

Burnt Mill Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115219
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338539
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Philippa Francis HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1136
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Fox
Headteacher	Helena Mills
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 31 lessons, saw 39 teachers and held meetings with groups of students, representatives of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents including the school's improvement plan, records of lesson observations, the school's data on current students' progress and minutes of the governing body meetings. Inspectors considered 225 parental questionnaires.

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

- the learning and progress of pupils in English and mathematics
- the effectiveness of learning support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the effectiveness of quality assurance in ensuring consistency in the quality of provision across subjects.

Information about the school

Burnt Mill is a larger than average school. It has held specialist arts college status since 2003. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average as is the percentage of students from minority ethnic groups. Most students have English as their first language. The percentage of students with special education needs and/or disabilities is higher than average. A new headteacher took up post in January 2010.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Burnt Mill is a satisfactory school. It is improving rapidly, already has several good features and has good capacity to improve further. Pupils feel safe and make good progress, particularly in their personal and social development. They enjoy their studies and attendance is above average. The results gained by students vary across subjects but have been low in mathematics and English over the last three years. Inspectors' observations and the school's records show that most current students are likely gain better results in these two subjects. Results in other subjects are closer to average. Students learn many skills that prepare them well for their future. The school's specialism in the performing arts supports their creative and artistic development well. Most lessons are at least satisfactory and an increasing number are good. Teachers often plan lessons well and make sure that students are challenged and fully engaged. In a minority of lessons, however, tasks and activities do not always match students' ability or provide sufficient level of challenge for them to reach their full potential. Students receive useful verbal feedback but marking varies in quality; some does not give enough guidance on how to improve. The school's curriculum is broad and interesting, and meets students' needs well. Students receive good care, guidance and support.

The new headteacher has successfully refocused the school on raising standards and ensuring equality for all. She has taken constructive action, based on sound and inclusive self-evaluation, to improve aspects of the school's management, particularly in strengthening quality assurance arrangements to ensure consistency in quality across subjects. A number of weaknesses, including insufficient progress in English and by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have been tackled robustly in a short time. The lesson observation scheme, however, is not comprehensive enough to inform self-evaluation effectively. Equality of opportunity policies and action plans are insufficiently detailed and are not monitored closely enough by the governing body and managers. The school's work with partners, parents and carers, and in promoting community cohesion is good and beneficial to the full range of stakeholders.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics, science and English from satisfactory to good by ensuring that:
 - planning of tasks and activities for different groups of students builds on their prior attainment and matches their ability

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- teachers challenge students, particularly the more able ones, to think more for themselves and reach their full potential
- marking is of a consistently high quality and includes guidance for improvement.
- Develop the lesson observation process by:
 - increasing its coverage and the frequency of observations
 - improving the quality of analysis of the findings to inform actions for improvement and self-evaluation more effectively.
- Ensure that statutory requirements related to equality of opportunity are fully met by:
 - finalising and implementing the school's single equality scheme, ensuring that it gives full coverage of the general duties that apply to the three equality strands of gender, race and disability
 - ensuring arrangements for assessing the impact of the policy on students, staff and parents
 - ensuring that actions to promote equality are drawn together and monitored closely by senior managers and the governing body.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Many students start school with below average prior attainment, low aspirations, and a lack of confidence and skill in literacy and numeracy. Most make good progress in their learning during their time at Burnt Mill. Students' learning about safety, health and the wider world, together with their development of a wide range of workplace skills, are good. This prepares them well for their future economic and social well-being. Students develop well as individuals, particularly because of the artistic and creative skills they learn. They contribute well to school and community life. Students' moral, social and cultural development is good. However, students' spirituality is less well developed because they do not always spend enough time reflecting on life and their learning. Students behave well and most have good attitudes to learning. Almost all enjoy school, as shown by the good attendance rate as well as their enthusiasm in many lessons. Students' learning and progress is good in the optional Key Stage 4 subjects, including vocational subjects, but has been less consistent in the core subjects of mathematics, English and science. Inspectors' observations of lessons and scrutiny of the school's monitoring of performance records shows, however, that progress in these subjects is improving, including particularly strongly in English where students underperformed significantly in 2008/09.

