

Burford School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123235
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327874
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

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

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Thomas Webber

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1174
Sixth form	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Pitman
Headteacher	Mrs Kathryn Haig
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2006
School address	Cheltenham Road Burford OX18 4PL
Telephone number	01993 823303

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2009
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Fax number

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Burford School and Community College is a larger-than-average 11–18 mixed comprehensive school with boarding provision for 82 students. It serves a widespread rural community, with significant numbers of students from isolated areas. The proportion of students taking free school meals is low. A small proportion of the students are from minority ethnic heritage and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is broadly in line with the national average. The school caters for students with a wide range of learning support needs, including significant numbers with behavioural, emotional and social needs, those with moderate learning difficulties and some with Aspergers syndrome.

The school has had specialist technology status since 2003 and was recently awarded a second specialism in science. The school also offers some family learning and adult education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Burford School is a satisfactory and improving school. The school is well supported by parents and is popular with prospective parents. Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9, and while rates of progress have declined in Years 10 and 11 over the last two years, recent improvements indicate that most students are now making satisfactory progress. The school provides good care, guidance and support for its students, which contributes well to their good personal development. Students say that they feel very safe in school and well cared for by staff who know them individually. Pastoral care is a key strength of the school. The effective leadership of the headteacher, who joined the school a year ago, is providing a clear focus for improvement. Through her guidance, the school has clearly identified strengths and areas for improvement and actions to secure improvements are beginning to have effect.

The school has a strong senior and middle leadership team, committed to improving teaching and learning and raising achievement. The use of data to record and monitor students' progress has improved greatly over the last year and is now good. This is helping managers and teachers to review performance regularly and take prompt action where they identify any areas of underachievement.

Analysis of students' performance over the last year revealed that, while higher-ability students made good progress and achieved well, there were too many middle-ability girls and lower-ability boys who were not reaching their targets. The school has explored the different reasons why individuals or groups of students have achieved less well than expected and put in place a varied range of well-targeted improvement strategies. These are precisely tailored to meet students' needs and the close monitoring of their progress demonstrates that they are having a positive effect on raising students' achievement.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. While inspectors observed much good teaching, and some outstanding practice, there is still too much variation in the quality of lessons and in the quality of marking and feedback, both within and between subjects. The school has identified this in its self-evaluation and has set clear priorities to improve the consistency of teaching and learning in the school improvement plan.

The curriculum, while broad and balanced, is still largely traditional with a few flexible pathways to meet different needs. A small number of vocational courses are available through collaboration with a local further education college. The range of extra-curricular activities is outstanding, and student participation is high. These activities contribute significantly to students' enjoyment of school life.

The school's specialist technology status has helped to increase the number of departments using information and communication technology (ICT) projects to enhance learning projects. Students can choose from a good range of design and technology options at GCSE and there are well-equipped and well-resourced specialist facilities. The second specialism in science was awarded too recently to evaluate its impact.

Most students enjoy school, have positive attitudes to learning and behave well, both in lessons and around the school. Parents say that their children have settled into the school very well and they value the good care and support their children receive. The concerns of some parents about the quality of teaching and the setting and marking of homework are being addressed by the school. A few raised concerns about occasional low-level disruption to lessons by a minority of students. Inspectors did not witness this in the sample of lessons observed, but

strategies to ensure the elimination of such behaviour are clearly reflected in the school's priorities for improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education. Results in A-level examinations were good in 2007 and the proportion of students achieving A and B grades was well above average. However, students in Year 12 achieved less well than expected in AS-level courses and this prompted the school to revise its systems for setting targets and monitoring students' progress. Results improved in 2008, and more students achieved A and B grades. Nevertheless, despite these improvements, too many students did not achieve their target grades. These disappointing outcomes caused a lower than expected proportion of students to continue with A level courses in Year 13. While overall pass rates in A level examinations remain high, the proportion of students who achieved A and B grades declined in 2008 and fell just below the national average.

Leaders of the sixth form have taken determined and effective action to identify and address reasons for recent fluctuations in achievement. Year 11 students entering the sixth form are carefully guided as to which courses match their needs and capability. All students sign a contract making clear their responsibility for their own learning. Systems for monitoring their effort, attendance and progress have been reviewed so that reasons for underperformance are quickly addressed. Students are required to undertake private study during school hours.

