

The Grange School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110488
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325156
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1254
Sixth form	142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Morrey
Headteacher	Mr Vincent Murray
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2006
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 24 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at school documents, including its analyses of students' progress and 231 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- students' progress in Years 10 and 11, with particular focus on English and mathematics
- the progress of previously underachieving groups of students, particularly girls, and Pakistani students
- how effectively assessment and attainment data is used to plan teaching which meets the needs of all abilities
- the effectiveness of actions taken to improve attendance overall and reduce persistent absenteeism.

Information about the school

The Grange School is a larger than average secondary modern school in an authority with 13 grammar schools. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those whose first language is not English is above average. A significant number of students join the school at times other than the start of the school year, some of whom are at an early stage of learning English. Approximately 70% of students are White British and of the 30% from other ethnic groups, the largest single group are of Pakistani heritage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average.

The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a little higher than average, but the percentage with statements of special educational needs is lower than average. Students with moderate learning difficulties, dyslexia or emotional and social needs represent the majority of those identified with learning difficulties. The school was awarded specialist status in business and enterprise in November 2008.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Grange School is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. The headteacher has a clear vision for the improvement of the school which is both ambitious and pragmatic. He is well respected by staff, students and parents and well supported by a good and improving senior leadership team. Students and parents alike commented on how much the school has improved over the last few years. One parent said, 'The headteacher has turned this school around.'

Since the last inspection improvements are evident in students' behaviour, the progress made by those with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the curriculum and most aspects of leadership and management. Care, guidance and support are good and remain a strength of the school.

The school creates a harmonious environment where students learn to respect others and work well together. Many parents said they were pleased to have their child at The Grange, where they believed they were well cared for and they were making progress. One said, 'It was the best move we made!'

The school is strongly focused on raising expectations and achievement further. Self-evaluation throughout the school leads to an honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses and actions are taken where deficiencies are found. Systems to monitor students' progress have been strengthened and are comprehensive. These have identified key areas where students have not made sufficient progress in the past, including that of girls, some higher-ability students and Pakistani students. A range of actions taken to support students this year is having a positive impact on improving progress, which is now satisfactory for most students. Students on the school's special educational needs register and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress as a result of the good support they receive. Several parents said that this had enabled their children to make good progress in learning English in a short time.

While the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, inspectors observed much good and some outstanding practice. The school is working hard to improve the consistency of the quality of teaching, but the best practice is not yet seen consistently across the school. Managers are aware that there is more work to do to ensure that assessment for learning strategies are used effectively in all subjects and

that all teachers plan lessons to meet the different needs and abilities of all students. While attainment in English and mathematics is improving, too many students do not develop good basic skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maximise students' academic progress by ensuring that all teachers provide students with consistent and regular oral and written feedback, so that they know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Raise the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers focus sharply on what they want students to learn and by matching tasks more accurately to students' abilities.
- Improve students' future economic well-being by developing students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT consistently across all subjects and year groups.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

In the lessons observed, students' learning was satisfactory overall, and good or very good in the best lessons. Students have positive attitudes to learning, and most participate well in class activities. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually good. Many students told inspectors how much this had improved over the last few years. In many practical lessons there was a high level of engagement and students worked very enthusiastically, making good progress. Occasionally, when lessons do not interest students sufficiently or the pace is too slow, a few students lose concentration and low-level disruption slows the rate of learning in the class. Students made satisfactory progress in the mathematics lessons observed and satisfactory or good progress in English lessons.

In 2008, not all students in the school made the expected progress, relative to their prior attainment. Results in mathematics declined due to changes in examinations and staffing shortages. This caused the proportion of students who achieved five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, to decline in 2008, after several years of steady improvement. The rates of progress for girls was often lower than that of boys, some higher-ability students did not achieve the expected results and Pakistani students achieved less well than their White British counterparts.

The school has implemented a wide range of strategies to support those students at risks of underachieving and to help them to improve their performance. These included homework and study sessions at lunchtime and after school, additional lessons, mentoring and one-to-one tuition. The school's current monitoring data indicate that these strategies are having a positive impact and that GCSE results in 2009 are likely to show a clear improvement. Evaluation of the mentoring schemes indicates that they have had a particularly positive effect on girls' achievement, but managers are aware that the achievement of Pakistani students remains lower than that of their peers.