The standard of students' work and their examination results vary across subjects. Although results in a number of subjects, particularly vocational subjects, are closer to

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average, examination results in English and mathematics have been low for the last three years. The percentage of students who gained more than five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, declined markedly in 2009. Results in the school's specialist subjects are mixed and showed some decline, with the exception of music, in 2009. Standards of students' current work, however, indicate that results in both core and specialist subjects are likely to be much improved in 2010 because of the significant amount of extra support that has been provided for students at risk of underperformance.

The school monitors the performance of different groups carefully and has focused on improving the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. While the progress of this group has been less strong than other groups in previous years, it has improved considerably and inspectors' observations confirmed that most of these students are making good progress.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Students' good progress is secured by a mix of improving teaching, good care and

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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guidance along with substantially improved support for learning and a curriculum that is personalised to meet most students' needs. Almost all lessons are satisfactory and a majority are good or better. A few lessons are outstanding and are often inspirational in capturing students' imagination and interest. Almost all teaching of core subjects is at least satisfactory and improving because of a recent emphasis on ensuring that the quality of these lessons matches that seen in other subjects across the school. Inspectors observed good lessons in English. The school is working effectively to eliminate the very few lessons that are inadequate.

Teaching in the school's specialist subjects is often of high quality. Teachers make good use of creativity and performance skills, such as artistic displays, singing or writing poems, to reinforce learning of other subjects. In less effective lessons, teachers do not always use assessment information effectively to match tasks and activities to students' ability. Students, particularly the more able, are not always challenged sufficiently to think for themselves. There is a tendency, in more than a few lessons, for students to rely too much on teachers although the school's recent focus on developing students' independent learning skills is beginning to eliminate this. Assessment is used well in the majority of lessons to support learning. Students know the level they are working at and target setting is effective in motivating them to do better. Marking of written work, however, is not consistently of high quality.

The curriculum is broad and allows a wide choice of options for students at Key Stage 4, which they value and helps in maintaining their interest and enthusiasm. The school's well established specialism in the performing arts permeates most subjects and is used productively and effectively. The provision of vocational courses, including work with a local further education college, attracts and interests a high number of students.

Recognition of the need to increase curriculum time for mathematics and English has resulted in soundly planned changes for the coming academic year. Education to promote students' personal and social development and their role as good citizens is integrated into the curriculum well. The many enrichment activities have high levels of participation, including in sport. Equality is promoted by, for example, challenging stereotyping in subject areas such as by encouraging boys to take part in dance.

Students are well known to staff as individuals and the level of care and support is high. Vulnerable students receive very good support which helps them make good progress and enjoy school life. Partnerships with external agencies are productive and ensure that there is a wide range of expertise across the school's support teams. Students are guided well as they move through the school and on into further education or employment. Both parents and students speak highly of this support. The provision of support for students at risk of underperformance has been considerably strengthened in the current year and has supported improved progress in underperforming subjects. Data are used more frequently and by a wider set of managers to monitor students' progress. Intervention, with considerable additional support, takes place promptly and has ensured much better progress in a number of subjects.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	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 new headteacher has refocused the school on raising attainment and promoting equality of opportunity. She has secured a high level of support from managers by using an open and consultative management style that has already ensured much higher levels of accountability and capacity to bring about improvement. As a result of restructuring management roles, strengthening of many of the systems for monitoring students' performance and the effectiveness of provision, and taking a firm and decisive 'hands-on' approach to ensuring good discipline, there are already successful signs that many areas in need of improvement are being tackled. Some of this work, however, is at an early stage and has not yet made a full impact on the school's effectiveness.

