

# Burnham Grammar School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 110493               |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Buckinghamshire      |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 310332               |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 19–20 September 2007 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Cathie Munt HMI      |

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

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|---|--|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Grammar (selective)                          |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Community                                    |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 11–18  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed  |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |  |
| School                                    | 825  |
| 6th form                                  | 225  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body                           |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | Mrs S Eaton                                  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Mrs C Long                                   |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 24 November 2003                             |
| <b>School address</b>                     | Hogfair Lane<br>Burnham<br>Slough<br>SL1 7HG |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01628 604812                                 |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01628 663559                                 |

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

This smaller than average secondary school serves students from the immediate locality and from the neighbouring local authority. The school acquired Specialist Science and Mathematics status in 2003. It trains postgraduate teachers in partnership with teacher training establishments. Among other local and national awards, it acquired Investors in People status in 2002 with re-designation in 2005. Students' attainment on entry to the school is well above average. A larger proportion of students, than is the case nationally, are from minority ethnic groups, mainly Asian or British Asian. None of them is at an early stage of learning English. The headteacher leaves at the end of this term and the Head of Science takes over the role of headteacher in January.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school where students achieve high standards at all stages. The majority of sixth form students progress to university. Students' diligent approach to learning, together with teaching that is good overall, mean that they make effective progress in their education. This is most rapid in Years 7, 8, 9, and 13. Almost all of the parent questionnaires returned agreed that students enjoy school. Students endorse this view, as does their improved attendance, which is above the national figure. The majority of responses were supportive of the school. Respondents are pleased with the academic standards achieved and the care that their children receive. The school is vigilant about health and safety matters and procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are exceptionally good. Parents of Year 11 students commented on the excellent personal support provided by staff, with one praising the 'strong, practical support from the SEN (special educational needs) team'. Many parents of Year 7 students noted how well their children had settled into school routines. One commented that, 'the staff seem approachable and friendly'. Inspectors agree with students that the advice and guidance provided in the sixth form is too dependant on the expertise of individual tutors.

Staff and governors have focussed on combating inappropriate and bullying behaviour. Parents did not identify bullying as a concern and students report that the school deals with any occurrences appropriately saying that staff listen to their views and act on them. Parental concerns focussed mainly on communications issues and, rightly, with the uneven quality of teaching in some subjects, particularly when regular teachers are absent. In a very small number of the lessons observed, learning was passive and there was insufficient challenge for the most able students. The school is addressing these concerns with a new code of practice for communications and senior managers are working with individuals where teaching and learning are not good enough.

Students' personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. They work together harmoniously, respect the views of others and have a clear sense of fairness. Their fund raising for township pupils in South Africa is a typical example of their concern for others. Students benefit greatly from taking part in a wide range of sporting activities: opportunities for involvement in performing arts are more limited.

The experienced leadership team has promoted high standards over time and has made good use of the resources provided by virtue of the school's specialist status to support mathematics and science in local schools. Although much good practice is evident, a range of approaches to the management and interpretation of data has slowed the pace of improvement in some subjects. The most effective departments' strategies for improvement, and their self-evaluation documents, provide good models for others. Governors take an active part in the school's life, raising funds and spearheading projects such as the anti-bullying campaign.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The effective and efficient sixth form is well led and managed. Most students take four subjects in Year 12, chosen from a range of courses that match their mainly academic interests and aspirations. They make good progress during their time in the school and reach very high standards in their A level examinations. A high proportion gains the highest A and B grades. Students are required to take an additional AS subject such as critical thinking. Although these

courses enrich their studies and support learning in other subjects, students do not value them as highly as they might. Consequently, results for them are well below national averages.

Students are very well supported academically. They are monitored closely by their tutors and receive regular feedback on their progress through reports and review days. Students know their targets and what to do to reach them. They appreciate the one-to-one contact they have with their tutors and with some subject teachers. The vast majority progress to university. The advice and guidance they receive to help them make choices, though satisfactory, is inconsistent as it depends heavily on the expertise of individual tutors.

Teaching and learning is mainly good though the quality varies across subjects. At its best, students are encouraged through skilful questioning to think critically and take responsibility for their learning. There is a good balance between challenge and support. For example, in an A level English lesson, the teacher asked, 'am I being over-zealous in what I'm asking of you?' Facilities for private study are good and students develop the skills to work well on their own. In media studies, coursework is well structured and interim deadlines are set to enable students to manage their workloads.

