

# The Buckingham School

London Road, Buckingham, MK18 1AT

<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 February 2016
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- A parent's comment that 'the school has improved greatly over the past few years' is right. Pupils are now learning well and making good progress.
- Nearly all Year 11 pupils had made more than the nationally expected progress in mathematics and English by the time they took their GCSEs in 2015.
- Disadvantaged pupils now achieve as well as other pupils because leaders successfully reflected on the most effective way to support them.
- Changes to the option subjects in Years 9 to 11 mean that more pupils follow courses that match their aptitudes and interests.
- Sixth-form learners' achievement has improved because teaching is better in practically all subjects. Learners are very good role models for younger pupils and contribute much to school life.
- The headteacher has appointed senior and middle leaders who have strengthened the effectiveness of leadership and teaching. At the same time, the governing body moved into a higher gear.
- Pastoral care, especially in Year 7 and for those who have special educational needs or disability, is very supportive. Practically all pupils enjoy school and behave well. They all feel safe.
- The school prepares pupils very well for their future health and safety. Career advice is good. Pupils successfully learn about spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues blended with an understanding of citizenship and British values.
- In many lessons, pupils work extremely hard and are totally absorbed by high-quality and challenging teaching.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In some subjects, including mathematics, the most-able pupils do not make quite as good progress as others so they do not achieve the highest GCSE grades.
- Too many pupils do not read as well as they should do for their age. Poor comprehension of text holds back their learning and essay writing.
- A very small minority of pupils occasionally interrupt the flow of lessons. Some pupils take too little care over the presentation of their work.
- Teaching is not consistently good in all subjects and in all years. For example, there are variations in the quality of marking, preparation for examinations and challenge for the most-able.

## Full report

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

- Raise standards and progress by:
  - intensifying, particularly in Year 7, all possible ways to improve pupils' reading comprehension and fluency and their ability to write at length
  - guiding middle leaders and teachers to adjust their teaching for any pupils or learners, particularly the most able, who underachieve
  - focusing on all pupils and learners aiming for the highest examination grades possible
  - helping pupils and learners to tackle tests and examinations with experience and confidence about what to expect
  - improving the success rate for sixth formers who need to retake GCSE mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by (wording of school policies in quotes):
  - checking that the most-able pupils are challenged and do 'extension work rather than work they are already confident in'
  - monitoring that 'homework is relevant and challenging'
  - sharing the excellent examples of marking which uses the 'Strengths, Improvement, Task and Student response (SITs)' feedback sheets and gives pupils 'time to reflect, respond and improve their work'
  - insisting that all teachers follow the school's behaviour policy and do not accept poorly presented work
  - supporting recently appointed middle leaders to generate consistency in their team's work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Several new senior and middle leaders have joined the school since its previous inspection. The senior leadership team is now effective and keenly generating improvements. The headteacher motivates the staff well. Close to nine out of 10 staff who completed the questionnaire are proud to work at the school; nearly the same number feel the school has improved in the last two years. Confirmed by the inspection, one member of staff wrote that 'The school has such a positive feel about it.'
- New software produces analysis of the progress of any groupings of pupils. It clarifies where further support is needed – for boys in some subjects but for girls in others, or pupils in one teaching group but not another. It reveals, as a middle leader put it, 'that a step-change' has increased the focus on the higher grades although this has yet to be reflected in examination results.
- Leaders have been determined to narrow the gaps (mentioned in the previous inspection report) between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that made by others in the school and others nationally. They researched other schools' successful strategies and visited a school that had eradicated these gaps. This contributed to some changes to the support and extra help for these pupils. The progress gaps narrowed or disappeared and, in some subjects, disadvantaged pupils now make better progress than others. The school spends its pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funds wisely.
- The revised progress analysis has reduced the amount of middle leaders' paperwork, giving them more time to develop their teams and to identify and prepare support for underachieving pupils. Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because a few recently appointed middle leaders have yet to establish consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour management. It is clear though, that they are all heading in the right direction. Specialist chemistry and physics teachers have been appointed to join the school in the near future, which will further strengthen the science team's expertise.
- Senior and middle leaders assess the quality of teaching and learning accurately and the quality of training for all staff is good. Time is built into staff timetables for them to share good practice and work with colleagues. Subject reviews are regular, generated by weak outcomes if necessary, and action is taken to address any issues that emerge. Leaders support newly qualified and trainee teachers very well and practically all of them make rapid progress to achieve the teachers' standards.
- Careers education is strong with enterprise events for all years. Year 7 pupils have worked on an Olympic team event linked to different countries and Year 8 pupils visit universities. They also have well-presented assemblies describing their Year 9 option subjects. In 2015, Year 10 pupils entered a Buckingham University enterprise competition and designed the winning product against stiff competition.
- Some Year 11 pupils feel they have been in the dark about their future options but there is no evidence to suggest they have not been well informed. They can sample sixth-form lessons in subjects they are considering.
- Leaders have done much to promote reading and writing but acknowledge that, despite many success stories, too many pupils, even in Year 9 upwards, do not read fluently or understand text well enough. It is not straightforward taking pupils out of lessons for extra reading as this occasionally means that they miss a subject that they enjoy or one that raises their confidence. The headteacher is determined to devise further ways to improve literacy and to ensure that there is a stronger focus on numeracy skills in relevant subjects.
- The curriculum, which is good, is reviewed every year. It has been altered for Year 8 pupils starting their Key Stage 4 work. Acknowledging pupils' varied interests and skills, it offers subjects leading to the full English Baccalaureate (EBacc) qualification or an alternative mixture of work-related and academic subjects. The latter takes into account further and higher education routes and other post-16 options. The most suitable courses are selected, for example shifting from GCSE computer science to a BTEC information technology course.
- Pupils can join in a wide range of sports, performing arts, and subject revision and support sessions. Many of these happen in the lunch hour because it is hard for those who have to catch buses to rural homes to attend after school. Nevertheless, with visits and trips as well, pupils' experiences are enriched by the extra-curricular activities.

