

# The Bulmershe School

Woodlands Avenue, Woodley, Reading, Berkshire RG5 3EU

## Inspection dates

7–8 November 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The new headteacher, together with governors and the senior team, provide strong leadership. As a result, there have been significant improvements in key aspects of the school, including pupils' outcomes, in the last year.
- Leaders make good use of information on pupils' achievement in key stage 4 to analyse strengths and weaknesses and set appropriate priorities for improvement.
- Subject leaders have a clear focus on the quality of learning and teaching. There is a spirit of continual improvement, staff are held to account, and senior leaders ensure that a wide range of effective training is provided.
- Teaching is very effective. Typically, pupils enter the school with low starting points and make strong progress in English, mathematics, science and the humanities. Progress in other subject areas is improving rapidly.
- The school's assessment and tracking systems are relatively new. Occasionally, staff do not use information about the current attainment of key stage 3 pupils and sixth formers to plan activities to meet their needs.
- The vast majority of pupils behave in a mature and thoughtful manner around the site and in lessons.
- Parents, staff and pupils are rightly proud of The Bulmershe School. They recognise that it offers an aspirational yet caring community, where pupils are kept safe and their welfare matters greatly.
- The provision in the sixth form is good. Most students make strong progress. Suitable careers education and guidance prepare students well for their next steps.
- Strong leadership and planning ensure that the additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is used well. These pupils are supported to make accelerated progress across the curriculum.
- Leaders and governors have prioritised removing the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils. These pupils now make progress in line with that of other pupils nationally.
- Not all teachers expect enough of the most able pupils. They provide too few opportunities to deepen pupils' thinking and promote extended writing in some subjects.
- Leaders have worked successfully with pupils and their families to make sustained improvements to attendance. Leaders are aware that this work needs to continue to improve the attendance of some groups.

## Full report

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

- Leaders should improve the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' progress further, by:
  - ensuring that teachers' lesson planning and the accuracy of their assessment in key stage 3 are consistently as effective as the best examples in the school
  - improving the quality and depth of writing across the wider curriculum to promote thinking, particularly for the most able pupils
  - refining the school's use of assessment information in key stage 3 and the sixth form.
- Continue to improve pupils' attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher is passionate about wanting the very best outcomes for all pupils. A welcoming and inclusive culture, with a shared drive for continual improvement, is evident from the top down. Leaders, teachers and pupils are rightly proud of their school. A very high proportion of parents who expressed an opinion praised the quality of leadership, teaching, behaviour and how well the school looks after the pupils. One parent spoke for many when they commented, 'This is a great school where pupils' individuality is acknowledged and respected then nurtured and nourished to give them the opportunity to be the best they can be.'
- Senior leaders have established a strong culture of professional development across the school. They have a secure understanding of what effective teaching and learning look like. Leaders ensure that they monitor the quality of teaching closely and so they know individual teachers' strengths and areas for development well. They use this information to ensure that training is effective, and sharply focused on school priorities. This has led to improved outcomes in many subjects.
- Middle leaders and teachers respect and trust the headteacher and senior leaders. They value the support and challenge that leaders bring to their work. Working together has ensured that the teaching is securely good, particularly in English, humanities and drama.
- Subject leaders are an enthusiastic and committed team and they are committed to continually improving standards in their subject areas. A culture of collaborative learning, professional dialogue and coaching has led to improved teaching and learning. The staff survey indicates that the effect of this teamwork is that teachers feel valued, and staff morale and pride in the school are particularly high.
- Governors and senior leaders have ensured that the leadership of SEN and the support offered for vulnerable children are particularly effective. As a result, the attendance of these pupils has improved and those currently at the school are making good progress across the curriculum.
- Leaders have ensured that the pupil premium grant is used effectively. It has funded a well-managed programme of tuition, small group interventions, accelerated reading and mathematics programmes, and outreach events with the local community. These have had a demonstrable impact on the progress that disadvantaged pupils have made. Provisional progress information shows this group made progress in line with national expectations in 2017. In addition, pupils' work demonstrates that disadvantaged pupils currently at the school are making progress in line with their peers.
- Leaders ensure that the Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to raise standards of literacy and numeracy for those pupils arriving at the school with lower-than-average attainment in English, mathematics or both.
- The broad curriculum meets the needs of key stage 3 and 4 pupils very well. Leaders and governors ensure that the sixth form offers a suitable range of academic and vocational courses to meet students' needs. This, along with a wide range of

opportunities for learning beyond lessons and opportunities to undertake leadership roles, underpins pupils' achievements. Consequently, pupils' progress, although not yet outstanding, has improved considerably since a dip in 2016.

