

Biddenham International School and Sports College

Biddenham Turn, Bedford, MK40 4AZ

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' progress towards GCSEs is not rapid enough, especially for boys.
- Achievement in mathematics is a weaker area, especially for more-able students and some students with special educational needs.
- Standards are not high enough in the single and core science courses.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Sixth form progress is not consistently rapid in subjects with large numbers of students.
- Teachers do not always plan lessons to give students enough challenge, given what they can already do.
- Students are not always clear what they should be able to do by the end of the lesson, and sometimes the pace drops.
- Many teachers do not use questioning well to extend students' learning and to find out whether they have understood what they have been taught.
- Not all subject leaders are effective in using data about students' progress and setting challenging targets.
- School plans to improve students' progress do not consistently identify the main actions to take and how these will be checked.
- The range of evidence used to evaluate teaching is too narrow.
- Governors do not have a fine-tuned knowledge of aspects of quality of teaching in the school and school planning.

The school has the following strengths

- Behaviour is good throughout the school and students show positive attitudes towards their learning.
- Students of all backgrounds feel well supported in the school and appreciate its inclusive ethos.
- Students make good progress in work-related subjects.
- Students are supported well in developing their literacy skills.
- Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is well provided for.
- The specialist school units provide well for students with behavioural and emotional difficulties.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 lessons, including nine joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made short visits to other lessons, observed school assemblies and scrutinised students' work.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, heads of subject departments, teachers, members of the governing body, and a representative from the Local Authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation, school development plans, behaviour records, safeguarding records, governing body documents, and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors also considered the views expressed in 76 questionnaires returned by school staff, together with the 87 responses submitted by parents to the online Parent View survey.

Inspection team

Roger Waddingham, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Hiscox	Additional Inspector
Gillian Scobie	Additional Inspector
Jalil Shaikh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Biddenham International School and Sports College is a larger than average sized school, for students from 13 to 19.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. This is additional funding allocated by the government for groups of pupils, including those looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- There are more pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds than in most schools of this size and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils receiving extra support through school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.
- The school offers off-site training for 28 students in Year 10 and Year 11, through placements at Bedford College, Shuttleworth College, KWS education, 1st place training, and Burnell training

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to ensure it is usually good or better, so:
 - all lessons challenge students in relation to their previous achievement
 - questioning is used to extend students' learning and to find out whether they have understood what they have been taught
 - all students are clear about what they should be able to do by the end of each lesson
 - staff take full account of examination requirements when giving detailed advice to students on how to improve.
- Raise achievement by:
 - ensuring that boys make better progress in their GCSE subjects
 - increasing progress in mathematics, especially for more-able students and those at school action plus
 - improving the proportion of good GCSE passes in the single and core science courses
 - working with subject departments to make sure students make consistently good progress in a wider range of A-level courses.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making use of the most recent information about students' progress to set challenging targets in all subjects
 - widening the range of evidence in evaluating teaching
 - focusing improvement plans more tightly on the main actions to take and the ways that impact of these actions will be evaluated
 - ensuring that governors have a more detailed knowledge of the effectiveness of teaching and the school's plans to improve standards.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- The proportion of students achieving five or more A* - C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, declined in 2011 and 2012, and in 2012 some students underachieved. Despite a rise in these results in 2013, achievement is not yet good for all groups and across key subjects.
- In 2013, girls' attainment was close to the national average, while boys' attainment was below, and they made slower progress. Students' progress from their below-average starting points in Key Stage 2 is now better than the low figures of the past two years.
- Progress in English has improved and is now broadly in line with the progress of students nationally. Students who are in the early stages of English language development are supported well and make good progress in literacy.
- In mathematics, students are now making better progress than they were, but the progress of more-able students in particular requires improvement.
- Progress in science is not consistently good; while students on the vocational course made good progress in 2013, the results for those studying separate sciences and the single science option require improvement. Students are not always clear about what standards they have to reach to get different grades.
- Achievement in the sixth form is improving after a recent decline. English and chemistry results for 2013 show A-level students made good progress. However, overall achievement at A level requires improvement because students have not shown good progress consistently over time across a wide enough range of subjects. Students following vocational courses make good progress because they are very clear about what the examination requires them to do and they are very well motivated. The overall proportions of students completing courses are in line with the national averages.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress in their literacy skills, benefiting from carefully organised tracking of their progress, and support. A good variety of resources are available to them in the specialised learning 'Hub' to help them make progress in reading. Progress in mathematics requires improvement, particularly for school action plus pupils, although they are now being given extra support in additional mathematics time so current pupils feel more confident in their work on number.
- The school has planned well to support vulnerable students, including those from groups with pupil premium funding. They make good progress in the sixth form because small group teaching is effective in identifying their learning needs and their course options are matched well to their attainment and interests. At GCSE, in 2012 students supported by the pupil premium were less than two-thirds of a grade behind their classmates in English, and about a grade behind in mathematics, a smaller gap than was the case nationally. Though the gap slightly widened in English in 2013, current Key Stage 4 pupils supported by the pupil premium continue to catch up. The school coordinates and monitors the impact of pupil premium expenditure well. The support is targeted well to promote both pupils' academic progress, and their motivation and confidence.
- The school checks carefully the achievement of students educated off-site. Regular reports are received on their attendance, and information about their progress shows that it is in line with