- Philosophy and ethics education as well as personal, social, health and economics lessons give Year 7 pupils a grounding in British values and spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. These important aspects of their education develop in all years. There has been a significant shift in the school's provision of these elements since the previous inspection. All teachers know that they must refer to them in lessons and make work relevant to pupils' lives whenever possible.
- Morning tutor sessions, assemblies and the theme for the week all support the school's coherent and successful approach to pupils' broad education and preparation for their futures. A few weeks before the inspection, a retired judge spoke to Years 7 to 9 pupils about the rule of law, and Year 7 pupils described a memorable assembly where magistrates had set up a court. Year 11 pupils met during the inspection had a clear understanding of the terms 'extremism' and 'radicalisation'. All staff have followed a 'Prevent' training course.
- The school has strong links with its feeder primary schools focusing, for example, on improving reading in Years 6 and 7 or delivering computer science lessons involving robots; the latter strengthens primary school teachers' skills as well as those of their pupils. Many Buckingham pupils and learners attain sports leadership awards working in local primary schools.
- Parents' forum meetings often involve a presentation and discussion about important issues, such as how spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is promoted through all subjects, assessment in the future without National Curriculum levels and the government's new Progress 8 measure.
- The school could not do more to engage with parents and those caring for looked after children to ensure that all pupils are safe and well supported. Parents wrote that they are kept 'well informed' and one said that their child 'improved by leaps and bounds after catching up'. A few parents have concerns when staff leave (often for promotion) halfway through GCSE or sixth-form courses. The headteacher does everything possible to seek temporary specialist teachers if a permanent replacement cannot be found.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The experienced Chair of the Governing Body leads an effective and hard-working team whose members bring much relevant experience and expertise to meetings. They are dedicated to all staff having high aspirations for pupils and for pupils to experience 'Success through achievement, challenge and enjoyment' (a phrase which is displayed on many of the school's walls). Members are conscientious about the areas they monitor and visit members of staff to explore developments and issues. Following training, governors now ask detailed questions about pupils' progress and know which subjects do not generate the same outcomes as the strongest; some governors attend senior leadership meetings on progress and other topics.
  - Governors support the headteacher's approach to pay awards – that they must be linked to the progress staff generate, and that temporary contracts are not extended if staff do not teach really well. Governors fund external support from the Buckingham Learning Trust because they understand the benefits of helping staff to move forward. They keep a sharp eye on how extra funds are spent.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. A governor checks the register of all staff, including volunteers, every term and several governors have completed safer recruitment training. All staff, including newly qualified teachers, receive child protection training at least annually. Governors review all relevant policies. Staff and some pupils experience presentations on sensitive issues such as female genital mutilation and child exploitation. A culture of safety education and awareness permeates the school's work.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Many successful lessons reflect the excellent and respectful relationships pupils have with teachers and each other. They allow pupils to share their ideas, ask questions and contribute confidently; these aspects of learning were less evident during the previous inspection.
- Pupils' concentration and willingness to learn are evident in many lessons, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In a Year 10 netball lesson seen during the inspection, all pupils made outstanding progress as the teacher inspired them to challenge themselves and showed pupils with different ball skills how to improve. Some humanities teachers make a point of stressing vocabulary and spelling to improve pupils' writing.
- Another factor contributing to all pupils learning well is when teachers prepare work, text in history for example, at two or three levels so all pupils can understand it. Teachers spot when the most-able pupils are ready to move on and have extension work ready for them. This does not happen often enough.

