

# The Buckingham School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110484
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	333378
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ann Berger

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<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 (total)	936
Sixth form	94
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Interim executive
<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Gamble board
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Angela Wells
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 March 2008
<b>School address</b>	London Road Buckingham MK18 1AT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01280 812206
<b>Fax number</b>	01280 822525

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

The Buckingham School is an average-sized secondary school with a small, but expanding, sixth form. The large majority of students are White British, with a small number of pupils from a variety of minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to the national average, although the proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is above average. The range of learning difficulties includes social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. The school has specialist status as a Sports College. When the school was inspected in March 2008, it was judged to require special measures. The acting headteacher appointed in September 2008 was confirmed as the substantive head in April 2009. She has been working with an associate headteacher this year.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school no longer requires special measures. The Buckingham School is satisfactory and is improving rapidly.

The focus on developing a unique and distinct identity has stimulated greater pride in students and greater determination to succeed in staff. Strategies for improvement are clear to all, resulting in a growing sense of purpose and optimism.

Standards are rising. They are now broadly average, and students' achievement from their average starting points is satisfactory. Recent test and examination results show a significant improvement. However, given underachievement in past years, there remains scope for further improvement in standards at GCSE level, particularly in design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT) across the school. Close attention is being paid to the pace of students' progress in Key Stage 3 and improvements augur well for the future. Managers have listened carefully to the views of students and used this information to raise staff's expectations. However, the school has not been in a position to utilize the information from partner primary schools fully to ensure that expectations are suitably challenging at the start of Year 7. Though arrangements this year are much improved, the curriculum has not been adjusted to ensure that higher-level work is taught from the start.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The planning of lessons is better and activities are designed more effectively to address the learning needs of the groups. Teachers integrate new technology effectively into their teaching but they could offer more opportunities for students to use it. In response to the previous inspection, teachers are trying to get students more involved in lessons, for instance, in practical activities and discussion. This is proving successful but, in a significant minority of lessons, activities are not engaging enough.

The good and detailed assessment system gives teachers and students a clear picture of progress. Relationships are good. Students appreciate the way staff care for them and the time they spend helping them. The curriculum is satisfactory, though lacking in breadth to match the interests and aspirations of all students. Additionally, there are insufficient opportunities to learn about the diverse nature of society in Great Britain.

The extra-curricular activities, clubs and visits are well attended but not all the interests of students are suitably addressed. The setting of homework is variable, which is confusing for students and parents and limits the way in which parents can support achievement. This issue has been identified through the parents' forum and is to become a focus for next term. This forum has secured a much stronger engagement from parents and the whole community is more effectively involved in promoting ambition with students. The student body is also engaged in improving the school. For example, Year 9 pupils have been involved in observing lessons and giving feedback to teachers. Teachers report that, as a result of this, their classroom practice has improved. Despite these many improvements, attendance remains inadequate, as the school has not managed to fully engage a small minority of students who are persistently absent.

The restructured leadership and management are giving a clear direction to the school. The headteacher's firm, dynamic and principled leadership and determination not to avoid difficult decisions have been vital. Her partnership with the associate headteacher has been very productive. External partnerships are also developing well, as the school looks to learn from good practice in other authorities. The interim senior leadership team shares the vision of how

the school can improve and shows determination to bring this about. Clearer accountability and improved monitoring are the keys here and the interim executive board has played an important part. The progress already made in improving standards and achievement shows that capacity to improve further is good. The vast majority of middle leaders are effective in raising standards in their subjects. The school has made judicious use of good-quality support from the local authority and external consultants.

The specialism in sports has a positive impact across the school, although its potential is not fully exploited. This area is not focused sufficiently on creative approaches to the curriculum or fostering a wider engagement with the community.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. Students make satisfactory progress in their A-level courses to reach standards that are broadly average, and good progress in the vocational courses. Systems to track students' progress are now in place so that their performance is closely monitored. The newly instigated mentoring programme is having a positive impact on progress. The school is setting targets for and with the students, although some targets reflect the previous low aspirations of students and staff.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and is enhanced by good relationships between staff and students. Students value the small class sizes, as a result of which they receive a high level of individual attention. However, this does limit the opportunities for students to enrich their learning by having a substantial number of peers for debate and discussion.