While the majority of students enjoy school, attendance rates are broadly average.

The persistent absence of a comparatively small number of students brings the overall rate down, but the school has made significant improvement in this respect over the last year.

Students say they feel safe in school and are confident that the relatively rare incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are dealt with quickly. They have a good awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and many of them regularly take part in sports activities. The student council was instrumental in ensuring an improved range of healthy food choices in the canteen. Many students take active roles within the school community, for example by acting as buddies or mentors for younger students and coaching sports activities for students in local primary schools. Health education and citizenship are covered well through the school's SPACE programme.

Students are given good opportunities to reflect on key issues, for example in assemblies and tutor periods. The school's emphasis on good behaviour and high expectations results in students developing clear moral guidelines and the skills required to thrive in a culturally diverse community. Students respect the faith and culture of others, and they work well together.

Students develop good personal skills needed in education and the workplace, and the recently awarded business and enterprise status is beginning to raise the profile of enterprise activities in the school. However, the school acknowledges the need to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

In all lessons observed there were very good relationships between teachers and

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

students, based on mutual respect and trust. In the best lessons observed, students made very good progress, well supported by teachers' good subject knowledge and work which provided a good level of challenge for all students. Questioning was often used very well, both to check students' progress and understanding, but also to extend their thinking. For example, in an outstanding science lesson all students were fully engaged and made excellent progress as a result of clear demonstration of new concepts by the teachers, followed by students working independently in pairs. Regular assessment and good use of praise by the teacher helped to build students' confidence. In an outstanding drama lesson the teacher helped students to develop their critical and reflective skills by providing opportunities for peer assessment and feedback on students' performance work.

However, such strengths are not seen consistently throughout the school, and some lessons, although satisfactory overall, lack this level of challenge and engagement. Lesson objectives are not always clearly defined, and are often too focused on the tasks students are doing rather than on what they are learning. Planned activities are not always sufficiently adapted to meet students' different abilities, so students do not always achieve as well as they could. Sometimes the pace of learning is too slow and this can lead to lack of concentration and low-level disruption. Teachers do not always use questioning effectively to check students' understanding and, too often, answered their own questions.

Most students are able to talk confidently about their work and know their targets. However, the frequency and quality of marking are variable across the school. Students do not always receive constructive advice on how to improve their work and its presentation. Tracking students' progress is now well established across the school, although the effectiveness of the use of assessment data to set targets and inform lesson planning varies between different departments. Good practice in teaching and assessment is not always effectively shared.

The school has developed its curriculum well to meet the particular needs of its students and has made good progress in introducing new approaches in Year 7. This allows for a more cross-curricular approach and is developing greater awareness of learning skills and techniques. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has improved since the last inspection through the introduction of a more flexible option system, including academic and vocational courses. Good partnerships through the local 14–19 consortium, and with local school and colleges, extend the range of courses available, and are supporting the introduction of new diploma courses next year.

Students value the good range of extra-curricular activities, and many participate regularly in sports, technology, art and music activities. The school responds well to its diverse ethnic community by offering courses in Urdu and Polish. While it is too early for the school's specialist status in business and enterprise to demonstrate a clear impact on students' achievement, there are good plans and some innovative ideas to promote enterprise activities across the school. The business and enterprise curriculum is being strengthened, with a greater range of options available.

Arrangements for care and guidance enable students to make the best of the opportunities offered by the school. Many parents commented positively on how the good transition arrangements and links with primary schools helped their children to

settle in very quickly. Students with particular learning needs are identified and support is provided quickly. Strong partnerships with external agencies and specialist services provide good support for vulnerable students. For example, a brother and sister joined the school from abroad, never having been in formal education. The school provided sensitive and personalised support to help both settle in well. Good specialist learning support is effective in helping students achieve. For example, a boy with severe dyslexia has been supported to progress to an A-level programme.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has built a committed and dedicated staff team. Middle managers increasingly share his vision for the school. Both at senior and middle leader level, data on students' progress is analysed with increasing confidence although this is still underused by some teachers in planning and assessment.