- There is some extremely high-quality marking in several subjects. Pupils are very clear that they find it helpful and learn a good deal from it. They, and their parents, highlight subjects where teachers' feedback tells them quite clearly what they need to do to improve their work.
- If the school's policies, for presentation of work or marking spelling mistakes, for example, are not followed, pupils' reading and writing do not improve and they do not learn the benefits of well-presented tasks. In several subjects, pupils' work revealed the need for more careful checks on graphs without any scales or incomplete exercises, for example. One middle leader observed that presentation is 'work in progress'.
- The leader of English knows that many pupils' reading and comprehension are not strong enough for them to question, infer and decipher text or widen their vocabulary. The quality of teaching in small group sessions for weak readers is good and programmes to support rapid progress are successful. There remains a need to intensify this work in Year 7 to sow seeds for future years.
- Pupils often assess their own and each other's work and do so thoughtfully. They gain insight into what constitutes particularly good work and, in Years 9 to 11, appreciate how GCSE mark schemes are structured to reflect grades. Pupils say they find an understanding of assessment levels helpful.
- The small number of teaching assistants either support work in English, mathematics and science or work with groups or individual pupils, often to improve their reading. Recently, staff received training as to how to liaise effectively with teaching assistants, which has further enhanced their effectiveness.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Strong links with feeder primary schools and a summer school for some Year 6 pupils help Year 7 pupils to settle in to secondary school life successfully.
- A well-being centre has been set up for pupils, mainly in Year 7, who require nurturing to improve their confidence and self-esteem. The school's support for looked after children, pupils with child protection plans and others needing care is very strong with meticulous records and monitoring. A parent wrote that 'expert support had been offered through the child's turbulent time of emotional stress'.
- Similar care is given to monitoring the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils attending alternative provision. The providers keep in touch with staff and send half-termly updates. They contact the school immediately if a pupil does not attend. Pupils' attitudes to learning improve and they make good progress towards work-related or life skills qualifications.
- Pupils learn about first aid, emotional and mental health, and the dangers of drugs among many other topics. E-safety has a high profile, supported by computer lessons which, for example, consider the ethical and moral principles of programming or how computers contribute to the anti-cyber bullying agenda.
- Philosophy and ethics lessons epitomise how pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain. They blend well-crafted guidance on examination techniques with a focus on pupils appreciating the significance of this subject to their futures. Pupils consider challenging questions, such as 'Do you think countries that have the death penalty believe in human rights?'
- Several year groups also have citizenship lessons when pupils might prepare ideas for improving or contributing to their own community or the local community. Year 7 pupils are proud of their contribution to fundraising for Great Ormond Street Hospital. The school council is effective and respected by pupils, with sixth-form leadership teams supporting its work.
- Pupils discuss issues such as homophobia, sex education or gender orientation with sensitivity, reflecting the school's strong stance on equality and tolerance. Racism is almost non-existent and bullying very rare and dealt with firmly. Pupils admit that the school's ban on using mobile phones during the school day has reduced potential upsets, as a group of boys observed, 'particularly by teenage girls'!

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They take pride in their uniform, move around the large school site sensibly, and are polite and welcoming. The great majority arrive at lessons punctually, settle down to work well and are keen to receive achievement badges.

- Heads of years and their teams have identified, and work hard to change, the behaviour of the small minority of pupils who occasionally interrupt lessons and distract others from learning. A very few pupils spend time in the school's isolation room and repeats of poor behaviour are rare.
- Attendance is above average and the number of persistent absentees has dropped since the previous inspection. With an enhanced role, the attendance team contacts families and foster parents immediately when their child is absent. For serious reasons, one pupil in each of the last two years was permanently excluded. The number of fixed-term exclusions is below average.

