

Bullers Wood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101666
Local Authority	Bromley
Inspection number	307772
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1441
6th form	359
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Cliff Hardcastle OBE
Headteacher	Ms Kathleen Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2004
School address	St Nicolas Lane Logs Hill Chislehurst BR7 5LJ
Telephone number	020 8467 2280
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Bullers Wood is a larger than average girls' school with a large, mixed sixth form. It is located in an affluent area and admits pupils with a wide range of abilities and backgrounds. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin and few speak English as an additional language. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of educational need, is lower than that typically found. The majority of these students have either moderate learning needs or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It has been designated as a High Performing Specialist School and has specialised in languages since 1996 as well as vocational education since 2007. It also specialises in 'Raising Achievement Transforming Learning'; mentoring other schools in order to raise standards. It provides school-centred initial teacher training. It has been awarded the Sportsmark, Artsmark Silver, Healthy Schools and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Bullers Wood is a good school with some outstanding features, particularly in the sixth form, and some aspects of students' personal development, but it also has some key areas in which it is satisfactory. Students in Years 12 and 13 quite rightly hold the sixth form in high regard. They are very appreciative of the ethos, the range of courses on offer and the outstanding quality of academic guidance. The school is aware that it needs to continue improving the achievement of both the lower attaining students in Key Stage 4, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The headteacher has an aspirational, determined approach to school improvement. Senior leaders have high expectations of student achievement and clearly aim for excellence in all that they do. They have achieved this in some aspects of students' personal development and in the sixth form. However, as they acknowledge, there is more to do in rigorously checking the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that it supports all students, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, in making at least good progress. The impressive arrangements for tracking academic progress in the sixth form ensure a high quality experience for all students. This clearly demonstrates that the expertise exists, and capacity is available in the school, to make sure that this will happen at Key Stage 4. The school's high expectations are not as evident when it sets challenging targets for student achievement. These are comparatively modest and only indicate satisfactory or good achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4. The school is currently reviewing these targets to ensure they are fully in line with the improved information now available on student progress.

The modern foreign language specialism has had a good impact on the opportunities available for students. In Years 7 to 9 they study two of the four languages on offer. All students in Years 10 and 11 are expected to study at least one modern language to GCSE, and many take two. The status has had a high impact in the community both at home and abroad with opportunities for students to participate in exchange visits to other countries. Modern language teachers have been able to share their expertise to support colleagues in both primary and secondary schools and in the training of new and more experienced teachers. The school also has a specialism for the development of vocational subjects. Although the introduction of this specialism is in its infancy it is already beginning to have an impact on the range of courses on offer at both GCSE and in the sixth form.

Responses from parents to the confidential questionnaire were highly supportive of the school. A significant minority of parents had concerns regarding the effectiveness of communication with the school, and how well it responds to students' views.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good and has both an outstanding curriculum and provision for care, support and guidance. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The director knows the students very well and provides good support, ensuring that their personal development and well being are outstanding. The curriculum provides a very broad choice of both academic and vocational subjects thereby successfully meeting the needs and aspirations of a wide range of students. Teaching and learning is good because teachers use their high-quality subject expertise skilfully. Students benefit from outstanding academic support. Progress is meticulously

tracked and monitored, and any potential underperformance is quickly identified and procedures put in place to address it.

A high percentage of the pupils choose to continue their education into the sixth form. The retention rate from Year 12 to Year 13 is also very high; the majority of pupils completing their AS and A2 courses achieve results that are above the national average. Sixth form students' contribution to the whole school is highly valued as they take on a range of duties including supporting and mentoring younger pupils and organising theatrical performances.

What the school should do to improve further

- More rigorously evaluate the quality of teaching and learning so that students, particularly lower attainers in Key Stage 4, achieve more.
- Set more challenging targets for student achievement.
- Use the monitoring of students with learning difficulties and and/or disabilities more effectively to improve their achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students start school in Year 7 with generally above average standards. In Years 7 to 9 standards, despite a recent decline, are above average. This still represents good achievement. Examination results in Year 11 in 2007 exceeded national expectations in some subjects, notably in modern foreign languages, drama, geography, history, statistics and vocational studies. Standards were therefore above average in Year 11. Because some lower attaining students did not make the progress they were capable of this represented satisfactory progress overall. The school recognises that the progress of low attaining students in Key Stage 4 is an area for development and has taken good action to address it this year. The school is able to provide convincing evidence that achievement will improve this year.

In the sixth form achievement and standards are good and improving because of rigorous monitoring of students' progress. Some students made outstanding progress in Year 12 in 2007. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. They feel well supported by the special education needs team and monitoring is regular, but it is not being used consistently to improve achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development is good, and in some areas outstanding. The majority of students are confident, sensitive and have very positive attitudes to learning. Most of them enjoy their lessons, have an outstanding understanding of how to stay healthy, and feel very safe in school. A carefully coordinated and well monitored personal development programme plays a significant role in creating an ethos which enables pupils to develop strong personal skills. They confidently discuss social and moral issues, and are frequently encouraged to reflect upon spiritual matters in both assemblies and the classroom. They have a good understanding of the multicultural society in which they live. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of pupils is outstanding.

A strong school council enables students to play an active role in school life. They regularly address important issues and are involved in such things as developing suggestions on 'what makes a good lesson'. Their awareness of environmental issues is demonstrated by their involvement in the sustainable schools initiative.