Equality of opportunity is embedded well across the school. Students of all faith backgrounds work well together in lessons and the school has a positive atmosphere. Respect for human rights is embedded across the curriculum and stereotypical views are both explored and challenged. Actions taken by the school to reduce differences in achievement between different groups of students are beginning to have a positive impact.

Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. Arrangements are in line with government requirements and there is good training for staff that is regularly reviewed. Child protection arrangements are well understood by staff. There is an appropriate level of expertise and good links with outside agencies to ensure students' safety and well-being.

Community cohesion is well developed across the school. There is a clear understanding of context and the school has systematically evaluated its current provision and planned accordingly. It is increasingly well regarded in the local community. Parents and carers are very positive about the school. The school works hard to engage with parents and these effective links have had a positive impact on promoting students' learning and well-being.

Governors fulfil their statutory duties and are aware of the school's main strengths and areas requiring improvement. Finances have been well managed to eradicate a previous financial deficit. The school deploys its resources effectively and, with improving achievement, provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Outcomes for sixth form students are satisfactory. Students' prior attainment when they join the sixth form is a little below average. Results on AS- and A-level courses tend to be a little below average, but they achieve well on vocational courses. In the past girls have tended to achieve less well than boys. The school monitors progress closely and, in the current year, there are early indicators that students are making better progress. The school is working to close the gap in attainment between boys and girls.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most teaching is thorough, but it does not always challenge students sufficiently and there are missed opportunities for students to work more collaboratively and independently. The school has improved the curriculum through introducing a greater range of vocational options at Level 3, which are better suited to the students' needs and interests. Students value the good range of enrichment activities available, including opportunities to be involved in sports and charitable work. There are few courses available to enable students not yet ready for advanced level study to progress to the sixth form. Students receive good advice on future higher education and career options and many are successful in moving on to higher education.

Sixth form leaders have undertaken a thorough evaluation of sixth form provision and have a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. Actions taken have already led to improvements in the curriculum offer and monitoring students' progress.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at The Grange school to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions for each of their children.

The inspection team received 231 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 1064 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	143	81	4	3

Parental questionnaires indicated that the vast majority are very supportive of the school and value its supportive and caring ethos. Several responses indicated that the school provides very good, personalised support for students, for example those who have suffered serious illnesses. Many parents commented on the significant improvement they have seen in the school over the last few years and most are happy with the progress their child is making. A small minority indicated they would like to be better informed about their child's progress and would like the school to help them support their child's learning more.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



01 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Grange School, Aylesbury, HP21 7NH

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for making us so welcome and helping us with the inspection. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you in your lessons and around the school. Many of you and your parents/carers spoke very positively about the school and how much has improved over the last few years. We have taken these views into account in arriving at our judgement that your school is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school.

In 2008 not all students made as much progress as expected, and managers identified that some groups were not doing as well as they could. The school is working hard to improve this, through close monitoring of progress and lots of additional support. There are early signs that this is having a positive effect and the school expects results in 2009 to show clear improvement.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, but inspectors also saw good and some outstanding lessons. Most lessons are well planned, but the work does not always meet the full range of abilities in the class. The quality and frequency of marking varies between subjects. We have asked the school to make sure that all teachers plan work to meet students' different abilities and to make sure that you receive good oral and written feedback on your work to help you improve. Current monitoring indicates that results in English and mathematics are set to improve this year, but there are still too many students who do not fully develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. We have asked the school to ensure that these are well developed in all subjects to help prepare you to progress to further education or employment.

Most of you told us that you really enjoy school and the vast majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school. Attendance is improving and is broadly average. Lots of you participate regularly in sports and arts activities out of school and told us how much you enjoy team events, competitions and arts performances in drama and music. Many of you take up the opportunities to get involved in school and local community events and contribute strongly to helping others, for example in local schools, through fund-raising activities and mentoring other students in school.

You told us how much you value the help and support you get from staff in the school. They are very committed to ensuring you all achieve as well as you can and to making The Grange a good school in all aspects. We hope you will all contribute to this by attending regularly and working hard to achieve your full potential.

Yours faithfully

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector

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