

The Radcliffe School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 110532 |
| Local Authority | Milton Keynes |
| Inspection number | 310349 |
| Inspection dates | 30–31 January 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Emma Ing HMI |

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 | 916 |
| 6th form | 100 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Rev Jeremy Trigg |
| Headteacher | Mr John O'Donnell |
| Date of previous school inspection | 23 November 2005 |
| School address | Aylesbury Street West Wolverton Milton Keynes MK12 5BT |
| Telephone number | 01908 682222 |
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|--------------------------|--------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors. The school was removed from special measures at the last inspection in November 2005.

Description of the school

The Radcliffe School is an averaged-sized comprehensive. The community it serves is mixed both socially and economically. Almost one fifth of students are eligible for free school meals which is slightly above the national average. Whilst most students are from White British backgrounds, a sizable proportion are from Pakistani backgrounds and a very small minority are from Black British and other minority ethnic groups. Around one in five students speak English as an additional language and many of these are at an early stage of learning English. A high proportion of students join the school during the school year. The proportion of students with learning difficulties is in line with national averages.

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 students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing and governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The leaders at Radcliffe School do not consistently have high enough expectations of its students and are not enabling them to make progress in line with that achieved by similar students nationally. Students arrive at the school with prior attainment that is below average and, in particular, many have weak literacy skills. When they complete compulsory education at the age of sixteen, the standards that they reach are exceptionally low. The sixth-form curriculum does not meet the needs of the students and progress made by students in the sixth form is erratic and inadequate overall.

Leaders have too generous a picture of the school's performance and are not sufficiently focused on the school's current weak performance. Strategies to raise performance are not at the forefront of the schools' thinking and the systems and procedures that are required to improve the quality of education are not working robustly.

A small but significant minority of parents express legitimate concerns that their children are not being stretched, that there is too little homework and that expectations are too low. There is too much inadequate teaching and not enough good teaching throughout the school. Whilst some departments have been supported by outside agencies, whole-school initiatives have not been effective at securing consistently satisfactory teaching.

The school has put into place new systems for tracking the progress made by students. These are used to inform support packages for those who are falling behind. However, they are not yet gathered together in a reliable and coherent whole school package that enables senior leaders to know accurately how individual students are doing. Neither are they used to analyse the performance of different subjects and teachers in order to drive progress. Teachers are not using data well to inform their planning and ensure that all students are appropriately challenged in their lessons.

The school has had success in improving the behaviour of students, which is satisfactory, and also in making sure that attendance is now in line with the national figures. Students contribute well to their school through peer mentoring, helping with reading, participating in house competitions and to the community as a whole through the Junior Sports leader Awards and participation in local youth politics, for example.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The progress made by students in the sixth form fluctuates. The cohort that completed their A Levels in 2006 made inadequate progress, but those leaving in 2007 achieved in line with expectations. The school's tracking data indicates that students currently in Year 13 are not doing as well as they should. In addition, too many students are not staying on to pursue the second year of their A Level course. For some, poor progress and poor staying on rates are because they are doing courses that are not appropriate for them, given their level of prior attainment. The curriculum in the sixth form, whilst broad in respect of the number of A Levels offered is narrow in respect of the range of different types of courses offered. The school does

not collaborate with other local schools to ensure a good range of courses on offer or viable numbers in teaching groups. Many subjects are operating with fewer than five students, which means that the sixth form is not economically viable. Teaching in the sixth form is inadequate.

Sixth-form students are gaining valuable experiences in contributing to the life of the school and through extra curricular activities such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Their behaviour is satisfactory. Sixth formers are not receiving good academic support through the tutorial system.

The leadership of the sixth form is supportive of students. However, there is insufficient challenge to students and quality assurance systems are not in place. The schools' self-evaluation of this area of the school's work lacks rigour and is over-generous. Although the progress made by students is monitored, this process is not sufficiently sharp to ensure that all are enabled to achieve as they should.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rate of progress made by students in their work.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels by ensuring robust and accurate self-evaluation leading to actions that improve outcomes for students.
- Improve the quality of teaching to eliminate inadequate lessons and increase the proportion of good lessons.
- Ensure that the sixth-form curriculum and support meets the needs of students and enables them to achieve well.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 4

The standards reached by students at the end of compulsory schooling are exceptionally low. There has been no improvement since the school came out of special measures in 2005 and particularly on some indicators, notably the proportion of students with 5 A*-C including English and maths at GCSE, and the proportion achieving 5 A*-G grades at GCSE.

The progress made by students between Key Stages 2 and 4 is inadequate. Progress in mathematics is particularly poor. None of last year's Year 11 pupils made exceptional progress over their five years at the school. White British and Pakistani students made less good progress than the rest of the cohort. Those with statements of special educational need made better-than-average progress.

Observations in lessons confirmed other inspection evidence that students are not making satisfactory progress. There have been some improvements in the teaching of mathematics, but not enough to enable students to catch up, as they should. The scrutiny of students' work indicates that improvements have been secured in English and, in this subject, students are on track to meet challenging targets. In addition, there is some good progress being made in BTEC physical education and in art. Those students taking entry level and Youth Award courses are working well and making satisfactory progress. Students, and some parents, are rightly concerned that achievement in information and communication technology is poor.

The progress made by younger students at Key Stage 3 improved last year and is now satisfactory. Standards at this level have dropped since 2005 but remain average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students are personable and generally well behaved around the school. Relationships are generally good and the atmosphere is positive. The incidence of behaviour leading to exclusions has been reduced but is still high. In lessons, students are apt to be passive learners and too many are quietly 'off task' for significant periods. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory.