Teachers are beginning to use assessment information well to plan lessons that increasingly provide an appropriate degree of challenge. Students report that lessons are often interesting and stimulating, but there is still variation in the quality of teaching across subjects. The curriculum has a broad range of AS and A2 choices, but, as at the time of the last inspection, there is still only one vocational pathway at Level 2. The small number of students who take this achieve well and many progress into employment.

Personal development is good with students making a significant contribution to the school and local community. For example, students mentor younger students, work with local primary and special schools, organise arts events in the local area and fund raise for charity. Students value the good support they receive from teachers and tutors, especially in making career choices and in progression to higher education or employment.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 3

The quality of boarding is satisfactory. All the key standards were evaluated. Four of the five key outcomes were rated good, but deficiencies under the staying safe theme led to a grade of satisfactory overall. The school has taken action to address the two previous recommendations. However, the school is still reviewing the security arrangements to further enhance the safety of the boarders. The promotion of diversity and equality is good and is promoted well in all aspects of the service.

Boarders live in an environment where their health and emotional care needs are met. Clear record systems are established. Risk assessments are completed for those boarders maintaining their own medication. Matrons provide a competent service supported by local health care professionals. Boarders are registered with the local surgery and access a range of health care facilities and specialist support as required. They also receive advice and information on a range of other health care issues. Boarders are provided with varied and wholesome meals which

provide for specific religious, cultural and dietary needs. There are opportunities for boarders to comment and make suggestions about food provided. Mealtimes are conducted in a social, relaxed and congenial atmosphere. Boarders are happy with the range, quality and quantity of food provided.

Boarders feel safe at the school. Bullying is not an issue but action is taken when it occurs. There are clear disciplinary measures in place which are seen as fair by the boarders. Staff receive regular and appropriate child protection training and are aware of the reporting procedures. There are clear complaints procedures and boarders feel comfortable in raising and discussing issues and concerns with staff. No complaints have been received. Appropriate measures are in place to protect boarders and staff from the risk of fire. Not all areas of the building are risk free and the recording of accidents is not linked to health and safety monitoring. Security arrangements are still an area of concern, particularly regarding an external door on the boys' side of the house. Safe and robust recruitment systems are in place for the selection and vetting of all staff to ensure the protection of boarders. However, not all records were fully complete.

A strong sense of community exists within the boarding provision. Relationships between boarders and staff are mutually respectful. They feel that they live in a family atmosphere. Boarders value the personal support received from a wide range of staff. Most boarders feel secure in taking personal matters to tutors and boarding staff. They do not experience discrimination. Although there are separate gender common rooms, the boarders integrate and there are easy and relaxed relationships between both genders and between boarders and staff. The boarders are polite, well mannered and conduct themselves in an exemplary manner.

Boarders are listened to and their views contribute to the operation of the boarding provision. Boarders are pleased with the recent reintroduction of the year representative system. All boarders maintain contact with their families and have access to landlines, mobile phones and the internet to assist with maintaining contact. Arrangements are in place to prevent inappropriate use.

The overall standard of boarding accommodation is good. Boarders live in a homely and relaxed environment which is well decorated and maintained with an exceptional standard of cleanliness. The facilities provide appropriate levels of privacy and meet the needs of boarders. Some boarders expressed concerns about not having easy access to lockers to keep their personal possessions safe. There are banks of lockers available, but not always close enough to the boarders' rooms, so they are not all used. Boarders are provided with shared room and dormitory accommodation arranged by gender and age and the choice of who they share with is taken into consideration. Boarders are able to personalise their bed space. There are sufficient communal, toilet and washing facilities to meet the needs of the boarders. Boarders are happy with the accommodation provided.