Students' personal development is good. Prefects are responsible for organising mentoring for younger pupils and school events. Consequently, they develop good leadership and team-working skills. Students benefit greatly from taking part in a range of sport activities though opportunities for involvement in performing arts are limited. Some students help with a reading project at a local primary school.

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

- Develop the coherent and consistent use of data at senior management and department levels.
- Improve the consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across all departments.
- Ensure that sixth form tutors are prepared more fully to guide students in their future.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school ethos encourages students to approach their studies in a mature and confident manner. Consequently, standards are outstanding and continue to improve. Students do exceptionally well in the national tests for 14 year olds. For the past six years, results have been well above average compared to schools nationally. GCSE results are well above average and improving. The majority of students attain standards considerably higher than the expected level for the age group in the majority of subjects. A-level results are outstanding and improving. In 2006, results for physical education and information communication technology were the best in England.

Most students enter the school with well above average attainment. All students make good academic progress. However, this is not even across the school, being higher in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. An individualised tracking and assessment system identifies underperforming students. Departments do not use this data consistently to help students identify what it is they need to do to improve. The progress of higher-attaining pupils has been lower in the past than might be expected. Although effective intervention strategies are raising attainment year on year, annual targets could be more challenging. Students in the sixth form make good progress overall. Their progress is particularly good in Year 13.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students enjoy coming to school and taking part in stimulating activities. The school has worked effectively to improve its attendance, which is above average.

Good behaviour in lessons and at break times creates a calm and relaxed atmosphere. Students assume responsibilities willingly, for example mentoring or counselling younger pupils. They feel safe and well supported by staff and report that bullying is rare. When it does occur, they know staff take it seriously and deal with it promptly. The students' personal development and well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. They have a clear sense of fairness and respect the views of others. Their ability to reflect is evident in their thoughtful contributions to local and global communities. For example, before going to South Africa they raised funds to provide sporting equipment for schools that they visited in the townships. Their cultural awareness is strong because the school takes account of their diverse backgrounds and reflects this in the work around the school.

Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. A large number take part in sporting activities. Fizzy drinks have been banned and school meals have improved at their request. Students take pride in making their voices heard in the school. They report that staff take appropriate account of their views. The attitudes and skills developed by students will support them well through the next stage of their education and in later life.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning are good overall but the quality is not consistent across all subjects. The school evaluates teaching and learning well and it is developing creative strategies to address weaknesses.

In many classrooms, good working relationships encourage effective learning. Students are attentive, well motivated and work independently. Where teachers are passionate about their subjects, students respond with energy and enthusiasm. In the most effective lessons, the pace and level of challenge is well matched to the students' abilities. They are encouraged to think for themselves and apply what they learn through lively, purposeful activities. Students make links between subjects and relate their learning to issues in the wider world. For example, a Year 11 English students' presentation on 9/11 drew challenging questions from others. Information communication technology (ICT) helps make learning more active where teachers are confident in its use. Effective support means that all students are able to participate in lessons and make good progress. Good questioning encourages students to express themselves clearly thus deepening their understanding. Some teachers are particularly skilled in developing students' language skills and in promoting clear explanations.

The school rightly recognises that these good features do not occur in all lessons. Some learning can be passive and students that are more able are not always sufficiently challenged.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum focuses well on the needs of individual students and is good. It is built around the choices made by the students themselves in the upper school. Students in the sixth form can study subjects such as German and Spanish at neighbouring colleges. Before they even join the school, first-rate initiatives ensure students have a smooth transition into Year 7. Lessons on 'thinking skills' greatly enhance the personal development and academic progress of younger students. Resources and provision for ICT have improved greatly, partly because of specialist status. ICT supports students' work very well in many other subjects, for example helping science students to understand difficult concepts such as plate tectonics. Aspects of literacy and numeracy are addressed well across the curriculum. Discussing issues in pairs before answering, stressing key words in topics and reading graphs and charts accurately have had a positive impact on progress in subjects such as art, geography and history. Students enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities and there are many good opportunities for them to take on responsibility, in school and the wider community. A comprehensive programme of enterprise and career related activities, such as visiting speakers, prepare students effectively for their futures.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The quality of care, guidance and support is good with some outstanding features. This has a significant impact on pupils' well being and personal development. The school is particularly vigilant about health and safety and child protection matters. Procedures for the safe recruitment of staff are exceptionally good with very clear guidance on the assessment of risk. The personal, social and health education programme focuses effectively on the development of safe and healthy living styles. Good support systems nurture academic achievement. For example, a variety of study workshops, after school clubs and revision classes provide helpful and timely advice. Learning mentors, tutors and Heads of Key Stages know their students very well and monitor their academic and personal development systematically. Students are set targets regularly and clear expectations of annual progress are shared with them.

