

The Bulmershe School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110062
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	378045
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2012
Lead inspector	Anne Wellham 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1025
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Tyndall
Headteacher	Peter Lewis
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 October 2008
School address	Chequers Way Woodley Reading RG5 3EL
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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Additional inspector

Sarah Hill

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Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 29 lessons taught by 28 teachers, of which 2 were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors also visited a range of lessons for short periods accompanied by senior and middle leaders. Meetings were held with six groups of students, seven members of the governing body and school staff including senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, looked at a wide range of documentation and analysed 127 parental questionnaires and others completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Most students are from White British or other White backgrounds. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language are higher than those found nationally. Of these, the largest groups are of Pakistani, other Asian and African heritage. The proportions of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs are below average. The school has a unit for 12 students who have special educational needs related to specific learning difficulties. It became a specialist sports college in 2004. It also gained the International School Award in 2011. The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- Bulmershe is a satisfactory school. It provides a safe, inclusive environment where improvements in teaching and learning and in developing leaders at all levels, including the role of the governing body, are providing students with greater challenge and successfully raising their aspirations. The sixth form is satisfactory. Overall effectiveness is not yet good because the quality of teaching and learning in the school and the sixth form is not consistently good enough to eliminate the variations in students' achievement across subjects. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory overall as a result of satisfactory teaching in the school and the sixth form. A lack of sustained improvement following the previous inspection prompted a concerted approach to boost achievement. Since 2010, robust systems to assess and track students' progress, more rigorous monitoring of teaching and targeted professional development are tackling the variations in teaching and learning and achievement across subjects and year groups. Nevertheless, work is not always well matched to students' needs and there are limited opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. A strong ethos based on valuing individuals and diversity underpins the work of the school. Attendance is broadly average and improving, although the school is aware that there is more to do on improving some students' punctuality to school and to lessons.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Well-planned actions are being used to tackle the inconsistencies in achievement, consolidate improvements to behaviour and raise students' aspirations. The management of teaching and staff performance is satisfactory. However, analysis of achievement overall is not sharp or precise, or clearly referenced to national benchmarks, particularly for students with specific learning difficulties. The drive for improvement is not always communicated explicitly by senior leaders which means that policies and procedures are not applied consistently by staff or understood thoroughly by parents and carers.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise achievement across all subjects by:
 - matching learning to the needs, abilities and interests of all students so that all activities and tasks present the correct level of challenge
 - providing more opportunities for students to participate in lessons and to develop independent learning skills
 - developing a coherent whole-school approach to improving students' writing and communication skills across every subject.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - providing a sharp and precise analysis of achievement across the school, particularly in evaluating the progress of students with specific learning difficulties
 - ensuring that the headteacher and senior leaders communicate an explicit vision for improvement that is clearly understood by staff, parents and carers and students.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

During the inspection a balance of good and satisfactory learning was observed, with no inadequate teaching. Inspectors' evaluation of students' learning and attitudes confirms that students are making accelerated progress in subjects where the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good or better. They are reaching standards that are in line with, or above, national averages from starting points which are often below average. Students demonstrate good attitudes towards learning where lessons are interesting. When the work is carefully matched to their prior learning and abilities, they make good progress. The more able students and those students with special educational needs find tasks too easy or too difficult in lessons where the same activities are set for the whole class. In subjects where teaching is consistently good or better students achieve well and make up for past underachievement, including disabled students and those with special educational needs.

The planned curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to students' achievement by providing a variety of academic subjects and a range of vocational subjects at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. During the past two years targeted intervention, planned changes to the curriculum and improved moderation to check the accuracy of teacher assessment are allowing subject leaders to tackle underachievement more effectively. Students' knowledge of their learning and progress is improving. Students are aware of their targets and, in subjects where they receive high quality verbal and written feedback, they understand the link between their targets and their current work and know what to do to improve to the next level. Progress is held back in some subjects where reading, writing and speaking and listening skills are not

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developed consistently or given a high enough profile. Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children are making good progress at the school. Inspectors observed variations in the progress of students across subjects and within classes and evidence shows that achievement overall is satisfactory.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, including in the sixth form. This is reflected in responses from parents and carers in inspection questionnaires. Students value the positive relationships that they have with their teachers and the additional study and revision clubs provided for them. The best learning takes place when students are challenged to think for themselves and tasks are planned to develop their oral and writing skills, whatever the subject content. Students respond enthusiastically when they are given opportunities to participate actively in lessons and the best lessons provide opportunities for students to draw on their different experiences, to reflect on different ideas and to develop their spiritual, moral, cultural and social values. In an outstanding biology lesson observed in Year 13, the teacher's excellent knowledge of the subject and the examination criteria, combined with a precise understanding of the students' abilities, resulted in a sequence of meticulously planned tasks which engaged all students and matched their needs at this stage of the course.