## Outcomes for pupils

are good

- English and mathematics 2015 GCSE results showed that pupils, especially those who entered the school with average standards, made more progress than that seen nationally. This contributed to the rise in the percentage of pupils achieving five good GCSEs including in these two subjects.
- The outcome of the school's focus on improving disadvantaged pupils' progress is that, in several subjects, they make at least the same progress as other pupils, and sometimes more. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability achieve as well as others.
- Work seen, and information based on accurate assessments, confirms that current pupils' progress is better than last year's. It has particularly improved in science because specialist external support has been helpful and effective. In 2015, practically all the most-able pupils attained pass grades in the three separate sciences.
- The most-able exceeded national progress figures in mathematics but not in English. Based on pupils' starting points, the percentage of high GCSE grades is too low in some subjects, particularly for the most-able pupils. For example, despite good pass rates, very few pupils attained high grades in art, food technology or media studies. In contrast, pupils with a range of starting points exceeded the national percentage attaining A\*/A grades in citizenship, sociology, physical education, and health and social care.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The average points score per learner and the percentage of distinctions rose in 2015. Predictions, which were externally moderated and accurate in 2015, show a further improvement in 2016. Inspectors saw several lessons, particularly in Year 13, where learners made strong progress and worked diligently. A few learners admitted that they work harder after they have submitted their university applications.
- Leaders strive to instil a similar work ethic in Year 12. They now focus on making sure that teachers outline the structure of courses so that learners see the need for hard work from day one. Effective monitoring of progress means that those who fall behind are given improvement targets to meet.
- Teaching is good overall and particularly successful when specialist teachers blend their subject knowledge with reference to the assessment requirements of examinations. In a Year 13 work-related course, the teacher explained complicated computer programming skilfully, and science learners valued guidance on revision techniques following a discussion about their mock examination results.
- However, as in the main school, marking ranges from regular, detailed and specific guidance to rather brief comments that give learners limited advice. The sixth form is not yet outstanding as progress is less strong in Year 12 and not consistently good in all subjects. Improvement is also needed for learners who have not attained a grade C in mathematics. The retake success rate is good in English but not in mathematics.
- The sixth form now offers a good, flexible range of academic and work-related courses; learners can mix the two if this matches their aspirations and abilities. The proportion of learners applying to university has increased with two thirds choosing this route in 2015 and one in five taking up apprenticeships.
- Retention rates are high. All learners proceeded to education, employment or training in 2015 because careers advice and guidance is well planned and effective. A learner described a member of staff as 'the guru of applications'. Learners value the wealth of activities (some validated externally) related to enterprise and employability. The school focuses on developing learners' understanding of the key elements employers seek: skills, values and behaviours. A past sixth former started a business during Year 13 and now employs seven staff.

- Learners consider how to think and write critically and to work sensibly on their own. The head of sixth form monitors their objectives for study periods. Several learners observed that they had much support to improve their study skills and could discuss any personal or work concerns with the head of sixth form.
- Learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They prepare some assemblies themselves and learn from speakers, for example about mental health issues. Several leadership groups work with younger pupils to explore issues related to cyber bullying or to support reading. Sixth formers arrange charity fundraising events and community support.
- Sixth-form leaders promote high expectations and set targets based on learners' GCSE results, but a few learners want their targets to be more aspirational; future targets will be more challenging. All learners are encouraged to carry out work experience and leaders ensure that it is worthwhile.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	110484
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10002398

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Modern
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,010
<b>Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes</b>	134
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Gamble
<b>Headteacher</b>	Angela Wells
<b>Telephone number</b>	01280 812206
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.buckinghamschool.com">www.buckinghamschool.com</a>
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11–12 December 2013

## Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection there have been several staffing changes including senior and middle leaders and teachers.
- The school is just above the average-sized 11–18 school with a small sixth form.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium is below the national average and declining. The pupil premium is funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for looked after children.
- A small number of pupils receive catch-up funds if they have not attained average levels in English or mathematics at the end of primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage with a small number of pupils from various minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs or disability is below average but the proportion of those pupils with statements or education, health and care plans is above average.
- A well-below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A very small number of pupils attend alternative educational provision at Blueprint School (a pupil referral unit), Haydon Training Business College and Aylesbury Youth Motor Project (part time).
- Since the previous inspection, the school has met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in close to 50 part-lessons and tutor sessions. A few lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. In practically all lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' and learners' written work as well as looking at samples of books provided by the school.
- Inspectors met with several groups of pupils and talked to others informally during break times. Discussions were held with staff, including pastoral and academic senior and middle leaders. Meetings were held with the chair and six other members of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of 56 parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 35 parents submitted written comments. Inspectors also considered responses to 99 online questionnaires completed by members of staff and 42 completed by pupils (4% of pupils).
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation, action plan for 2015/16, standards and progress information, behaviour and attendance records, information about the governors' work, external reviews and a range of policies.

## Inspection team

Clare Gillies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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John McAteer	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Walshe	Ofsted Inspector

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