- Tutor time and assemblies are used well, in key stage 3, to promote interest in a broad range of issues, stimulated by current affairs. These, a well-planned religious education programme and a range of opportunities in other subjects, combine to promote a good awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Pupils respect people from different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs and are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders are aware that the quality of learning in key stage 4 tutor times while good is not as consistently strong as it is in the younger years.
- The small number of pupils educated off site benefit from their experience of a broader and more vocational curriculum, and from bespoke support packages. Their progress and welfare are overseen by a nominated member of staff, who liaises frequently with the other schools involved. These pupils' learning in core subjects is carefully organised, allowing them to gain suitable qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Leaders have developed comprehensive systems for monitoring and tracking pupils' behaviour and attendance. Notably, the school's Ivory Centre has been particularly effective in offering support and positive interactions within a supportive environment for vulnerable pupils. As a result, there has been a reduction in exclusions and a sustained improvement in attendance over the last two years.
- Leaders have promoted collaborative work with other local schools, which has supported improved moderation and better teaching in a range of subjects. Since her appointment in September 2017, the headteacher has been proactive in seeking to develop existing partnerships and forge even closer working relationships with other local schools to expand this aspect of the school's work.
- The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress in Years 7 and 8, and students' progress in the sixth form, are becoming embedded. Senior leaders work with teachers to set challenging targets for pupils. Leaders ensure that attainment information is collected from regular testing, and they use this to monitor pupils' progress over time. However, planning for lessons and assessment is not consistently of high quality across all subjects. Further refinements to lesson planning in some subjects are needed so teachers consistently identify resources and approaches to challenge disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors are a strong and cohesive team who share the headteacher's ambitious aims and vision for the school. The chair of the governing body ensures that the governing body has a suitable range of specific skills and that governors attend to their own training needs. Recently, individual governors have adopted specific responsibilities for key aspects of the school's work. Consequently, governors have the capacity to offer increasingly robust and systematic challenge to all aspects of the school's work.
- Governors are well-informed about the quality of teaching and increasingly well-informed about the progress pupils make. They ensure that finances are managed well, including checking that additional funding has a clear impact on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

- A planned calendar of meetings and visits enables governors to evaluate aspects of the school such as safeguarding, the quality of teaching and provision for vulnerable pupils. Regular reports from leaders ensure that governors have a good understanding of the school's performance and its day-to-day work. Scrutinising internal performance information, alongside externally produced analyses, equips governors with a strong and improving understanding of the success of the school against its own targets, and national standards.
- Governors have worked well with the local authority to successfully secure strong leadership within the school. In the last year, they have coordinated the appointment of the headteacher, restructured the senior leadership team and appointed two new deputy headteachers. In addition, they review the recommendations of leaders to ensure fair and consistent application of policies, and that only the best teaching is rewarded with pay rises.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders make all required checks to make sure that adults are appropriately qualified and suitable to work with young people. The diligent recording of these checks meets statutory requirements.
- Leaders ensure that staff engage in regular training and receive timely briefings to ensure that their understanding of child protection is up to date. Consequently, staff understand their roles and are knowledgeable about safeguarding issues.
- Leaders and teachers' work to ensure that pupils are safe and happy is evident throughout the school. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online.
- Staff and pupils understand how to identify those at risk and how to report any concerns. Leaders swiftly and appropriately follow up any concerns raised, including involving outside agencies when necessary.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed that they all felt confident to share any concerns that they may have with school staff and that they trusted them to take appropriate actions. Parental feedback from Parent View confirmed that pupils feel safe and happy in the school.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Leaders have established consistent routines and expectations across the curriculum and pupils arrive at lessons well-prepared and ready to learn. Subject leaders know the relative strengths and weaknesses within their departments and work well with their teachers to share good practice through modelling and coaching. Most teachers and pupils share high aspirations for pupils' achievement.
- The majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to design interesting lessons with a suitable level of challenge. For example, in English, drama and most mathematics lessons, where challenge and teachers' expectations are routinely high, pupils show enthusiasm and actively engage in discussions and learning activities.