Where teaching is no better than satisfactory, learning activities are not matched well enough to the different needs of students and the key learning points are not consolidated clearly. Students who have not been helped to establish routinely good habits for learning take the opportunity to waste time and rely on the teacher to provide the answers. Irregular marking, gaps in work and imprecise feedback limit students' ability to actively engage with their learning and to make consistent progress. The reliance on workbooks or reproduced worksheets in some subjects prevents students from practising different learning styles and limits their opportunities to write freely or develop a range of reading, writing and communication skills. The teaching of disabled students and those with specific learning difficulties relies heavily on the extra support and intervention provided in the classroom rather than improving the quality of teaching and learning in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students report that they feel safe and that they have a secure understanding of the risks they may encounter both within and outside school. Those parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire are extremely satisfied with this aspect of the school's work and feel that their children are looked after well. Students are friendly and respond positively to reminders on how to conduct themselves appropriately as they move around the school. The different forms of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying, are understood by students and they express confidence in the prompt manner in which the school deals with the rare instances that occur. Extra-curricular activities are popular, particularly in sport, and students value the wide range of opportunities to attend residential activities,

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theatres, art galleries and sporting events in this country and abroad.

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children are taught well, but many expressed concerns about lessons where learning is disrupted by a few students. Inspectors did not observe any disruption to learning. School data and reports indicate that behaviour has improved during the past two years with a reduction in fixed term exclusions and recorded instances of negative behaviour. Inspectors observed satisfactory behaviour during the inspection, including some good behaviour in lessons. Students are proud of the new school uniform which was introduced in September 2011 and they report that it has smartened up their attitudes to learning as well as their appearance. Staff have also raised their expectations of what the students are capable of achieving.

Leadership and management

Rigorous monitoring of performance, an effective coaching programme and planned opportunities to share good and outstanding practice are improving the quality of teaching and learning. These improvements have not yet had sufficient impact on students' achievement, although the gaps are closing. School data indicate an improvement in current attainment for students in Year 11. Senior leaders are committed to raising achievement and to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. They are aware of the need to eliminate the remaining inconsistencies in achievement between different groups of students to make sure that every student has an equal chance to learn. The senior leadership team has been restructured to include a broader range of skills and expertise and to provide good quality support for the headteacher. The accountability of middle leaders and subject leaders is increasing. The school meets all the statutory requirements for safeguarding and the systems in place are coherent and effective. The school's specialist status and international links provide valuable opportunities for students to interact and work together which promote their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. The impact of the planned curriculum is inconsistent across subjects, particularly as there is too little emphasis on supporting writing and communication skills in some subjects.

The school has satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement. The appointments of key leaders with the correct levels of expertise and improvements to governance have strengthened capacity. The effectiveness of the governing body in holding the school to account has improved significantly during the last two years because the governors are no longer ready to accept reasons for past underachievement and are better informed to challenge the quality of the school's self-evaluation. The headteacher and senior leaders are dedicated to the school and understand the need for rapid improvement. Nevertheless, policies and procedures are not always shared or communicated explicitly enough to achieve a consistently proactive approach from all staff and students. Parents and carers are supportive of the school, although a few who responded to the questionnaire highlighted a lack of communication as a concern. They would welcome more opportunities to engage with students' learning and celebrate the school's achievements.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



18 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Bulmershe School, Reading RG5 3EL

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We judged your school and the sixth form to be satisfactory. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to you and were impressed with how smart you look in your new uniform. We agree with the student who told us that you now look smarter and act smarter. The students and staff we talked to told us that behaviour and attitudes to learning have improved, particularly during the last two years. We were pleased to hear that bullying is rare and that it is dealt with very quickly. Attendance has improved, but there are still a few students who do not come to school regularly and they are missing important chances to learn. You can all help by attending regularly and being punctual to tutor groups and all lessons.

You told us that you enjoy most of your lessons and value the friendly, positive relationships with your teachers. Your achievement is satisfactory, but we think that you could do better in some subjects so we have asked the school to make sure that opportunities to learn are consistently good, including in the sixth form. We have asked the teachers to plan work that is at the right level of challenge for all students whatever their needs or abilities, to involve you actively in lessons and to help you to learn independently. We have also asked the school to introduce a programme across every subject to develop your writing skills. You can help by adopting good habits for learning and showing positive attitudes to your work in every lesson.

We have asked the headteacher and senior leaders to analyse your achievement and to check that you are doing as well as you can compared to other students in other schools, particularly those students with specific learning difficulties. Also, when plans are made to improve the school we want the headteacher and senior leaders to explain them carefully to staff, parents and carers and students so that everyone understands what needs to happen next. You can help by giving your full support to all the staff to make absolutely sure the school improves quickly.

We wish you all at Bulmershe a happy and successful future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Wellham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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