

Mark Rutherford Upper School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109674
Local Authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	337351
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1125
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	309
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Russell
Headteacher	Mr S Peacey
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2007
School address	Wentworth Drive Bedford Bedfordshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Just under half of the time was spent looking at learning in classes. The inspectors visited 28 lessons and saw 27 teachers. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's priorities, analysed recent test results, scrutinised child protection and safeguarding documents, read 100 parental questionnaires and studied staff and students' surveys.

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

- the achievement and attainment of students in English
- the overall effectiveness of the sixth form
- the quality of provision and support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the consistency of teaching and learning across subjects and key stages
- the impact of measures to increase students' attendance.

Information about the school

Mark Rutherford is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It is situated on the outskirts of Bedford. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average but the percentage who speak English as an additional language is low. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, although the proportion with statements is higher than the national average. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school was awarded specialist status in the arts in September 2008. Part of the school site is leased to a charity based pre-school group, Rutherford Rascals.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Mark Rutherford is a good school that has made significant improvements since its last inspection. It is led by an inspirational headteacher who is supported by the senior management team. Partnerships in promoting learning and well-being are outstanding. Good provision in teaching, the curriculum and care, guidance and support has ensured that standards have continued to rise, most rapidly in mathematics. Standards have fallen in the sixth form, however, where overall effectiveness is satisfactory. This is because their progress is not monitored as well as in the main school. Students make good progress overall during their time at school. From a starting point of below average attainment, students reach standards that are in line with the national average by the end of Key Stage 4. Students make better progress in mathematics than they do in English because of the consistently high quality of teaching and robust use of data to track students' progress. All groups of students make equally good progress and there are no significant variations in their achievement. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other learners whose circumstances make them vulnerable are supported well.

The rich diversity of courses, both in choice of subjects and level of accreditation, ensures there is something for everyone, whatever their starting point or interests. The curriculum is further enhanced by the impact of the school's specialism in the performing arts. One parent said, 'Our daughter has been given excellent opportunities and experiences to pursue her particular interests in dance and sport in extra-curricular activity sessions.' Care guidance and support are significant strengths of the school as is the monitoring of students' performance. According to one parent, 'Academic mentoring is excellent. I was shown which levels my son was working at in October and December. There is no hiding place for students in any subject due to this thorough tracking system.' Most teaching is at least good but the school is aware of remaining pockets where it is not as strong and leaders and managers have been rigorous in dealing with any inadequate teaching through systematic monitoring which has led to improvements. Students know clearly what is expected of them in lessons. Lesson plans do not consistently meet the needs of all groups of learners, however.

Students reported that they feel safe in school and their parents have confirmed this view. Attendance is average and the percentage of absent students has continued to fall since the last inspection as a result of the measures taken by the school. Students behave well in school but a significant minority of students disagree. There is a wide range of work experience opportunities which help to prepare them well for the world of work. Good relationships between students are fostered through mixed age tutor groups. Students show a good knowledge of diversity in the United Kingdom and the

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wider world. Different groups of students get on well together.

The school has demonstrated a good capacity to improve since the last inspection by significantly improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum, and by thus ensuring outcomes for students are good. Its leaders have a clear focus on what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further and the governing body is equally focussed on achieving agreed improvements. The school provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers plan lessons consistently that meet the needs of different groups of learners.
 - Raise standards in the sixth form and in English by ensuring that the leaders and managers monitor closely how well students are doing.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Examination results at GCSE, including the proportion who achieve five good grades including English and mathematics, have continued to rise since the last inspection and are now in line with the national average. In lessons, learning is good because students have a clear idea of what they need to improve through the challenging targets they are set. Relationships between students and teachers are good. Students know from the learning objectives what is expected of them in lessons.