their targets.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement, particularly in the GCSE courses. Although the school has introduced good detail in the planning guidance given to staff, they do not always follow the guidance well enough to ensure that all students are challenged and supported to make good progress.
- In most Key Stage 4 lessons, students showed good motivation and were interested in their work. They made good progress where teachers skilfully directed students' learning towards the specific requirements of the examination syllabus, and encouraged them to reflect on what they needed to do to improve. This was a strength of the work-related courses, in particular, where a number of outstanding lessons were seen. Sixth form teaching had strengths in teachers' subject knowledge and the way staff explained new ideas to students using technical terms appropriately.
- Teaching in Year 9 was most successful when lessons were clearly based on a secure knowledge of students' previous learning in the subject, offering a good degree of challenge and interest. Staff did not always match the work well enough to what the students already knew and sometimes the expectations for average and more-able pupils were not high enough.
- Teachers planned aims for lessons in appropriate detail and usually made these clear at the start of a lesson. In weaker lessons these ideas were not explained well enough, so students did not know what was expected of them by the end of a task. In some cases staff did not guide students on how quickly they needed to work at their tasks, so the pace of the lesson slowed and work was incomplete at the end.
- In the best lessons teachers ensured that students had regular opportunities to discuss their ideas and they were challenged to explain their thinking in class discussion. However, many lessons required improvement because teachers did most of the talking, without checking that students understood, and the pace of learning slowed as a result. Learning also lacked depth when teachers did not encourage students to reflect on answers to questions, for example by asking them to explain their answers or to discuss answers together in small groups.
- Homework was reported as a concern by a number of parents and the school has responded well to this matter. Clearer guidance has been issued to staff after consultation with the parent forum, and the setting and completion of homework is now regularly monitored. Sixth form students reported that they found homework useful and supported well by the resources they were given.
- The quality of written guidance to students on their progress is not consistently good enough. Many staff have responded well to the new school policy on marking and some good quality comments were seen, particularly in English. Not enough staff are using the requirements of the examination syllabus to guide the detailed steps for improvement given when commenting on students' work.
- Support staff helped students well with their literacy in class and in small groups. Lower attaining students used information technology resources well to help them make progress in reading in particular. Occasionally, teaching assistants were not being used effectively during the teacher-led introduction.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good throughout the school and students feel that the school deals well with any poor behaviour. They particularly appreciate the school's inclusive ethos and cultural diversity. They show positive attitudes towards their learning and feel that behaviour in lessons is often outstanding.
- In most lessons behaviour is good and sometimes it is outstanding. Students are interested in their work and cooperate well on their tasks, showing a good degree of independence and concentration. They arrive in lessons promptly and settle to their work with little time wasted, particularly in sixth form lessons. Students move throughout the buildings in a calm and orderly manner showing a good degree of regard for others.
- Staff, parents and students alike say how well students enjoy being at the school and how they feel safe and free from bullying. Students said that incidents of racism or bullying were very rare and that they were dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- The school has a new policy for rewarding good attendance, which is now improving. Current school figures show attendance to be close to the national average, including the averages for different groups of students. Students with behaviour support needs are well provided for in the 'Ember Centre' and the 'Independent Study Centre', where specialist staff offer counselling and academic support. The school and the students are rightfully proud of the school's record of no exclusions in recent years as a good demonstration of the inclusive and caring approach to student welfare.
- Students receive good information, advice and guidance for course and career choices. Sixth form students feel they are encouraged well by staff to have high aspirations for their future education and training. School figures show that all students leave to progress to employment or to continue their education. Older students actively contribute to the life of the school, for example as mentors to younger students or taking a lead in sports events.