A statement of the school's principles and practices are available to boarders, parents and staff. Staff have access to written guidance on policies and procedures, some of which are being revised. Staffing levels within the provision are sufficient to meet the needs of boarders. Boarders are happy with the standard of care and support available. Although staff receive some training there is no effective system to record and monitor this. Informal supervision arrangements and meetings are undertaken. However, boarding staff are not provided with formal supervision meetings or appraisals which regularly review their performance. There is a lack of cohesion within the staff team which undermines their effectiveness. Roles and responsibilities are blurred and decision-making powers are not sufficiently developed. Staff

are unable to access systems to enable the effective running of the boarding provision. Although this does not have a major impact on the boarders, it does affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff team.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

The school must ensure that it meets the National Minimum Standards currently not met, as detailed below:

- ensure that all the required recruitment checks are undertaken and recorded for all staff prior to the commencement of employment (NMS 38)
- ensure that measures are put in place to increase the security of the boarding accommodation (NMS 41)
- ensure that all areas of the building are risk free (NMS 47)
- ensure that all accidents reported are linked to health and safety monitoring (NMS 47)
- ensure that sufficient lockable facilities are provided to all boarders within reasonable proximity to their personal accommodation (NMS 20)
- ensure that the management structure operates in a cohesive manner (NMS 8)
- ensure that all boarding staff receive appropriate training which is suitably recorded (NMS 34)
- ensure that all boarding staff receive appropriate levels of formal supervision meetings and appraisals (NMS 34).

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase rates of progress, especially in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, to raise achievement.
- Improve the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment feedback across and within subjects.
- Expand the range of vocational options and more flexible approaches to meet the needs of all students, particularly in the sixth form.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is a little above the national average. They make good progress during Years 7 to 9 and results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are above average in English, mathematics and science. However, rates of progress have declined in Years 10 and 11 over the last few years and students' attainment in GCSE examinations is satisfactory. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has declined since 2006 but remains above the national average.

There is evidence that recent improvement strategies are beginning to have a positive effect on the performance of current Year 11 students. The proportion of students who are making the necessary progress to achieve their targets is increasing, and there have been improvements in the mock examination results in 2009, compared to the previous year. Monitoring of quality and completion of course work also shows improvements compared to this time last year. Results in science modules taken at the end of Year 10 were better than previously achieved.

Almost three quarters of GCSE subjects are showing improvements in the results of recent internal examinations, though the school is aware that there is still much to do to ensure that students meet challenging targets.

Results in the school's specialist subjects - science, mathematics and design and technology - are broadly average. Students achieved good results in resistant materials and graphics design and the quality of their practical work is good, but they did not achieve as well on engineering courses.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress as well as other students in the school. Good support for those students who have Aspergers syndrome or behavioural issues helps them to make good progress in developing their personal and social skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students develop very good social skills and cooperate very well with each other. They say that they feel very safe in school and report that they know who to go to for help. When an occasional minor bullying incident occurs, it is dealt with quickly. Students work safely in workshops and laboratories. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now slightly above the national average. Punctuality, a concern during the last inspection, has improved considerably. Students eat healthily in school and take up numerous opportunities to get exercise, and the school achieved the Healthy School award in 2008.

Students' moral, social and cultural development in lessons and assemblies is good. Several students in each year choose to take responsibilities. Members of the school council make useful suggestions about ways of improving lockers, the rewards system and the school environment. Students enthusiastically help to raise funds for charities. They learn well about working life through lessons, including personal, social, health and citizenship topics. They develop good economic understanding and enterprise skills through activities such as timetabled enterprise days and two weeks of work experience in Year 10 for all students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school has set clear priorities for improving teaching and learning, acknowledging that the quality of lessons varies both within and between departments. There are clear signs across the school that the strong focus on improving teaching is beginning to have a positive effect. In the best practice observed by inspectors, teachers and students are increasingly using methods that improve students' knowledge and understanding by helping them to think about their work.

Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and course requirements and most plan varied and interesting activities to support learning. They are beginning to make better use of assessment at all levels, from formal tests to oral recap at the start of lessons. Where this is well established, students learn well, as teachers give them appropriate support and challenge. In over half of lessons observed, teachers asked questions that motivated and challenged students.

