

Biddenham Upper School and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109690
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310065
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Elaine Taylor 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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1006
6th form	281
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Carol Bell
Headteacher	Mr Michael Berrill
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	Biddenham Turn Bedford Bedfordshire MK40 4AZ
Telephone number	01234342521
Fax number	01234325646

Age group	13-19
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2007
Inspection number	310065

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Biddenham Upper School and Sports College is a popular, average sized, non-selective secondary school for students aged 13-19. There are 281 students in the sixth form. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. Approximately half of all students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and one third of students speak English as an additional language. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, although the school has identified an additional group needing extra support.

The school has specialist school status in sport and was designated as a full service extended school in 2005. There are close links with St John's Special School and Biddenham hosts their post 16 learning centre.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Biddenham is a good school with an inclusive ethos which permeates every aspect of its work. Students from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures form good relationships and make good progress. The school is well respected within the local community. Inspectors received many comments from parents such as this one who wrote, 'I strongly endorse the popular view in the community that Biddenham is evolving into a very good school indeed.'

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership provided by the principal, the head of school and the senior leaders has contributed significantly to the improvements that have been evident in recent years. Their self-evaluation is accurate in identifying areas for improvement, which they have tackled with success. They have built up a team of staff with a common purpose and the expertise and skills to sustain this upward trend. This has happened in a relatively short time and demonstrates ably the school's good capacity to continue to improve and that the school provides good value for money.

Students achieve well. When they enter the school in Year 9, they have attained standards that are just below average. Standards at the end of Year 11 have risen significantly over the past three years from well below average, to average or just above. The school sets increasingly challenging targets and monitors carefully the progress of students towards these targets. Effective support is provided to those students who have been identified as underachieving in the past. This academic guidance is having a positive impact on the progress they make. There is good support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those for whom English is an additional language. This ensures they make good progress too. No groups of students perform significantly less well than others.

The quality of teaching and learning is good with a number of strengths. However, there is still variation across subjects. The school has a clear focus on developing teaching and learning and effective opportunities and support are provided to teachers to improve their practice. In many lessons, good use is made of ICT to enhance students' learning, but this is not consistent in all subjects. In some lessons, teachers fail to give the students opportunities to develop independent learning skills and work does not always cater for the range of ability or learning styles within the group.

The curriculum is outstanding as it provides personalisation to match the full range of learners' aspirations and capabilities. The school provides a wide range of enrichment activities that are well attended. The impact of specialist status is evident in the improved participation in the specialist subject and in improved attitudes to learning across the curriculum.

The school provides well for students' personal development and well-being and outcomes are good. Students say they love coming to the school, feel safe and have real opportunities to contribute to the decision making process in a variety of ways. They readily take the initiative for example in organising assemblies and express their views with confidence. There are positive relationships between teachers and students and attitudes to learning are good. The school has worked hard and improved attendance over the past three years. However, attendance remains below the national average. Students are well prepared for life beyond the school and this is reflected in the very high proportion of students who go on to further education or training when they leave the school.

The impact of the school's work is reflected in students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the active role many of them play in the wider life of the school. The school

builds on the range of experiences that the students bring and celebrates the range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. As one parent said: 'The diversity within this truly international school has given our children a first class, 21st century education.'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form provision is good overall. Achievement is above average, although there remains some inconsistency across subjects especially at AS level. Take up of A-level subjects in Year 13 is high. Students enter the sixth form with a range of attainment and all make good progress. The sixth form students are mature and articulate and make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school, acting as very positive role models for younger students. Their attitudes are excellent and they work extremely well together, even when the accommodation is somewhat cramped. These positive features have contributed to the fact that student numbers in the sixth form have trebled in recent years.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the quality of teaching and learning so that more is as good as the best practice that already exists within the school.
- Raise levels of attendance to be at least in line with the national average.
- Finalise the single central record to confirm all safeguarding procedures are in place.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards and achievement are good. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and a substantial minority are in the early stages of learning English. They come from a number of different schools and some are new to this country. The school's assessment and tracking data shows that students' attainment on entry to the school in Year 9 is just below the national average. Progress by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory because in national tests results are still just below the national average. Standards at the end of Year 11 have risen steadily and in 2007 the progress the students had made was good. Groups that had previously made inadequate progress achieved in line with expectations because the work done by the school to tackle this underachievement had been successful. Above average numbers of students continue in education. At the end of the sixth form they attain high standards relative to their starting points, meaning progress in this stage is also good. Significantly fewer than average students leave school to go into jobs without training or are unemployed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being, including students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. They demonstrate considerable respect for other cultures and religions. They are rightly proud of their school and have a real sense of ownership. They develop good personal skills, making a good contribution to the wider community through, for instance, charitable work. The school is also the home of a post 16 special school and it offers to these students the benefit of a broader social integration and specialist teaching.

Students enjoy their time at school, but attendance has remained below the national average in recent years despite the efforts to improve it. The school supports, in an innovative way, a significant number of students whose parents have decided to educate their children at home. Student behaviour is good and the school has halved the number of students excluded on a temporary basis in the last two years. There have been no permanent exclusions during this time. In some lessons, where teaching fails to engage their interest, a minority of students engage in low level disruptive behaviour.