Students feel well cared for by staff and appreciate the good advice that they receive with regard to their future career choices. They make a significant contribution to the school, by, for example, tutoring younger students and running after-school clubs. The limited breadth of the curriculum accounts for the low transfer rate of Year 11 students into the sixth form, though recruitment for 2009 shows a continued upward trend. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new head of the sixth form is beginning to develop a strategic vision and the capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. She recognises the need to tailor the curriculum better to meet students' needs and aspirations for a more diverse and dynamic curriculum.

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

- Develop more innovative approaches to the curriculum to engage the interests of the students more strongly and to provide a wider range of opportunities to learn about other cultures within British society.
- Raise standards in design and technology and information and communication technology.
- Continue to address the legacy of underachievement and ensure the levels of challenge in Year 7 are sufficiently high.
- Establish a clearer strategic direction for the sixth form, with a curriculum to match.
- Reduce persistent absence.

A small proportion of 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**

The school responded well to the previous inspection report, which criticised low standards and called for a focus on improving the quality of lessons by regular and detailed tracking of students' progress. As a result, the legacy of underachievement is being successfully tackled. This has had a marked effect on standards. Early results from examinations already taken, alongside moderated teacher assessments, show that there will be a significant improvement in the proportion of students gaining five higher-grade GCSE passes, including English and mathematics. The school has additional information, based on teachers' assessments, that suggests a similar improvement in Year 10. Importantly, students in Key Stage 3 are achieving better, as seen in much improved results from moderated optional tests. However, while standards in most subjects are improving rapidly, the pace of change is too slow in design and technology and ICT, and the curriculum delivered does not match the needs of the students for practical and relevant courses.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students behave very well. They are increasingly aware of others' ideas and feelings and of the importance of taking these into account. They are interested in the culture of other societies. For example, students were seen clustered around the notice board showing the young people in Zambia with whom the school has developed a link. The limited opportunities to build on this interest restrict their understanding of the range of cultures in this country and abroad.

Students make a positive contribution to the community through a range of activities, including fund-raising and support for elderly people in the town. Their own contribution to the improvements in the school this year is outstanding. Nearly all students have been involved in some way in expressing their views and identifying ways in which the school can improve. Through the recent student conference, they have reviewed their work and identified future actions. Students are actively involved in all staff appointments. They have engaged fully with the many student leadership development programmes and their smart appearance and pride in their school are a tribute to the excellent work done by the staff team in this area. Attendance remains inadequate and the persistent absence of a significant but small number of pupils is rising.

Students are welcoming to visitors and very cooperative with their teachers. They behave in a safe manner and adopt healthy lifestyles, and in particular make good use of the many sports and games opportunities that the school provides. Students' life skills, such as teamwork, opportunities to take on a range of leadership roles, combined with basic competencies and opportunities to experience the world of work, are well developed.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is improving. Regular checks on lesson quality, combined with follow-up training and coaching, have raised teachers' confidence and enthusiasm. The result is more lessons that are good and a significant reduction in inadequate teaching. Students are clear about the purpose of the lessons because teachers plan carefully and explain clearly.

Established routines help students to work well together and marking is effective. Purposeful starts to lessons are followed by suitable pace and challenge in tasks. Effective questioning helps students explore ideas and understand what they have learned. However, in some lessons, activities do not always motivate students enough, especially when teachers plan tasks that are less relevant to the students' lives.

Senior leaders have driven with rigour and determination the revision of targets to increase the challenge for students. As a result, teachers are expecting more of their students in class. Students spoke very positively to inspectors about this. One commented, 'Staff go the extra mile for you. We know our targets and what we need to do in our work now to get better grades.'

The provision for students with special educational needs has been reviewed fully. The support is better matched to individual needs. Although there are better systems to evaluate the progress of individual students receiving support, this information is not yet used fully to inform strategic decisions. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and the small number of students who have English as an additional language receive good induction and specialist support.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The school has provided a satisfactory curriculum this year with many substantial changes planned to start in September focused on raising achievement and securing better engagement. Good work has been done in partnership with the local pupil referral unit to make available a wider range of vocational courses for certain students. The Key Stage 3 curriculum supports the development of literacy and numeracy and intervention programmes have been effective in securing better progress for students in Years 10 and 11.