- Teachers offer a range of approaches that develop pupils' thinking well. For example, most teachers use skilful questioning techniques to challenge pupils' understanding and make them justify their reasoning, particularly in key stage 4 and the sixth form. Similarly, many teachers focus their questioning to ensure that particular groups of pupils, such as the disadvantaged, are fully engaged in lessons. Some teachers prepare specific learning activities designed to motivate different groups of pupils. For example, in a Year 11 biology lesson, a small group of pupils were enthused to apply their recent learning to reflect on the impact of a particular eating disorder, while others engaged in other learning.
- Teachers set homework that is appropriate for the work that the pupils are doing and in line with the school's policy. This helps pupils to consolidate their learning and supports them making strong progress over time. The majority of parents responding to Parent View confirmed this to be the case.
- Across the curriculum, strong relationships enable teachers to monitor pupils' work in the classroom effectively. Usually, teachers adapt learning activities to provide an appropriate level of challenge to pupils with different starting points. Occasionally, in some key stage 3 lessons, teaching lacks pace and challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Senior leaders are aware that there is not enough consistency in the thorough planning of learning, particularly for the most able pupils. Lesson and assessment planning in key stage 3 is stronger in mathematics and English than it is in science. In science, more detailed planning is needed to identify, then sequence, the development of scientific understanding and practical skills over time. New leadership arrangements in arts and technology faculty have recently enabled a clearer focus on improving planning and assessment, but this work is ongoing.
- Teachers follow the school assessment policy well and most have taught pupils to routinely analyse their own work as well as to give constructive feedback to their peers. Pupils respond well to these opportunities to refine and improve their work. Consequently, nearly all pupils take a pride in their learning and most know their targets and what they have to do to achieve them.
- Most teachers offer precise, subject-specific feedback and clearly focused targets, which help pupils to make progress. The strongest and most consistent examples of these are in English and the humanities. In other subjects, such as science and mathematics, this practice is less well developed. Occasionally, pupils' misconceptions are not addressed during teachers' routine assessment of their work. This has limited the progress some pupils have made in these subjects, particularly in key stage 3.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Strong relationships and an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect are strengths of the school. Pupils are happy and feel well supported by the staff.

- Pupils are safe and secure in the school and they feel content here. Excellent systems are in place to offer help and support to vulnerable pupils, sometimes involving external agencies when appropriate. An overwhelming majority of parents responding to Parent View affirmed that their children are well looked after at school and nearly all of them agreed that their children are safe and happy here. Parents' faith in The Bulmershe School is well founded; this is a very caring and inclusive community.
- Pupils' responses to Ofsted's student questionnaire were very positive. They recognise how well the school promotes equalities, encourages them to take on responsibilities and develops their independent learning skills.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Through tutor time, assemblies and in some subjects, teachers ensure that pupils are aware of the risks and potential dangers in wider society.
- The small numbers of pupils who attend alternative provision are supported well and able to follow a suitable range of key stage 4 courses. Teachers work closely with alternative providers to enable these pupils to succeed, check that they are safe and monitor their welfare.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school. Pupils are courteous and helpful, and they welcome visitors and new pupils to their school. They are smart and wear their uniform with pride. There is very little litter or graffiti around the school.
- Pupils move around the site showing patience and respect to one another. Even when there are long queues for the canteen, they are sensible, good-humoured and politely wait their turn.
- In most lessons, pupils are focused on their work and low-level disruption is rare. Occasionally, when tasks are not well-planned or insufficiently stretching, some pupils can disrupt learning through off-task behaviour. Pupils report that this is rare and not how they want their school to be.
- Pupils reported that bullying is rare and, when it does occur, they trust staff to swiftly respond and take appropriate actions. Older pupils spoke with confidence that homophobia or racism are not acceptable in school.
- Leaders and governors have been effective in reducing fixed-term exclusions. In the past, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have had higher exclusion rates than their peers. The school has invested well in better resources and systems to support these groups of pupils, and behaviour and attitudes have improved. Any differences in exclusion rates are being eliminated.
- Overall attendance has improved and is in line with national average. Disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, have contributed disproportionately to absence levels in the past. Leaders have taken appropriate action to address this, although gaps do remain. Leaders and governors are very aware of these differences and have prioritised resources to continue to address them.