The school's arrangements to help pupils make a smooth transition from primary to secondary schools are excellent. Teachers receive a wide range of information about pupils' prior attainment and individual needs, enabling them to provide effective support. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive good support tailored to their needs. This helps them to achieve as well as their peers. Pupils feel well informed when choosing GCSE courses. They have good access to careers advice and guidance.

## Leadership and management

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of leadership and management is good overall. The school benefits from an experienced leadership team whose collective contributions have promoted high standards and improved the provision for all students. Self-evaluation is developing suitably, and takes into account the views of staff and governors. However, there is room for a sharper use of data in order to present a fuller picture of the progress made by the pupils.

Senior managers know the school well through their monitoring and from rigorous subject reviews undertaken with external advisors. The management of departments is variable and senior managers are tackling inconsistencies aptly. Differences in the interpretation and application of data have slowed the pace of improvement in some subjects. Some department heads, of science, modern foreign languages (MFL) and physical education for example, use data well and employ a range of effective strategies to sustain improvement. These strategies and the departments' self-evaluations provide good models for others.

The impact of the school's specialist status on standards has been most positive. It has used resources very effectively to improve standards in mathematics and science and to increase the school's capacity to work with and support local schools. Specifically, specialist funding has enabled the school to provide additional teaching groups, to recruit and retain suitably qualified teachers and senior staff, to provide laptops for teachers, to develop courses that have led to improvements in results in national tests and to provide support and challenge for the science department of a neighbouring school.

The governing body discharges its duty suitably. There is a mix of experienced and newer members and they take an active part in the school's life raising funds and spearheading projects such as the anti-bullying campaign. They have recently undertaken the successful appointment of a new headteacher who takes up post in the New Year. Vetting procedures for adults who work with learners are exceptionally well developed.

Capacity to improve is good. This judgement is supported by the school's track record in achieving consistently high standards in national exams, by the recent improvements in the higher levels attained in the Key Stage 3 national science tests, by the improved results overall for previously lower attaining groups and by the successful removal of a deficit budget.



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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 |
|---|----------------|-------|

### 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 <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 1 | 1 |
| 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                              | 2 | 2 |

### 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 2 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 2 | 2 |
| The attendance of learners  | 2 | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 2 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 | 2 |

### 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 | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?   | 2 | 3 |

<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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 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   | 2   |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards  | 2   | 2   |
| 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                     | 2   | 2   |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money  | 2   | 2   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 2   | 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

2 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Burnham Grammar School, Slough, SL1 7HG

I am writing to tell you the main judgements from the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your opinions. The vast majority of you are highly motivated, behave well and get on very well with adults and each other.

Burnham Grammar is a good school with an experienced leadership team that helps you to do very well in your exams and to go on successfully to further education. Of course, as most of you had very good Key Stage 2 results we expect you to make good progress in your learning. Your hard work, together with the good teaching that you receive in most lessons, ensures that this occurs. Attendance figures have improved. You need to attend regularly if you want to get the best out of your education. There is a lot of information in school about how you are doing. Some departments use this better than others do to help you to know what you need to do next. Managers and department heads need to make sure that everyone agrees on how data is used. The sixth form offers you many interesting opportunities. We have asked the school to make sure that the new tutors have all the training that they need so that they can offer you the best advice possible as you plan your futures.

Very many of you take part in a large number of sporting activities and eat sensibly. Well done for keeping fit and developing excellent habits for the future. Your parents believe that the school cares well for you. They are particularly pleased with the way it helps those with personal or learning problems and with how Year 7 pupils are helped to settle in. We agree that this is an excellent feature of the school. They are concerned that in some classes the teaching is not as good as it should be. The school knows this and it is working hard to improve the situation so that in every lesson you are challenged sufficiently. Some of your parents would like communication with the school to be better. The school is looking at what it can do to improve this. You can help here by delivering messages reliably.

Specialist status has enabled the school to improve ICT provision, to provide additional courses and, most importantly, to attract and keep high quality staff. The governors and staff have worked hard to make bullying unacceptable. You have told us that this has been a successful campaign. However, you need to be vigilant and continue to take personal responsibility to ensure that this remains so.

With best wishes for your future

Catherine Munt

Her Majesty's Inspector