Adaptations to the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 have resulted in a significant increase in the number of students following vocational courses. This is also having a positive impact on overall standards as students find the emphasis on the world of work motivating. Good partnerships with local colleges and other providers are developing but the curriculum currently lacks innovation. It does not play the part it could and should in developing the distinctive place of this school in its community. A high proportion of students take part in a satisfactory range of enrichment activities from across the curriculum. Students are particularly appreciative of sporting opportunities and expressive arts provision.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

The new headteacher and her interim senior team have worked successfully to create a positive ethos in the school. As a result, the students feel a sense of community, well-being and respect. Pastoral care is good and the school's new systems for promoting good behaviour ensure that students have positive attitudes to learning. The school is working hard to improve attendance which remains too low overall. The focus on Year 11 this year resulted in an 11% increase for the year group and, as a result, standards at GCSE have risen. School leaders planned strategically to give students a say in all aspects of the school and, consequently, students feel a greater sense of ownership of and belonging to their school and of responsibility for its success.

Arrangements for safeguarding are robust and are reviewed regularly. All staff are trained in child protection. The school has developed effective relationships with a range of outside

agencies. Students say that staff are available and helpful when they need someone to turn to.

Good transition arrangements before and after the move from primary school have been established for this year. Students appreciate the quality of advice they get about GCSE options and opportunities in the sixth form. More detailed and accurate assessment information is effective in tracking students' progress and raising their ambitions, and precise guidance about exactly where they need to focus their efforts is being embedded in teachers' day-to-day practice.

The school provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for students to engage in many sporting and other extra-curricular activities that promote students' health and general well-being. The school's tracking of progress and identification of support needed to enable all students to reach their potential is developing. Outside agencies are consulted and used well to support a range of needs. The students for whom English is an additional language are helped to settle down quickly and to make good progress.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The headteacher, associate headteacher and interim senior leadership team have enthused staff with their clear vision of where the school needs to improve and how improvement can be achieved. New line-management structures, alongside an intensive programme of checking lessons and staff training, mean that senior and most middle leaders have a good picture of the strengths and weaknesses in all areas. This has enabled them to improve the quality of teaching and students' rates of progress. Most staff and the great majority of students now support the breadth and pace of improvement, even though it has been challenging. Closer and quicker identification of students who may be underachieving is linking with the good level of personal support to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. These developments, and the sensible and secure systems which have brought them about, demonstrate a good capacity for improvement. The school is on the way to meeting the ambitious targets set by managers.

The interim executive board provides just the right support and challenge to ensure that the urgent drive for improvement is sustained, while bearing in mind the longer term. It is fully aware of the progress that has been made and the improvements that are still needed. The transition arrangements to return the school to regular governance are good. Value for money is satisfactory. The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. Progress in improving relationships within the school has been good. Students contribute to the local community, for example, through their involvement in a drug awareness initiative. School leaders appreciate the need to extend students' understanding of cultural diversity at a national and international level.



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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	

<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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**

26 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Buckingham School, Buckingham, MK18 1AT

We recently inspected your school for the third time since March 2008 to see how much progress has been made. You will be pleased to learn that progress has been substantial and that the school now does a much better job and no longer requires special measures.

Thank you for being so welcoming and willing to talk to us. We have been most impressed by the way so many of you have contributed to this improvement by participating in the leadership programmes, offering your considered views, and smartening up your appearance and attitudes to your work. Many of you have very good ideas about how the school can improve and you will see some of them in the recommendations we have made below. A small minority of students have let themselves and their school down by their persistent absence.

While many more lessons are good, the curriculum is not always as engaging or interesting as it might be. Your school is working hard to change this. The tracking system and target setting are good at helping you to understand what to aim for. The progress you make in lessons and the standard of work you are reaching are both better than at the time of the last inspection. The headteacher, associate headteacher and senior staff have a good and accurate view of what works well and what needs to be done to improve. We are confident that they are doing things the right way.

We have asked the school to make improvements by:

- providing a more interesting curriculum
- raising standards in design technology and information technology
- making sure the start of Year 7 is challenging
- extending what is offered in the sixth form
- finding more ways to encourage high attendance.

Yours faithfully

Ann Berger

Lead Inspector