiveness in monitoring learning.

Since the last inspection, the curriculum has developed well and is now good. Specialist status as a technology college has strengthened the links with feeder primary schools. The school has clearly demonstrated its strong capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The quality of provision in the sixth form is satisfactory but improving. Standards are average and students achieve satisfactorily by the end of Year 13. Underachievement identified in Year 12, in 2006, is being addressed and students are being encouraged to develop better independent learning skills. The curriculum is satisfactory and enriched by consortium links which allow for greater flexibility to meet students' needs. Out-of-hours activities, requested by students, are planned for the next academic year to replace unpopular twilight sessions. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The best lessons challenge understanding and introduce a range of learning activities that encourage a 'can do' attitude in the students. Personal development is good but care, guidance and support, which are satisfactory, are being reviewed to support students' transition to post-16 study. Attendance is improving and is now satisfactory, helped by the new electronic registration. Most students are actively involved in the wider school community. 'Study buddies' provide good role models for younger students. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new sixth-form management team's accurate analysis of areas for improvement supports the school's judgement of a good capacity to improve in its drive 'Towards Tomorrow'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Drive forward plans to raise standards further in the specialist technology areas.
- Ensure greater consistency in teachers' planning so that students are more actively engaged in learning in all lessons.
- Provide students with regular, structured opportunities to respond to feedback on their written work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards have been rising since the previous inspection and are above average both at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. They are average at the end of Year 13 and post-16 students achieve satisfactorily. When students come to the school, standards are broadly average. The majority achieve well and no group of students makes less than satisfactory progress. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities make exceptionally good progress. Students from minority ethnic groups make generally good progress. Both boys and girls in the middle attainment range make fewer gains than others because of previously low aspirations, now identified by the school.

In 2006, results were particularly encouraging both in the national tests and in GCSE examinations. Students in Year 9 achieved especially well in English and mathematics but science results for the most able were lower than expected. Close to two thirds of students gained five or more higher GCSE grades, the best ever. Just under half gained five or more higher grades that included both English and mathematics. Despite the school's designation as a specialist technology college, students achieved less well than expected in most areas of design and technology, other than graphics. Robust information on the current Year 11 indicates that results are likely to improve significantly in the specialist areas in 2007. Particularly successful subjects at Year 11 include English, information and communication technology (ICT), French, Spanish and history. Students achieved least well in geography because of instability in staffing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being are good as is students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. Students respond well to the challenge of supporting the integration of those with physical impairment as well as those with cultural traditions that differ from the majority of the school. Students enjoy school, are happy and feel secure. They report that any bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively. They are convinced, correctly, that they can contribute to the school's drive for excellence through the school parliament. They like and trust the adults they work with and thrive on justified praise when they do things well. As a result, behaviour is good and students attend regularly.

Students are aware of national and global issues through lessons and visiting speakers. They are aware of what makes for healthy living and take advantage of improved meals and snacks in the canteen, as well as of the various sporting activities. They appreciate the improvements in resources and facilities in recent months and treat them well. Students are ready to make a positive contribution to the community. They take fundraising activities seriously, help with younger students and contribute to older residents' welfare in the local community. Students report that they feel well prepared for the next stage of education, training or employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are good. Through regular monitoring of lessons, accurate evaluations of observations and thoughtful training of staff, the school has sustained and improved classroom practice since the last inspection.

Supportive working relationships between students and teachers are reflected in students' positive attitudes to learning in many lessons. Activities for students often build well on earlier learning. Challenging and varied opportunities encourage students to work productively both individually and in groups. In a very successful English lesson at Year 9, teaching orchestrated exceptionally well students' responses to their experience of the recent national tests through very well targeted questioning. As a result, students gained in confidence and learned well from shared experiences.