The school's specialist status has provided many opportunities for students to adopt healthy lifestyles. They conduct themselves in a safe manner and are aware of hazards in practical lessons. On site students eat and drink sensibly but a significant number of students choose to leave the school site at lunchtime.

Students' personal development in the sixth form is outstanding. They make an excellent contribution to school life in areas such as paired reading and mentoring with younger students and are confident and articulate young people who show a high level of motivation in their work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning is good. Teachers show good subject knowledge and planning is good. Most lessons benefit from the good rapport between teachers and students and from the support provided by teaching assistants. There is still some inconsistency between subject areas. The best lessons challenge students through direct questioning that probes and extends their understanding. In less effective lessons, teachers do not provide work that addresses the needs of the full range of ability and there is a lack of interesting activities to engage learners with different learning styles. There are generally limited opportunities for learners to work independently or to assess their own work or that of their classmates; however, this is better in the sixth form. There is good support for those with additional needs and with English as an additional language. Parents and carers are involved in helping learners to succeed through Learning Focus Days where they can engage in a dialogue on strengths and areas for development. Through their responses to the inspection questionnaires, parents and carers said that they would like more detailed written reporting.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding curriculum is designed to meet the needs of students with a wide range of ability and interests. It is extremely flexible and students can negotiate programmes that they enjoy and that equip them well for future success. They are able to study an impressive range of additional subjects through the independent learning centre. The very good range of enrichment activities, in particular those provided through the school's specialist status in sport, contributes to this outstanding provision.

There is high quality provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that enables them to grow in confidence and develop the key skills necessary for their future

economic well-being. Vocational opportunities both at school and off site for example at Bedford College provide a work related dimension. The school provides for students with particular gifts and talents well, with opportunities to take examinations early. Students with English as an additional language can study for a qualification in their first language from Year 9 and all pupils in Years 10 and 11 take part in courses leading to a qualification in sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. Students know that they can seek help and support if needed from expert staff supported by a large number of outside agencies operating within the school. Whilst students are well safeguarded, the school's administrative systems do not yet fully meet current requirements.

The school uses comprehensive data on student progress to provide personalised support for underperforming or vulnerable learners. Individual student profiles are used each term for academic mentoring and to report progress. This system is proving successful in informing students about their progress but some parents feel that the quality of mentoring is variable.

Students receive appropriate advice and guidance in order to make informed decisions relating to career aspirations. The behaviour centre and the learning support centre have well qualified staff ensuring that these facilities are highly effective and appreciated by the students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. Leaders at all levels have a clear focus on raising standards and this has resulted in continued improvement in most aspects of the school's work. All staff share the vision of the principal and the head of school and the extended senior team he has built. They have successfully created a positive, collegiate working atmosphere. Self-evaluation has successfully identified areas for improvement and the process increasingly takes into account the views of students by involving them in observing lessons and attending meetings of the governing body. Issues from the previous inspection have been dealt with successfully. Recently improved systems for monitoring the work of departments are leading to improvements in teaching through a developing system of coaching. The school is truly inclusive and there are many examples of success in removing barriers to learning. This is evident in case studies of those in danger of becoming disengaged who have gone on to achieve both personal and academic success. Imaginative use is made of extended services and the school's specialist status has had a very positive impact across the curriculum and on students' attitudes.

Governors support and challenge the school well and are aware of where its strengths lie and what needs to be improved. There are good links with a wide range of outside agencies and the school is imaginative and creative in its approach to tackling issues. This has led to its involvement with innovative projects at a national level. The school was near to closure when the current principal took over and it has since earned such a good reputation locally that it is now over-subscribed.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
---	----------------	-------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Biddenham Upper School and Sports College, Bedford MK40 4AZ

On behalf of myself and my colleagues I want to thank you for your help in the inspection, for welcoming us into your school and talking to us so sensibly about the things you like and what you would like to see improved.

You told us how much you enjoy the school and how proud you are to be part of such a caring community. We were impressed by the respect everyone shows for each other and how you value the different cultures and religions in the school.

We found that there are many things about your school, which make it a good school.

- The good progress you make in learning and how the school monitors that to make sure you all succeed.
- The range of opportunities to take part in sporting and other activities.
- The range of subjects you can study and the way the school allows you to have a programme that suits your personal needs and preferences.
- The way the principal, the head of school and their colleagues lead the school.
- The good quality of most of the teaching.
- The good relationships you form with adults in the school and with each other.
- The wide range of adults and organisations you can turn to for help.
- The contribution many of you make to the life of the school, especially in the sixth form.
- The way the school makes you aware of how well you are doing in your work and gives you targets to improve it.

We think that your school can improve further by making sure more of your lessons are as good as the best. We want all of you to help to identify the best features of teaching practice to make sure things continue to improve. You can also help by making sure you all come to school regularly.

We wish you all continued success,

Elaine Taylor HMI