The poor behaviour of a small minority of students is effectively dealt with by the school inclusion unit with the result that the majority of lessons take place in a orderly atmosphere. The small numbers of bullying and racist incidents are effectively and sensitively dealt with, and as a result the school is harmonious. The strong focus on improving attendance has resulted in steady progress so that the school is just above the national average.

Students are frequently involved in the local community. The participation of sixth form pupils both within the school and the local community is outstanding. They raise impressive amounts for charity. A financial education programme and good provision for developing enterprise skills ensures that they are very well prepared for life when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students make good progress because the quality of teaching and learning is good. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not as good as that of other students, and is satisfactory. Lessons are planned and structured well. Relationships between teachers and students are generally good. Students are generally attentive and participate well.

Students work well in groups and are enthusiastic learners. For example, Year 11 GCSE English students involved in peer assessment of students' coursework essays were able to offer articulate and appropriate judgements on the work of others. This revealed they have a good understanding of the main features of particular literary styles as well as of the demands of the subject examinations.

Recent improvements in the tracking of students' academic progress and target setting are now beginning to give a more detailed picture. Students know the levels they have attained and the individual targets that have been set for them. Teachers have a good picture of the individual strengths and weaknesses of their students. However, the quality of marking and feedback varies and students do not always get clear advice on how they can improve their work. The school has implemented programmes to improve aspects of teaching and learning. These initiatives need to be monitored and evaluated more rigorously to ensure they are improving students' achievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features, particularly the opportunities it provides for talented students. There are a broad range of courses that meet the needs of most students. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to make satisfactory progress. Monitoring of achievement has led to changes and improvements in the curriculum in recent years. It reflects the specialist nature of the school by ensuring students

study two languages, with a third offered in Year 9 for higher attainers. There is good continuity of curriculum between Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

Key Stage 4 students can choose from vocational courses in addition to the academic subjects in the curriculum. This enables students to individualise their curriculum to their strengths and interests. The school has continued to broaden this offer in recent years and continues to plan for more. An alternative curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds enables some students to have a greater emphasis on work-related learning. This has proven to be particularly successful and all students on this course in Year 11 now have places on further education courses.

The enrichment programme is extensive and very successful. The offer includes a large range of sporting activities, the arts, as well as debating societies. Participation by students is very high.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The provision for the care of students is good and outstanding in the sixth form. The learning co-ordinators know their students well and understand their educational, social and personal needs. Students of all abilities say that they feel well supported. There are secure arrangements for the safeguarding of children including child protection. Partnerships with outside agencies are many and varied, adding greatly to academic standards and students' enjoyment.

There is some poor behaviour in lessons but students report that the introduction of an inclusion unit has enabled staff to deal with problems immediately and effectively. Although students do not enjoy the time spent in the unit they say it helps them to improve their attitudes and attendance.

In Years 7 to 11 students now have academic targets in all subject areas and know what they are expected to achieve. However, they are unsure how to meet those targets. The school recognises that the reliance on general comments, rather than strategies to bring about improvement, is an area for development in the marking of their work. Assessment in the sixth form is detailed and comprehensive and all students are regularly interviewed with regard to their progress towards their target grades.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good with some emerging strengths, particularly in the sixth form and in the improving monitoring of student achievement. Senior leaders are aware of the key areas for improvement, and have taken effective action. For example, they identified some underachievement last year at Key Stage 4. Senior leaders have responded by extending the monitoring of potential underachievement to all levels of ability, providing additional mentoring and learning opportunities. Sixth form students report high levels of satisfaction with the current leadership of the sixth form; not only are leaders highly approachable but students really appreciate the rigorous systems for monitoring their academic progress. There are some real strengths in middle leadership, particularly of modern foreign languages and the expressive arts.

Senior leaders overestimate the level of achievement at Key Stage 4 and the quality of teaching. The targets set for academic achievement, although realistic and based on good information, are not challenging enough to secure the outstanding achievement to which the school aspires. The school development plan is visionary and forward thinking. However, it does not consistently identify who will be held accountable for the delivery of particular areas, nor how progress will be monitored and evaluated. Although lessons are observed regularly the quality of teaching is not evaluated in a sufficiently rigorous way to give senior leaders a detailed picture of the strengths and weaknesses across the school.

Governors are effective and carry out their responsibilities diligently. They are very supportive of the school, but are aware that they could do more to challenge senior leaders on aspects of achievement and the quality of teaching.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

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	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

12 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Bullers Wood School, Chislehurst, BR7 5LJ

Thank you for speaking to us so openly when we came to inspect your school. I am writing to tell you our main findings but if you want to read the whole report you can download it from www.ofsted.gov.uk

We judged your school to be good with some outstanding features. We were particularly struck by the way you develop into confident, sensitive young people. Your many contributions to the community, both local and international, are also impressive. You are right to hold the sixth form in such high regard; you get a very good experience in Years 12 and 13 with access to a wide range of courses and good teaching which ensures that you do very well in your examinations. I was particularly pleased to meet a group of students who spoke very enthusiastically about the sixth form and their future plans.

I am sure that this will not come as a surprise, but there are still things that the school can do to improve, and it needs your full participation to do so. Despite the best efforts of the school the attendance of some of you is not as high as it could be. This is clearly an area that some of you can improve. Additionally, we have asked the school to:

- check the quality of teaching in more detail so that you achieve more, particularly in Years 10 and 11
- set more challenging targets for your examination results in Years 10 and 11
- help those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve more.

I wish all of you the very best for your future, particularly those of you with examinations to sit in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes

Her Majesty's Inspector