Governance is improving because the governing body has identified a number of ways in which its members can increase their scrutiny of students' performance and the quality of provision. A number of changes are planned or have already taken place to ensure that governors are provided with useful information in advance of meetings and that the structure of their meetings allows them to focus on the key issues that need their attention. However, the governing body has not ensured that the statutory requirements relative to equality of opportunity have been fully met.

The school works well with parents and carers. Partnerships with external agencies, employers and other education providers are soundly based and productive. The impact of these is clear in the school's good curriculum and in the provision of care and support for students. The school's work to promote community cohesion is good and is based on a sound knowledge of the school's local community. The school's performing arts specialism provides a good springboard for highly effective project work in the community.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Students feel safe at school and are pleased with the recent improvements to the buildings and grounds. Safety is reinforced in most lessons well. Incidences of bullying are rare. Students are clear about what to do if they have concerns and work well together to tackle discrimination and support each other.

High priority is placed on ensuring equality of opportunity across the school's work. A culture of giving all students equal chances is developing strongly, particularly now that the performance of different groups is monitored closely and actions have taken place to support better progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school recognises that policies to underpin this work are in need of revision and the approach to bringing together and monitoring actions to promote equality is not yet well

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established.

The school deploys its staff and resources effectively and provides satisfactory value for money. Good improvements have been made to the ageing fabric of the school, such as building a spacious drama studio and developing a picnic area for students. The school is well kept and displays are used creatively to make the learning environment bright and cheerful.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Views of parents and carers

The response rate was relatively high. The responses received were mainly from parents or carers of pupils in Years 7 to 9 because Year 10 pupils were out of school on work experience over the period of inspection and Year 11 pupils had left the school. Inspectors considered other sources of evidence of parents' and carers' views that were available at the school. Most of responses showed agreement with all the statements and almost all respondents agreed that the school kept their child safe. The inspection team endorses their positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Burnt Mill Comprehensive 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 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 225 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1136 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	101	45	113	50	8	4	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	105	47	118	52	1	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	89	40	123	55	11	5	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	82	36	125	56	15	7	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	72	32	139	62	10	4	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	70	31	129	57	17	8	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	51	23	142	63	29	13	0	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)	70	31	132	59	10	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	74	33	134	60	11	5	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	78	35	121	54	17	8	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	49	22	138	61	23	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	75	33	133	59	5	2	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	102	45	113	50	6	3	2	1

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



8 July 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Burnt Mill Comprehensive School, Harlow, CM20 2NR

Thank you for your welcome to Burnt Mill and for helping us with the inspection. It was helpful to talk to so many of you and hear your views on school life. We judged that your school is satisfactory in its effectiveness and that it is well placed to improve further. Your achievement is satisfactory. Most of you make good progress in your learning and particularly good progress in your personal and social development, including becoming more creative and confident. The progress that you make in the core subjects of mathematics, English and science is improving because of the school's effective work in supporting those of you at risk of underachievement. The standard of your work and examination results vary between subjects: results have been low in English and mathematics but are improving; results in optional subjects at Key Stage 4 are generally closer to average.

Almost all of the lessons you receive are satisfactory and an increasing number are good. Your learning is most effective when teachers involve you and challenge you to do the very best you can. Sometimes teachers help you too much and do not give you tasks or activities that stretch you and match your ability. Marking of your work is not consistently helpful. The school's curriculum meets your needs and you have plenty of good support and guidance to help you achieve. The new headteacher and her team have made a lot of changes to ensure that everyone in school works together to ensure you get the best possible results. Some of the changes are recent and more time is needed to realise their impact. Other changes have already made a positive change to school life. Teachers make sure that everyone has equal opportunities at school, but the policies and action plans that exist to drive this are in need of review. The governing body supports the school well.

Inspectors have asked the school to make three specific improvements:

- improve teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science
- make sure that written marking is consistently of a high quality
- review and improve policies and plans to promote equality of opportunity.

You can help the school make these changes by working hard and making sure you ask staff for help whenever you need it. I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Francis

Her Majesty's Inspector

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