

Buckingham School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110484
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310327
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1000
6th form	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John White
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Jones
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2007
School address	London Road Buckingham MK18 1AT
Telephone number	01280 812206
Fax number	01280 822525

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Buckingham School is an average sized secondary school with a small, but expanding sixth form. The large majority of students are White British, with a small number of pupils from a variety of minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to the national average, although the proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is above average. The range of learning difficulties includes social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. The school has specialist status as a Sports College. When the school was inspected in January 2007 it was judged to require significant improvement and was given a Notice to Improve. In recent years the school has experienced some difficulty in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced teachers.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and that the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The school has made inadequate progress since the previous inspection, when it was given a Notice to Improve. Standards are broadly average on entry to Year 7 but are below average by the end of Year 11. Consequently, students' progress in the main school is inadequate, particularly in the last two years. Many of the parents who responded to the questionnaire were concerned about their children's lack of progress. A large number rightly identify inadequate teaching as one reason for this. This is partly because the school has difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers, especially in science and design and technology. There is some very good teaching but the use of assessment and marking is not precise or consistent enough. The school is now setting adequately challenging targets for students, but many students remain unsure about what they need to do to improve. Neither they, nor their parents, receive enough advice about how students can do better.

The governing body, headteacher and senior leadership team have been slow to rectify the areas identified for improvement by the previous inspection. A clearer action plan has now been produced as a result of increased support from the local authority, but progress towards its implementation is just beginning. Leadership and management are therefore inadequate. Despite this, staff morale remains high. The school's specialist status as a sports college has a very positive impact on the school and the local community. Teachers from the physical education department are playing a significant role in improving teaching by training colleagues in the use of assessment. A 'school improvement group', comprising of enthusiastic, able teachers from throughout the school, is working together to research and share good teaching practice. Good teaching in the sixth form enables students to achieve well.

Most teachers are dedicated to supporting the students who say they feel safe and trust staff. They enjoy the wide range of sporting activities that are provided through the school's specialist status, to develop healthy lifestyles. They respond well to opportunities to contribute to the local community, for example through peer mentoring and gaining sports leadership awards. Behaviour is satisfactory but there are occasions when some students take advantage of weaker teaching, especially from temporary teachers, and disrupt the learning of others. Students achieve a satisfactory level in basic skills in English and mathematics. A course in personal and social education, daily tutorials and workplace experience develop their capacity to co-operate with others and work as members of a team.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision for students in the sixth form is good. Despite its relatively small size, the curriculum offered to students, both within the school and through links with the local college, is broad and caters well for their needs and abilities. Many students join the sixth form with levels of attainment that are below the national average. As a result of good teaching in most subjects they achieve well. Students benefit from good individual support in small groups, and they are also encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. They reach standards that are

close to national levels, and do particularly well in the various vocational and sports courses offered by the school. In this respect, they clearly benefit from the school's status as a specialist sports college. Self-evaluation in the sixth form is satisfactory. However, the planning for some developments is hampered by insufficient representation for post-16 provision on the senior leadership team. Students receive good support and guidance from their teachers. This contributes to students' high levels of motivation and ensures that a very high proportion complete the courses that they begin. Students speak highly of their learning experiences and opportunities and are proud to be part of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement for all students, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Improve leadership and management so that plans for improvement are implemented quickly and effectively and evaluated more rigorously.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers assess students' work more precisely and show them how to improve.
- Make sure that all students get the support and advice they need to reach challenging targets.
- Make further efforts to recruit and retain more teachers.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students do not achieve well enough during their time in the school. They enter with broadly average standards but by the time they reach Year 11, standards are below average. During their first three years in the school, between Years 7 and 9, students make satisfactory progress. Results in the Year 9 national tests have improved each year since 2003 and were close to the national average in 2007. Many students achieved well in English but did less well in science. As at the time of the last inspection, too few reached or exceeded the higher Level 6.

In 2007, GCSE results were particularly low, with only one third of students gaining five or more higher grades. There were some stronger subjects, notably physical education and business studies, where results were in line with national figures. Results in physical education exceeded specialist school targets. However, overall, students' results were much lower than the school expected from its own, inaccurate assessments of standards. This continued the downward trend that was noted during the previous inspection. Results in modern languages, geography and information and communications technology were exceptionally low. The achievement of current Year 11 students is also unsatisfactory, although there are signs that standards are beginning to improve slightly. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because of the good support that they often receive from behaviour intervention programmes and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most enjoy their time in school and levels of attendance are close to the national average. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory and tutorial time is used effectively to promote students' responsibility for themselves and for others. Behaviour is satisfactory but some students,

particularly in Years 9 and 11, show poor attitudes to learning and their behaviour disrupts the progress of others. Students themselves say that they sometimes take advantage when teachers do not insist enough on high standards. Parents also express concern about the behaviour of a few pupils. Students attending behaviour intervention programmes show a willingness to address their behaviour and consider the consequences for others. The number of permanent exclusions is low. Students report they feel safe in school and say bullying is virtually unknown. One victim of bullying said he was very happy with the outcome and the way it was dealt with by the school. Students make a good contribution to the school and the local community, including the peer mentoring of younger students. In history, students are working with the local town council on a project about the holocaust. They make good efforts to lead healthy lifestyles, as shown by their willing participation in many sporting opportunities provided by the school. The economic well-being of students is satisfactory. Students achieve a satisfactory level in basic skills in English and mathematics. They gain useful workplace experience and develop their capacity to co-operate with others and work as a team.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

Closer monitoring of lessons by the senior management team is leading to some improvements in teaching and learning. However, while there are fewer inadequate lessons than at the time of the last inspection, the legacy of too much inadequate teaching over this period has resulted in poor achievement in too many subjects. Several very good lessons were observed during the inspection across a range of subjects. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations of students. Their good subject knowledge enables them to use questioning very effectively, to challenge students and promote good learning. Teachers establish good relationships with students that enable them to manage the class effectively, maintain a good pace and ensure good behaviour.

