



# Burnt Mill Comprehensive School

## Inspection Report

---

**Unique Reference Number** 115219  
**Local Authority** ESSEX  
**Inspection number** 295303  
**Inspection dates** 22–23 February 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Robert Drew

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	First Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Community		Harlow
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Essex CM20 2NR
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01279300555
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1116	<b>Fax number</b>	01279307234
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Stephen Chamberlain
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 December 2005		

---

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–16	22–23 February 2007	295303

---

---

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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 five Additional Inspectors

## **Description of the school**

The school is average in size and serves central Harlow. The vast majority of students are White British, with very small numbers coming from several different ethnic minority groups. Attainment on entry is below average and slightly more students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is broadly average, but far fewer families than is typical of the nation as a whole have experience of higher education. The school has specialist status as a Performing Arts college.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school no longer requires significant improvement.

This judgement has been reached because the school has made good improvements since the last inspection and has raised achievement to a satisfactory level. Existing strengths continue to flourish, such as the high standards in ICT and modern languages. While overall standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are below average, they are considerably higher than at the time of the last inspection. Good improvement is evident in basic literacy and numeracy skills. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have risen most rapidly and now match the national profile of attainment. Given students' below-average attainment on entry, this demonstrates good achievement in Years 7 to 9, with satisfactory achievement in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory progress across the school as a whole. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress. The school is aware that, despite recent improvements, able students still gain too few of the higher grades and levels. Similarly, although standards in mathematics at GCSE have risen sufficiently to indicate satisfactory progress, attainment remains much lower than in English and science.

The key to improvement has been the headteacher's very clear and determined lead. He has built a strong senior team and, with their support, brought greater challenge to students and set higher expectations of staff. Teachers and subject leaders have benefited from fresh direction and training and gained a far greater awareness of their accountability. These changes have improved teaching and learning in particular and these are now satisfactory. Lessons have clear objectives and good pace. Staff manage students' behaviour securely and relationships are good. Nearly all lessons acknowledge the wide range of students' needs in each class, but only a minority provide very well for that range. In some lessons students are not given enough opportunities to discuss issues and work independently. Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are generally good. Both they and their teachers show a satisfactory awareness of their targets and how to reach them: in the very best lessons, the use of assessment is outstanding.

Students' personal development has also benefited from these changes and it is now good. The level of enjoyment seen in lessons and around school is high and students have responded well to issues of personal safety and healthy lifestyles. They contribute very effectively to the school and wider community, making good use of initiatives such as the school council and eco-group and to well-established features, for example, the first rate performing arts productions. Students benefit from active participation in a good range of extra-curricular activities and visits, learning greater independence, confidence and team skills. Behaviour is satisfactory overall. For the great majority, it is generally good, sometimes very mature and considerate, but too many students have to be excluded, despite this number falling rapidly. Care, guidance and support are good and underpin good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pastoral support and the tracking of academic progress have both been reorganised and are

now good. The good curriculum has been carefully restructured and meets students' needs well. The variety of courses in Key Stage 4 and different routes through Key Stage 3 help motivate students and sustain positive attitudes to school.

Inspectors confirm the school's view that leadership and management are satisfactory, ensuring satisfactory achievement and standards for students. Consequently, value for money is satisfactory. Recent changes show that the school has a good capacity for further improvement: it analyses its strengths and weaknesses accurately and takes appropriate action. The work of subject leaders and governors is satisfactory, having become more effective in the last two years. The headteacher has given an excellent lead and is very effectively supported by senior colleagues.

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

- Raise standards in GCSE mathematics so that they at least match those in English and science.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by ensuring consistency in the use of data, the active involvement of students and the provision of challenging work for the most able.
- Spread best practice amongst subject leadership so that the rigorous self evaluation and high aspirations seen in some areas become the norm.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

The school enables students to achieve satisfactorily. While standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are below average, they have improved substantially since the previous inspection. Some features have been better than average for several years, including the proportion of those gaining five or more A\*-C passes, which rose further last year to reach 67 per cent. A more modest gain was made where the five or more passes included GCSE English and mathematics. This figure is still too low but improvement is being sustained in current Year 11 work. Attainment in mathematics is significantly higher than in 2005, though still below national averages. English standards remain below average, but less so than mathematics. In science, Year 11 standards have improved sharply in the last two years and are above national levels. By the end of Key Stage 4, students make good progress in science and satisfactory progress in English and mathematics. Younger students are doing better, with Key Stage 3 results in 2006 broadly matching national standards, and current Year 9 work suggesting a consolidation of these standards is taking place across the school. Literacy and numeracy are much improved. More able students now make satisfactory progress: they are gaining more high levels and grades, but percentages of students achieving these grades are still below those seen nationally.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. They have opportunities to reflect during assemblies and tutor time, to consider moral issues in a number of subjects, and to learn about different cultures. The great majority behave well in lessons and around the school and support the new system of consequences and rewards. The number excluded from school has been reduced, but remains high. Well-established anti-bullying and other support procedures enable students to feel safe in school. They feel that they can turn to staff for help, as well as to fellow students. They enjoy coming to school and relationships between staff and students are good. They show that they understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through their good participation in physical recreation, including sport, and their support for the more healthy options provided in the cafeteria. Students make a very good contribution to the school and the local community. The school has been innovative in enabling students to take responsibility, and they are rightly proud of their achievements, for example, in helping to refine the behaviour policy. Many take part in productions at the local theatre and develop their teamwork, leadership and problem-solving skills as a result.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with many examples of good practice. Teachers establish good relationships with students so that the latter are keen to learn. Behaviour is usually managed well, although on occasions students are unsettled and cause disturbance. Teachers demonstrate strong commitment to helping students learn, often at lunchtime or after school. However, some lessons rely too much on the teacher's input and not enough time is given for students' independent activity or discussion.