In a few lessons observed, teachers dominated the lesson too much, or did not ask open questions. This meant that students had too few opportunities to really engage with their work or develop their ideas. Sometimes lesson planning is focused too much on tasks to be completed, rather than on the actual learning taking place. Relationships in class are positive. Students are usually attentive and cooperative, and were well focused on their work in most lessons observed by inspectors, though students and parents commented on how occasional low-level disruption by a small minority of students can affect the learning of the whole group. The majority of teachers give supportive feedback to students on how they can improve, but there is still a small proportion of insufficiently detailed marking.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets most students' needs. While students can make some choices between different options in Years 10 and 11, the school plans to develop its vocational provision further. A small proportion of students attend vocational courses in a local further education college and achieve well. The Youth Award scheme is available in Years 10 and 11 for students who need to develop basic and interpersonal skills. There are effective enrichment programmes in several subjects for gifted and talented students.

All students take part in work experience. Strong links have been established with a number of other schools and colleges, including a long-standing partnership with a rural school in Uganda. Provision for, and participation in, extra-curricular activities are outstanding, especially in the areas of sport, music, drama and art. Many students work towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Parents commented very positively on how these excellent activities make a strong contribution to their children's enjoyment of school and support their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school's pastoral care is outstanding, leading to an ethos in which students feel valued and cared for. Support for vulnerable and looked after students is very good. The school's well-coordinated learning support team enables students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop self-esteem and improve their social skills and literacy. Well-targeted support working with outside agencies has led to improving attendance and below-average exclusion rates.

Statutory requirements for safeguarding and child protection are fully met. Links with primary schools are strong, with very good arrangements for transition. Students receive good support in making decisions about future options at the ages of 14 and 16. Teachers set and monitor targets for students well. Most students know their targets and the levels at which they are working, but assessment feedback is not always sufficiently detailed to help them improve. Support from teachers and assistants is very effective for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders at all levels have focused the attention of all members of the school community on ensuring that all students achieve their potential. The headteacher has successfully built a

strong team of senior and middle leaders who are committed to bringing about the necessary improvements.

Honest and effective self-evaluation, involving leaders at all levels, has clearly identified the key areas for improvement. Managers have set challenging targets and action plans are in place to implement these.

Improvements are already evident. For example, there are early signs that the rates of students' progress are improving and more students are on track to meet their targets. Good quality monitoring of teaching and learning is effective in highlighting areas for improvement such as consistency in marking. Good staff development is also helping teachers improve their practice.

The headteacher inherited a significant budget deficit. She and her business manager, supported by the local authority, have developed a sensible and coherent plan to address this issue over the next few years, with minimal impact on teaching and learning. Governors carry out their role effectively in supporting and challenging senior staff. The headteacher is committed to developing the capacity of all staff, ensuring there are clear roles and lines of accountability so that everyone can actively contribute to further improvement. Effective partnerships within the local and wider community contribute positively to the promotion of community cohesion.

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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?	3	3
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 effectiveness of boarding provision	3	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	3
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
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 learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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

12 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Burford School and Community College, Burford, OX18 4PL

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. We have taken these views into account in arriving at our judgement that your school is providing a satisfactory standard of education and good care, guidance and support.

You achieve good results in tests and examinations at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. However, not all of you make as much progress in Years 10 and 11 as you should and your school is working hard to improve this.

Some of you told us that the quality of lessons and the marking of your work varies within and between different subjects. Inspectors also found this and we have asked the school to make the quality more consistent across the school, to help you improve your work and raise achievement. You have a good choice of GCSE subjects at Key Stage 4 and A levels in the sixth form, but there are not many alternatives to these. We have asked the school to consider how they can organise subjects and timetables more flexibly to meet all your different interests and needs.

Many of you told us that you enjoy school and most of you behave well in lessons and around the school. Some of you and your parents said that a small minority of students disrupt lessons from time to time, and that you do not like how this affects everybody's learning. If you all concentrate on your work in lessons, everyone can learn better. Lots of you participate regularly in sports and arts activities out of school and told us how much you enjoy team events, competitions and performances in drama and music. This aspect of the school's provision is outstanding. A lot of you take up the opportunities to get involved in school and local community events and contribute really well to helping others, for example in local schools and through fund-raising activities.

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. We hope you will all contribute to this, by working hard to achieve your full potential.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Janet Mercer

Her Majesty's Inspector