There is inconsistency of practice both across and within subjects. This is due in part to instability in staffing and the high proportion of temporary and supply teachers. Many parents rightly express concerns about frequent changes of staff leading to inadequate teaching, especially in science and design and technology. Other than in physical education, teachers' use of assessment and marking is inconsistent. Most teachers share lesson objectives with students but in the lessons observed they rarely checked that students understood how well they had achieved them. Some teachers mark students' work helpfully and show clearly how it could have been better. However, there are too many times when no reference is made to targets or work is not marked at all. As a result, students often know their grades, but do not know how to improve them. Although teachers identify the higher attaining students in their classes, not all use this knowledge to plan sufficiently challenging work for them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has good curricular links with feeder schools that ease the transition from primary to secondary education. The introduction of the "Learning to Learn" course

in Year 7, with its focus on learning skills, is helping students to understand how they learn best in other subjects. There is a good mix of academic and vocational courses for students in Years 10 and 11. All students take part in a work experience programme. Provision for information and communication technology has improved since the last inspection and the development of a virtual learning environment enables students to access programmes of study and homework via the Internet. Extended work placements, a study skills course and additional support in English, mathematics and science enable the school to provide well for students who are in danger of becoming disaffected. The school's specialist sports status has a very positive effect on the curriculum. Students enjoy a wide range of out-of-hours sports activities and several gain sports leadership awards, supporting local schools and the community. The impact of specialist status is further reflected in the growing number of courses in the sixth form, which meet students' needs well.

The school teaches citizenship to all years through humanities, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and careers. However, as at the time of the previous inspection, the school fails to report to parents the standards that students achieve in this subject. In some subjects, notably design and technology, staff illness and the lack of suitably qualified replacements has led to many classes being shared by two teachers and a lack of continuity in learning, thereby failing to meet the students' needs adequately.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good care is taken of the welfare and safety of students; rigorous procedures ensure a safe learning environment for students, and child protection procedures meet all requirements. Staff monitor behaviour and attendance well. Behaviour intervention programmes in the school's 'Behaviour 4 Learning' unit help students with more challenging behaviour to address this and appreciate its impact on others. Good links with outside agencies and sensitive support from teaching assistants enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make satisfactory progress. Students feel well supported by guidance they are given on their next steps in education and careers beyond school.

Last year the school greatly overestimated students' attainment and progress. It is improving the way that it tracks academic progress in order to identify and support underachieving students and assessment is becoming more accurate. However, the use of this data to improve standards is still inadequate. Although students are made aware of their progress towards target grades, they are unsure about what they need to do to improve. Many parents say they want more information so that they can help their children. One wrote, 'By helping the parents, the school could do a lot to improve results.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

At all levels of leadership and management, the school has not responded effectively to the areas for improvement that were identified by the previous inspection. The governing body was slow to recognise the downward trend of standards and achievement over the last few

years, but is now providing appropriate challenge and support. Since the introduction of additional well-focussed support from the local authority and the school improvement partner, self-evaluation is improving. However, it is still weak. The headteacher and senior leadership team recognise the areas in which the school is inadequate but are very dependent on external support when planning for improvement. Clearer procedures are in place to monitor students' progress towards adequately challenging targets. Closer monitoring of lessons has resulted in a reduction in the number of inadequate lessons and the identification of important areas for development in teaching and learning. However, actions taken to address these areas of weakness have not brought about the necessary improvements in standards and achievement. Some senior and middle managers still lack understanding of ways in which available data can be used to evaluate the school's work and require further training. As a result, the school's capacity to improve is inadequate.

Despite the difficulties that the school is experiencing, staff morale remains high. The headteacher has supported the creation of a 'school improvement group' to research ways of improving their own teaching and supporting their colleagues. Many of the group are less experienced teachers, but they are very enthusiastic and they exert a very positive influence.

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Annex A

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?	4	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	2
The standards ¹ 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	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	2

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?	4	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
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?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 April 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Buckingham School, Buckingham, MK18 1AT

Thank you for making the inspection team feel very welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed speaking to you and seeing the work that you are doing. It was good to see that many of you are working hard and we know that staff are also trying hard to help you to do well. You may have heard that as a result of our visit, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has decided that your school requires special measures. This means that although the school does some things well, in some important areas there are weaknesses, which the school needs help to sort out.

To improve the school, we have asked staff to concentrate particularly on:

- helping you to make better progress and reach higher grades, especially in Years 10 and 11
- improving leadership and management in the school so that plans for improvement are carried out more effectively and evaluated better
- making sure that you know exactly what you need to do to improve your work
- making sure that you get all the support and advice that you need to improve and reach challenging targets
- continue to try hard to recruit more teachers who want to work in your school.

Inspectors will be coming back in due course to check how well things are progressing. In the meantime, you can help your teachers to do some of these things. For example, you can make sure that you know your targets and ask for more advice about how to reach them when you are uncertain. We hope that you will make the most of the good opportunities that the school provides, especially in sport and links with the local community.

With best wishes for the future

William Robson

Lead Inspector