Students report that there is little bullying or racist behaviour. Many are involved in a range of extra-curricular activities, which they report they enjoy and is helping their personal development. The contribution that they make to the community is good. A high proportion are training to be junior sports leaders, many are involved in peer mediation and mentoring schemes and in house competitions. Students feel confident that they have sufficient information to live healthily and stay safe.

The social, cultural, moral and spiritual development of students is satisfactory overall. Students are inadequately equipped for their future lives because they are not developing sound information technology, numeracy and literacy skills and because they are not given enough opportunities to develop team working skills and initiative.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 4

There is improvement in the teaching of English and mathematics but across the school the proportion of inadequate lessons is too high and the proportion of good or better lessons is too low. The relationships in most lessons are good and teachers do identify the intended outcomes of the lesson.

Most students know what level they are working at and what their targets are. Nevertheless, few teachers clearly explain to them what they have to do to improve their work. In only a few subjects are students expected to evaluate their own work and encouraged to take responsibility for their progress. Across the curriculum, there is too little support for students to develop literacy, numeracy and information technology skills. The pace of work is generally slow; lessons do not stretch students because expectations are low and teachers are not using assessment data to plan lessons that meet the needs of different groups of learners. This means that in too many lessons there are some students who are not making sufficient progress.

The school monitors the quality of teaching and learning but inspection evidence indicates that the school's evaluation is significantly over-generous, particularly in relation to lessons in the sixth form. There is not enough sharing of good practice and it is not clear that there are consistent expectations of teachers' lessons that are driven by senior and middle leaders.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The school has recently increased the vocational opportunities available to students in Key Stage 4 and these are proving successful. In addition, a range of entry-level courses provides sound opportunities and enables less able students to gain qualifications. The college programme, which is valued by those students who undertake it, is not evaluated by the school. Students participating in this are disadvantaged because as a result of clumsy timetabling they miss lessons, which teach important basic skills such as mathematics and English. There is good provision for enrichment and after-school activities including catch up and homework support.

Information and communication technology is taught partly through vocational courses. Because the school has not mapped or audited this provision, it cannot demonstrate that statutory requirements are being met. The development of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum is weak.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

As a result of actions taken by the school the behaviour of students is satisfactory in lessons generally and around the school. Although much reduced, the numbers of students that are excluded from the school for short periods remains high and this has a negative impact on these students' progress. The school has worked hard and with success to improve attendance, which is now satisfactory. Arrangements for safeguarding are adequate. The pastoral care in the school is good. However, a small but significant minority of parents expressed concerns about the quality of the school's communication with them.

The vertical tutor system has been a success in enabling students to integrate well in the school and in encouraging cross year friendships and responsibility. However, it has not been helpful in terms of the academic monitoring and support given to sixth formers.

The provision for students with learning difficulties is now satisfactory. The support given to learners who are at an early stage of learning English when they arrive at the school is good, but it is inconsistent in classes with some teachers failing to adapt their lesson to meet these students' needs. The induction of students who join the school mid-year is insecure. The support for students arriving from primary schools is a strength.

Students know their targets and the school provides good opportunities for these to be discussed with their parents. Systems tracking students' progress are being used to determine intervention with some success. The guidance of students into post 16 options is weak as insufficient information is given about the range of options available.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 4

The leaders of the school are failing to give clear direction about what needs to be done to improve the quality of education for the current group of learners and has not managed to secure satisfactory outcomes for them. Senior and middle leaders do not have a realistic view about the weaknesses of the school. Planning is not based on rigorous self-evaluation and does not include effective systems for evaluating the impact of what is being done. Important statistical data, for example, that showing underperformance of a particular ethnic group of students, is not taken into account, and therefore opportunities to improve matters are missed.

The school does seek to manage the performance of staff, but many of the targets set are not related to quantifiable outcomes for students. Senior leaders have not been effective at holding staff to account. Governors have not provided adequate challenge to the school and have allowed 'Project Radcliffe' and the school's bid for specialist school status to dominate debate at the expense of current performance. The school operates with a sizeable deficit budget that has been agreed with the local authority. It does not provide value for money.

The school's method of determining targets is confused and having first yielded targets with insufficient challenge is now yielding targets that are unhelpful because as they are based on little evidence they are too challenging. Although the school is now generating data that shows the performance of the students, leaders are rightly aware that it is based on judgements that are not universally reliable and therefore is not secure. The analysis of this data by senior leaders is not sufficiently rigorous to enable them to identify areas for concern.

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

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 4 | 4 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 4 | 4 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 4 | |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 | |
| 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 | 4 | |

The quality of provision

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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

05 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Radcliffe School, Milton Keynes, MK12 5BT

I would like to thank those of you who the inspection team met both formally and informally during our inspection visit. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you at your work. We agree with those of you that told us that it is a friendly school and that relationships are good.

Well done for working with the school to improve your attendance and behaviour. We were impressed by your levels of contribution to the school and wider community, which we judged as good. We were concerned however that too few of you are making satisfactory progress with your work during your time at school. As some of your parents mentioned, you are not being challenged enough and the expectations of the school are too low. The teaching is not good enough in the sixth form and in the school as a whole. The sixth form does not provide an appropriate range of courses for you and is not working well enough with the college and local schools to ensure that there are good opportunities. We therefore judge the school to be failing to provide you with an adequate education. As a result, we have placed the school in Special Measures. This means that the school will get additional support and that inspectors will visit the school on a termly basis to ensure that progress is being made towards ensuring that all of you are achieving as you should.

I hope things go well for you and for your school in the future.

Yours sincerely

Emma Ing

Her Majesty's Inspector