Lessons are planned well for a range of activity and use of resources such as ICT, but there is inconsistency in the provision that teachers make to ensure that tasks match the abilities of the students. Recent initiatives are enabling teachers to provide greater challenge for higher-attaining students. Good support, including that given by subject-based teaching assistants, is effective in helping those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Extensive monitoring of teaching and initiatives on sharing good practice are leading to more effective use of assessment data to identify under-achievement and support learning. However, opportunities are not always taken to assess progress in lessons or for marking to provide precise feedback to students. Similarly, there is inconsistency in the effective use of homework.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school considers its curriculum to be good, and inspectors agree. Recent, well-planned changes to the curriculum ensure that students' interests, needs and ambitions are met. Individual learning pathways have been introduced, providing opportunities for students to progress from different starting points, receiving extra support if necessary or accelerating their progress if appropriate. This innovative approach is constantly being developed.

In Key Stage 4, students choose from a very wide range of relevant and interesting courses, both at the school and via a local college and other providers. These have been selected with advice from local industry. This choice of academic and vocational courses is supplemented with work experience. A significant number of students benefit from extended work placements.

The specialist school's Performing Arts status enriches the curriculum with after-school clubs and performances. Links with local primary schools and the wider community are good. Extra-curricular provision is particularly strong, with a very wide range of activities, both sporting and artistic. Many students participate, which further contributes to their good social and cultural development.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. The school supports vulnerable children well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and monitors their progress carefully. It makes good use of the links it has established with other agencies through the 'Teams around schools' initiative, in which it plays a leading role. There is a thorough and coherent system for tracking progress, although staff do not always use the information that it provides in their target-setting and assessment of students' work. Students and their parents appreciate the quantity and quality of the advice they are given with regard to making subject choices at the end of Year 9. The school makes good provision for information, advice and guidance regarding careers and further education, working well with local post-16 providers in order to ensure that students are aware of the different pathways open to them.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The leadership of the headteacher and his senior leadership team are good. The headteacher provides particularly strong leadership and continues to give a very clear direction to the work of the school. His high expectations are leading to the transformation of the culture of the school and to students' and parents' perceptions of it. Focused, strategic planning, rigorous tracking of students' work and implementation of good systems have already resulted in progress in key areas. This improvement is sustainable because of the increasing

impact of the senior team and the professional development of all staff, which centres round the learning needs of students. Thus, there is good capacity to improve. However, the role of middle managers in moving their subjects forward is in the process of development and there remains some inconsistency of practice, and therefore impact, on progress. The role played by governors is also satisfactory. Through their greater involvement, they now have a more accurate understanding of the performance of the school and are beginning to challenge its work more. The school uses its specialist status well by taking a leading role in enabling other schools to benefit from its expertise.



**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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

## Inspection judgements

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

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

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

### The quality of provision

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

26/02/07

Dear Students

Burnt Mill Comprehensive School, First Avenue, Harlow, Essex CM20 2NR

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school last week. Some of you also gave up part of your lunch time to speak with us, which we really appreciated.

We enjoyed our visit because the school has made big improvements since the last inspection. These improvements are set out below.

- Your rate of progress from Year 7 to Year 11 is now satisfactory.
- Standards have risen in several subjects, but especially in science.
- The proportion of students gaining five or more A\*-C grades is well above the national average. If English and mathematics are included as two of those five subjects, the proportion has risen from its very low level at the time of the last inspection.
- Your results in Year 9 tests now match national standards.
- More of you are gaining high levels or grades.
- Your behaviour is good in most lessons and around school.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory and many lessons are of good quality.
- The headteacher and senior colleagues give the school an excellent sense of direction and have shown they know how to change things for the better.

If the school is to carry on improving it needs to.

- Raise standards in GCSE mathematics even more.
- Reduce the number of exclusions.
- Make sure all subjects are led and organised as well as the best ones.
- Ensure that all lessons, not just some, have work which meets the needs of able students, uses assessment well and let you get actively involved.

Best wishes for the rest of your time at the school.

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew (Lead inspector)