The leadership and management require improvement

- In the past year the school has set up a School Improvement Group to plan urgently to tackle identified areas of underperformance. As a result of the main actions from this initiative, teaching and achievement have improved. However, school approaches to the monitoring of teaching, departmental planning and the use of data about students' progress all require improvement, because they are not consistently effective.
- Records of the school's self evaluation findings show that the right broad areas for improvement have been identified. However, the priorities for action within these areas are not made clear because there is too much content in the related improvement plans, and there is not enough emphasis on what needs to be done to improve teaching. Subject leaders are not all using progress data and target setting to full effect, and some subject action plans are not clear and succinct. Not all have appropriate monitoring criteria and time scales.
- The school's procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching have improved over the past year after action was taken to check that lesson observation judgements were appropriately challenging. However, the evaluation of teachers' planning, student performance data, and students' written work has only recently been introduced into school procedures, so previous judgements of overall teacher quality were not as well founded as they should have been.
- The school is taking the right steps to improve staff skills. New staff in particular report that

opportunities for induction training and general professional development are well provided. Middle managers report that regular meetings with their line managers each term offer them good professional challenge and they are offered effective training by working with more experienced colleagues and attending external courses.

- The school has made significant recent developments in the availability of student tracking data to identify where extra support is needed. In the sixth form this is used well to identify concerns with individual students. The use of progress information at GCSE requires improvement because the school's targets for students are not always based on the most recent information and are not high enough.
- Significant improvements in the courses provided at GCSE have been made recently so that science choices are better matched to students' potential and all students receive extra time to consolidate their skills of numeracy and literacy. Students have a good range of choices in the sixth form, with vocational courses and the three-year option through the 'Gold' course meeting the needs of less academic students very well.
- There are good opportunities for students to develop their spiritual and cultural awareness in a wide range of school visits, and the international dimension is promoted well through contacts with students in a number of other countries. Literacy skills are promoted well through the extended time for teaching English and additional small group support for those who need it.
- The school has recently drawn on the Local Authority for support to school leaders. This has been effective, and leaders are demonstrating the capacity to improve, as the rise in results illustrates. The Local Authority is also brokering support to individual subject departments.
- Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors now have a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school after the Local Authority promoted the formation of the 'Governor School Improvement Group'. They are more aware of student performance information through these meetings.
 - The committee structure has been reorganised, with governors allocated to monitor key school improvement areas and their training needs identified in taking on new roles.
 - Governors have a broad picture of teachers' performance and what is being done to improve it. However, monitoring of expenditure on teaching requires fine-tuning because the governors are not aware of the effectiveness of staff on the upper pay scale.
 - Planning for improvement and the monitoring of progress is now better focussed through the school Single Plan. Governors understand the targets and are monitoring them, but have not taken steps to involve themselves in wider school development planning procedures.
 - The governors are aware of the school's expenditure of pupil premium funding and the school website has appropriate detail.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109690
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	425435

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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1042
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	300
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carole Bell
Headteacher	David Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2010
Telephone number	01234 342521
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