Despite these good features, there are some lessons where teachers' planning does not structure lessons well enough to ensure all students are active learners. Teachers' feedback on students' written work varies much in quality across and within subjects. Even when marking is diagnostic and supportive, students are not always encouraged enough to make best use of it and respond to teachers' helpful suggestions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good and has improved since the last inspection. Statutory requirements for religious education are now met. It offers an increasingly wide range of academic and vocational courses, sometimes in collaboration with a local college. There is clearly planned progression in routes into post-16 and further education. Provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education is good and supports students' personal development well. Work experience placements, however, are not planned routinely for all students and there are missed opportunities to further enterprise activities through the technology specialism so that students can develop independent learning skills. The curriculum is enriched through a wide range of out-of-hours activities, particularly sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are good. Personal guidance is outstanding. Strong but unobtrusive procedures ensure that the day-to-day experience of students is rewarding and enjoyable. The open site is well supervised. Students with physical impairments, as well as other students with learning difficulties and disabilities, are exceptionally well provided for. Students and parents value the approachable and helpful pastoral managers and teaching assistants. Links with outside agencies are very strong and the school acts as a strong advocate for vulnerable students. Projects such as the excellent 'Toe-to-Toe' programme involving parents in supporting students' literacy are very successful. Careers guidance provides students of all ages with clear support in making next-stage choices.

Systematic whole-school procedures regularly check students' academic progress. These are very thorough and there are robust initiatives to support students who are not achieving well enough. Academic mentoring and family learning contribute well to encouraging students to succeed. However, day-to-day academic guidance for students on how to improve their work is not yet good enough in some subject areas, especially in the sixth form.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Good leadership and management are reflected in the leadership team's rigorous identification of the school's strengths and areas for development, and in the very effective actions taken to bring about improvement. Although progress since the last inspection is satisfactory, the rate of improvement has accelerated in this academic year under the leadership of the exceptionally able headteacher. The school now has a full complement of senior managers and this is contributing greatly to the school's good capacity to improve further. Standards are rising throughout the school and students' better progress is clear in examination and test results and in lessons. Staff training activities are successfully helping middle managers to appreciate the importance of the school's well-considered monitoring and evaluation schedule.

Observations of lessons are now regular and generally accurate. The school recognises that more has yet to be done to extend the skills of some middle managers in carrying out their roles more effectively. Nevertheless, many long-serving members of the school team report feeling rejuvenated because their contributions to school improvement are fully valued.

Governance is satisfactory and strengthening rapidly. Governors are gaining in confidence to challenge the school when necessary. Leadership of the sixth form is developing well and is currently satisfactory. The management of provision for students with physical impairment is outstanding as is that for those with learning difficulties. The development of the school's effectiveness as a technology college has been slow but robust measures to accelerate improvement are now in place, including further curricular options for students.

The views of parents and pupils are sought very regularly and used to inform worthwhile changes. A few parents are concerned that homework and marking are not regular or thorough enough. Inspectors agree that there is some inconsistency in these areas.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| <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? | 2 | 3 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | Yes |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 1 | |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 | 2 |
| 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? | 2 | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 | 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? | 2 | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 | |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 | |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 | |
| 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

17 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Bushey Meads High School, Bushey, Hertfordshire WD23 4PA

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly to Bushey Meads and for sharing your ideas and opinions with us. We very much enjoyed our conversations, particularly those with the members of the school parliament. We are sure you will want to know our findings.

You are rightly proud of Bushey Meads. You think it is a good school and we agree with you. Your very able headteacher and his staff want the best for you and are determined that you will make the greatest possible progress over your time in the school. You make a very positive contribution to this ambition. Because you enjoy school, you behave well and attend regularly. You make good progress and by Year 11 reach standards that are above the national average. This is also because you are taught well. Most of you work hard though some of you pay too little attention to teachers' feedback on your written work and this sometimes hinders your learning.

You recognise that you are well cared for. We are pleased that you feel comfortable with each other and with your teachers. You tell us there is always someone to go to when needed. You are also pleased that students with physical disabilities are so well integrated into the school. You take responsibilities seriously at Bushey Meads. Some of you use your negotiating skills very well to improve conditions for fellow students, for example in improving the school bus transport. Others of you are involved in setting up an all-weather shelter for the playground. Some are sports leaders and Year 13 has contributed well to running the debating society.

When thinking about how Bushey Meads could be even better, your school agrees with us that the specialist technology areas could contribute more to improving the school further. We have also asked your teachers to ensure that lessons regularly involve you actively in your learning. For your part, you can help by continuing your very good co-operation with your teachers but also by responding more positively when teachers provide helpful feedback on your written work.

With very best wishes for your future success at Bushey Meads

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector