

# Princes Risborough School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110489
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	337515
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30 September –1 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Angela Corbett HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	970
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	115
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Rupert Aries
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Peter Rowe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2006
<b>School address</b>	Merton Road Princes Risborough Buckinghamshire HP27 0DT
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 23 lessons and visited nine, held meetings with staff, groups of students, the chair of governors and the school improvement partner. They observed the school's work, looked at documents including the school's self-evaluation, development plans and policies. In addition, 47 staff, 140 parental and 170 student questionnaires were scrutinised.

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

- the progress made by all groups of students in the school
- the impact of teaching and the curriculum in promoting equally strong outcomes for all students
- how effectively assessment and target setting are used in raising achievement
- the capacity of leadership and management to sustain recent improvements
- the contribution of the technology specialism to school improvement.

## Information about the school

Princes Risborough is an average size school that gained specialist Technology College status in 2001. It is a non-selective school in a selective authority. Most students are of White British heritage and there are very few from other backgrounds or whose first language is not English. The mobility rate is average. The proportions of students entitled to free school meals or with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities are low. However, twice the national average has a statement of special educational need. The school has a specialist communication unit for students on the autistic spectrum. The school has achieved healthy schools status.

**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

Princes Risborough is a good, inclusive and caring school where the academic and personal well-being of every student is at the heart of everything it does. It is a vibrant and active community that has developed a wide range of excellent partnerships, particularly at local level. Almost all students say they enjoy school and speak with pride about their school. For example, one said, 'It is very good, you definitely enjoy and achieve here.'

Attainment on entry is broadly average based on Key Stage 2 results. However, school data show it is lower for a significant number of students, and a few more able students leave at the end of Year 7 to attend local selective schools. Students' learning has accelerated since the last inspection so that attainment is now in line with national averages. This represents good progress for the majority of students at Key Stage 4, because these students did not benefit from the current improved provision and progress at Key Stage 3. However, some variation between and across subjects and individual students remains. The good curriculum is personalised to meet the needs of most students. Students participate enthusiastically in the outstanding enrichment programme which contributes to the strong harmony in the school.

Overwhelmingly, students say they feel safe. They appreciate greatly the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive, particularly in 'The House', which plays a key role in supporting the inclusive ethos of the school. The new 'vertical tutoring' system is highly valued by students, and is already contributing significantly to their safety and confidence, as well as their aspirations.

Teaching is good overall with an increasing proportion that is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and divided into learning steps so that teachers can measure the progress students are making. In the best lessons, enthusiastic teaching, smooth transitions between the tasks and activities and a secure pace engages students and enables most of them to make good progress. However, not all teachers are so successful in their use of these strategies and other whole-school initiatives and best practice is not systematically shared across the school. Students' work is marked regularly and most know how well they are performing, however, they are less clear on the specific actions they need to take to achieve or exceed their targets.

The inspirational headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, provides clear vision and ambition for the school. This enthusiasm to ensure the best possible outcomes for every student is shared by staff at all levels. However, while middle leaders have contributed to the improved achievement, their ability to analyse and use assessment data is inconsistent and few are involved in whole-school initiatives. Consequently, while

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self-evaluation is good at senior level, the contribution of middle managers, including those in the sixth form, to school self-evaluation and school improvement is more variable. Nevertheless, given the school's recent track record in improving students' outcomes since the last inspection, its capacity for further improvement is good.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding lessons, building on the best classroom practice which has already been developed by:
- ensuring that all lessons move at the pace of the best and students make clear, observable steps in their learning
- taking a more systematic approach to sharing best practice across the school
- making more effective use of questions to make students think more deeply and so extend their learning.
- Enable middle leaders, including those in the sixth form, to become greater drivers of school improvement by:
- developing their ability to analyse and make use of assessment data for themselves
- increasing their involvement and contribution to whole-school self-evaluation, development planning and delivery.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

Students thrive and have very positive attitudes to learning. Achievement is good for most students across the school. Their attainment, when based on the percentage of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, at GCSE has risen steadily and is now at the national average. A much higher proportion of students attain at least five A\* to C grades. GCSE module and examination results for those in the current Year 11 show the trend of improvement is set to continue. Highly personalised support secures satisfactory outcomes for those students with particularly varied needs, especially in relation to their personal development and well-being. All students in the specialist communications unit make good and some make outstanding progress. Other students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

In the large majority of lessons observed by inspectors, students made good progress and their behaviour was exemplary. However, a few students and parents said that on a small number of occasions there was minor disruption in some lessons. Students' relationships with teaching staff are excellent and an atmosphere of trust allows them to ask questions freely, participate in classroom discussions and respond very positively to activities. In the best lessons, careful matching of the work to individual needs and a variety of tasks ensure good progress. Where learning is slowed, it is usually because too much time is spent on some activities or questioning did not sufficiently promote or extend learning.

Students, including those who are vulnerable, feel very safe in the school and adopt safe ways of working in practical subjects. Bullying is said by students themselves to be 'very

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rare' and parents and students say it is quickly and effectively dealt with. The uptake of sporting activities is good and most students adopt healthy lifestyles. Students participate extremely well in all aspects of school life, including school productions, the school council and school improvement working groups. Many of these include opportunities to develop leadership or teamwork skills as well as involvement in wider community projects, such as the local town council. Similarly, activities like links with a school in Uchira, citizenship lessons, assemblies, tutorial time, the building of an outdoor reflection area and a host of others facilitate good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The 'Preparation for Working Life' course, alongside careers guidance, work experience and enterprise learning, helps students to be well prepared for the world at work or the next steps in their education.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

**How effective is the provision?**

A large majority of teaching is good, with an increasing proportion that is outstanding. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. The good understanding of students' learning needs helps teachers to provide stimulating and varied lessons, often with practical

<sup>1</sup> 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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learning activities or group work. As a result, there is a very productive and purposeful atmosphere in almost all lessons. Teachers' high quality questioning develops students' knowledge and thinking skills. Teaching assistants are knowledgeable, deployed effectively and work well with teachers to support students. In a few lessons the pace slows as teachers do not maintain pace and challenge for all students in the class which limits the progress made. Teachers regularly assess students' work so that they know how well they are performing. In some subject areas, for example in English, peer and self-assessment with clear criteria are used well to help students understand how to move on. The progress of individual students is tracked carefully against challenging targets and any underachievement is identified. When needed, a wide range of well-targeted interventions are put in place.

- The curriculum, which has improved since the last inspection, is well matched to students' needs and aspirations. Key Stage 3 is covered in two years, and students start their GCSE courses in Year 9. Alongside an extensive range of academic subjects, the curriculum includes vocational courses, such as construction and performing arts. A fast-track programme enables more able students to take some GCSE examinations at the end of Year 10. This opens further academic choices in Year 11. The school offers less able students a personalised alternative pathway with strong literacy and numeracy support, focusing on accredited vocational and life skills subjects. However, flexible pathways are not sufficiently defined for progression beyond Key Stage 4. Linked to the school's specialism, all students take a technology subject. The curriculum is further enhanced by trips, visits, visitors to school and revision sessions.

Staff know the students well and work hard to provide them with outstanding care, guidance and support. Very effective systems are in place to monitor the well-being of all students and identify concerns. Support and care, including that for vulnerable students, is exceptional. Staff in both 'The House' and learning support department work as effective teams, and have clear roles in providing support to meet the differing needs of students. This is very well tailored to students' needs through good liaison between staff in school, with parents and, where necessary, with outside agencies. Overall provision for students in the specialist communication unit is good.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

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There is a clear drive from a dedicated headteacher, respected by staff, students and parents alike, to improve all aspects of the school. The senior leadership team follows his lead and takes a proactive role in promoting school improvement, providing excellent support to middle leaders. Quality assurance, self-evaluation and development planning at senior level are good. However, they are less consistent at middle leadership level, particularly in relation to individual use of data and in taking a leading role in whole-school initiatives. This means that the impact of middle leadership is variable. Challenging targets are used effectively to raise achievement, and leaders at all levels are held to account for the academic outcomes of individuals and groups of students. This, together with the much improved tracking systems and interventions, is beginning to ensure targets are reached consistently across the school.

The profile of the specialism across the school is linked by students more to information and communication technology provision than the specialist technology subjects, which play a limited role in school improvement. The school recognises this and a full review and refocus is a key priority. The promotion of respect and valuing others is at the heart of the school's ethos. All statutory duties in terms of equalities are fulfilled, and the impact of its policies is outstanding. Most notably through the highly personalised approach to each individual student that promotes their well being and secures their good or better outcomes in relation to Every Child Matters. Risk assessments are in place. Safeguarding procedures in relation to recruitment and child protection are a strength; they are regularly reviewed at both school and governor level. Some minor omissions in the single central record were remedied prior to inspectors leaving the school. The governing body is well led, supportive and fully involved in evaluating the work of the school. The school community is both cohesive and harmonious. Engagement with parents is outstanding. Parents receive regular information including that on a daily basis and are involved closely in school life, for example as support in tutor groups. Parental questionnaires and other communications reflect the high-esteem that parents have for the school. Parental questionnaires and other communications reflected the high esteem that parents have for the school. Strong links, particularly with the local community as well as at national and international level, contribute to good community cohesion.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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



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<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Students are proud to be in the sixth form and enjoy both the academic challenges and opportunities to develop good social and personal skills. Results in 2009 moved to around the national average and, while this represented good progress for some students and in some subjects, it is satisfactory overall. Good tracking systems help to monitor students' progress and evidence suggests that students in Year 13 are making more rapid progress. Teaching, often in small groups, is now good and students say they are well supported in their learning. Assessment is used well to target individual learning needs and provide advice on how to improve grades. The curriculum focuses on advanced level courses and is broadened through links with other schools. The introduction of new courses and academic mentoring has strengthened the curriculum and now better meets the needs of learners.

Sixth formers make a good contribution to school life. Their mature and responsible attitudes towards their studies and each other provide good role models for younger students for whom they also act as mentors and mediators. Their attendance is good. They are well cared for and receive good advice on how to apply for jobs and select places at college or university. Consequently, almost all move into employment or higher education.

Senior leaders have driven the recent improvements well in achievement and provision. However, developments have not been in place long enough to be tested through external examinations and to demonstrate the sustained improvement the school is striving for.

### *These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
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	2

## Views of parents and carers

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Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Around half of parents made written comments, almost all were positive. One parent's comment, typified many: 'This is an absolutely fantastic school.' Another said, 'It says my children will 'Enjoy and Achieve' and that is exactly what they do.' Parents also commented on the high levels of support that students receive, the efficient and effective handling of problems that arise and the good communication with parents. Parents view the school's leadership as excellent; in particular, they have a high regard for the headteacher, who they consider to be caring, focused and inspirational. They view the vertical tutoring system as beneficial to students.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Princes Risborough School 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 140 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 917 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	76	64	43	36	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	71	60	47	40	1	1	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	61	60	45	42	2	2	2	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	60	55	44	40	3	3	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	58	52	52	47	1	1	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	43	60	55	3	3	3	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	39	67	59	3	3	3	0
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)	53	51	51	49	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	60	55	47	43	2	2	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	53	59	52	48	4	4	4	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	48	46	55	53	1	1	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	92	80	21	18	2	2	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	89	75	26	22	3	3	3	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



2 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Princes Risborough School, Princes Risborough, HP27 0DT

On behalf of your inspection team, I would like to let you know that we enjoyed the time we spent with you on our recent visit. We would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for completing the student questionnaires and sharing your views with us in meetings, lessons and around the school. We think that Princes Risborough is a good school.

We hope that you will take the time to read the full report but I have highlighted the key points below.

- You enjoy school, feel safe, benefit from the 'vertical tutoring' and make outstanding contributions to school life. However, your attendance is only satisfactory.
- The standards you achieve by the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form are broadly in line with the national averages.
- You receive good teaching and make good progress in most lessons.
- The curriculum is good and your programme of enrichment on Wednesday afternoons is outstanding.
- You know your targets and how well you are doing. However, you are not always clear about what actions to take to improve.
- You are confident and polite students. You behave well, show respect for each other, and value the school's inclusive ethos and the help you receive from staff, particularly in 'The House'.

Your headteacher and senior leaders have worked hard to improve the school and together with all staff in the school are keen to improve it further. To help the school improve, we have said that senior leaders should:

- Share the best teaching practices across the school so that you make better progress in your lessons and ensure you are clear about how to improve.
  - Enable your middle leaders to make a greater contribution to school improvement.
- You can help by attending well and being actively involved in your learning.

Yours faithfully

Angela Corbett HMI

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