Most pupils behave well in the large majority of lessons and around the school although a small proportion of Year 11 students are disengaged from their learning. The rate of exclusions has fallen significantly. The school's specialist arts status makes a significant contribution to students' enjoyment, particularly through school productions. Students show an awareness of the importance of healthy eating through the increased sales of healthy food. A high proportion of students participate in sports activities. Students value the importance of the school voice as way to express their views and influence decisions, although this is at an early stage of development. Students are actively involved in raising funds for charity and know the importance of recycling.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Learning objectives in lessons are clear and referred to during the course of lessons. Students' interest is engaged through a wide range of activities, particularly the use of technology and through discussion with and between learners. Teachers have good subject knowledge which is used effectively to meet students' needs. Teaching assistants support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Students are given clear targets for improvement. They are well informed about how to reach them. However, planning to meet the needs of different groups of learners in lessons is not consistent across all lessons. On occasions, teachers dominate too much in lessons and students are not given sufficient opportunity to think for themselves. The curriculum is closely linked to that of its feeder schools which promotes good transition to the upper school. Close partnerships with other providers ensure higher attaining students are placed on appropriate courses, as are those who find learning difficult. The school's specialist status in the arts has extended the choice of courses available to students. Information and communication technology across the curriculum is used well to support learning. There is a high uptake of extra-curricular provision by students particularly during activities week in the summer. The school has been determined in tackling the issue of attendance and punctuality and, following the success of the strategies employed, has seen improvement in both. Students speak highly of the quality of guidance they receive for options at GCSE and future careers. Support for students at risk from becoming vulnerable is good. Academic mentoring, where students receive one to one support and parents attend, is well regarded by students and parents.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	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 and senior leaders have a clear vision for the school and the students and display a positive 'can-do' attitude.' Leaders are focussed on the drive to improve standards. Challenging targets are set and leaders have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and weakness. A strong sense of accountability is built through monitoring lessons, analysing data and evaluating the effectiveness of additional support strategies. The progress of different groups of learners is tracked very well as the school successfully tackles discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity. Leaders do not shirk from making difficult decisions and, where underperformance is identified, swift action is taken. Most heads of subjects carry out their roles well in monitoring the quality of provision and outcomes for students.

The governing body is focussed on improvement and carries out its role well in holding the school to account. Governors have skilfully worked with the school to reduce its deficit budget. The school actively encourages the involvement of parents and attendance at parents' meetings is high. Arrangements for safeguarding are good and applied rigorously. Community cohesion is good. The school has evaluated the effectiveness of its plans and links with the local and national community are particularly strong.

Partnerships are a major strength of the school. Specialist status has brought closer links with colleges and the university and the school is working closely with the local authority on future schooling arrangements in Bedford.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	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

There has been a decline in standards since the last inspection although the sixth form has grown in popularity as its provision and range of courses available have improved. From a starting point of broadly average attainment, students reach standards that are in line with the national average by the end of the sixth form. The sixth form offers a wide choice of A/AS courses as well as vocational qualifications. Retention rates for A/AS course are very high. Care, guidance and support in the sixth form are good. Students' personal development is good as they have opportunities to volunteer in the local schools and the hospital. Senior leaders have responded well to the fall in standards by strengthening arrangements for leadership and management in the sixth form but the changes have been too recent to impact yet on achievement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of the small number of parents and/or carers who responded to the survey said that they are happy with their children's experience at Mark Rutherford. In particular, most said that the school keeps their children safe and that the school is well led and managed. According to one parent, 'I can't praise this school enough; their standards are very high and my child is doing extremely well and is loving every minute of it.' A small minority of parents did not agree that the school helps their children to have a healthy lifestyle and a very small minority did not agree that teaching is good or that the school does not take account of their suggestions and concerns. These views were not shared by the very large majority of parents or by inspectors, although a very small proportion of teaching was identified by inspectors as inadequate.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mark Rutherford Upper School and Community College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 100 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1125 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	38	49	49	11	11	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	28	28	67	67	3	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	46	46	45	45	7	7	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	36	50	50	13	13	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	17	64	64	18	18	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	19	66	66	12	12	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	11	63	63	20	20	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	27	27	61	61	8	8	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	30	56	56	13	13	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	20	66	66	10	10	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	14	64	64	14	14	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	34	34	56	56	7	7	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	36	54	54	8	8	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Mark Rutherford Upper School and Community College, Bedford, MK41 8PX

You will recall that we recently came to inspect your school and I thought you might like to know what we have said in the published report.

We found that you go to a good school that is continuing to improve. Your headteacher leads by example and, by working very well with his senior leaders and with other education providers in the town, has ensured that you have a wide variety of courses to study. Most of your lessons are good or better and you have told us that you feel safe and secure in school. Your examination results are continuing to improve and you make good progress in your learning, particularly in mathematics. However, we think your results could improve further in English and in the sixth form and we have asked your leaders to address this.

You have told us how much you appreciate the academic mentoring provided and, in lessons, you generally know what is expected of you and how you can improve further. We have asked the school to make sure that in all lessons teachers plan activities that will meet your different needs.

Thank you for taking the time to speak to us and tell us your views in the survey. Although some of you had concerns about behaviour in the school we found that the majority of you behave well and are responsive in lessons. You can play your part by ensuring that your behaviour consistently matches the quality we saw in the best lessons.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well in your future.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims

Her Majesty's Inspector

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