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils start the school in Year 7 with attainment that is below the national average. Historically, pupils have made strong progress from these starting points to attain GCSE outcomes broadly in line with national averages. However, in 2016, although Year 11 pupils' progress was average overall, boys did not achieve as highly as girls. In addition, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils made significantly slower progress than their peers.
- The provisional GCSE results for 2017 demonstrate a clear improvement from this dip in 2016, and strong performance in the majority of subjects. Overall, pupils' progress from their starting points has improved across the curriculum and disadvantaged pupils made progress in line with national expectations. The progress made in English was significantly above the national average and strong progress was made in mathematics. Consequently, the proportion of pupils achieving a good pass in GCSE English and mathematics was in line with national averages.
- The school makes good use of its pupil premium funding. This has ensured that disadvantaged pupils currently in the school make rapid progress in English and mathematics, and improving progress across the wider curriculum.
- Targeted programmes for vulnerable pupils ensure they have access to an appropriate and challenging curriculum at all times. This includes those pupils who are receiving extra support for their behaviour and who are at risk of exclusion. Regular support and challenge for this group are also leading to improved attendance and engagement in school.
- Careers advice and guidance are well organised and effective. Year 10 pupils benefit from opportunities to learn from work experience. Pupils in key stage 4 are able to speak with confidence about the range of opportunities open to them at age 16, including the variety of courses, different institutions and qualifications needed to support their individual aspirations. Pupils and sixth formers are well prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training.
- Current pupils' attainment is improving across the curriculum. School information and inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that pupils are making strong progress, particularly in key stage 4 and the sixth form. Where the most able are set demanding work, they rise to meet the challenge. However, these pupils are not always sufficiently challenged, particularly in the younger year groups. In subject areas other than English, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills and develop their understanding through producing extended writing.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- In recent years, published outcomes information shows that students make progress in the sixth form in line with national averages, in both academic and vocational courses. This includes students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Provisional progress information for 2017 indicates that this continued in A-level courses, but that the progress made in applied general courses dipped last year. Subject leaders have revised their assessment and tracking systems in the sixth form as a result. Current

students are making strong progress in the academic and vocational courses that the school offers.

- Sixth formers are confident, work well in groups and use complex language well. In lessons this, together with their participation in discussions, shows their deep understanding of their work. For example, in a fast-paced Year 13 English lesson students applied their knowledge of poems they had previously studied to engage in a high level of discussion and challenge a theme.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good. Lessons proceed with pace and purpose and students are set ambitious targets. Teachers demonstrate their strong subject and assessment knowledge to design learning activities that support students' understanding to grow. Examples of good relationships promoting challenge and examination skills were seen in English, mathematics, science, humanities and social science lessons. Students value the support their subject teachers give them and use lesson time well.
- Students' attitudes in the sixth form are very positive and they are committed to their studies. Those who joined the sixth form from other schools told inspectors that they feel well supported by teachers and their peers, which enabled them to settle in quickly. Students value the range of extra-curricular opportunities including sports and opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities, such as involvement in the school council or mentoring younger pupils with mathematics.
- Students who did not achieve standard grade passes in English and/or mathematics at GCSE are supported well to resit these qualifications. Leaders have ensured that appropriate support has enabled an increase in the proportion improving their grades.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum offered in the sixth form includes an appropriate mix of academic and vocational courses that meet the students' needs well. Tracking systems evaluating assessment information are relatively new and becoming embedded. Consequently, although leaders monitor the students' progress towards meeting their challenging targets, interventions to support those at risk of underachieving are not always sufficiently rapid.
- Leaders provide an appropriate package of careers advice and guidance to students. There are opportunities for students to engage in work experience and leaders have plans in place to enhance this provision. The curriculum is enriched with regular non-qualification activities, including personal development lessons and assemblies designed to develop students' personal, social and employability skills.
- The latest destination data presents a strong and improving picture, with all students going on to appropriate education, employment or training. Three quarters of students go on to study at higher education institutions with most of the rest taking up apprenticeships or employment. A small number retake level 3 qualifications.

## School details

Unique reference number	110062
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	10041462

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,040
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Miskell
Headteacher	Amanda Woodfin
Telephone number	0118 9353353
Website	<a href="http://www.thebulmersheschool.com">www.thebulmersheschool.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@bulmershe.wokingham.sch.uk">office@bulmershe.wokingham.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	20–21 November 2013

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The Bulmershe School is slightly larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a sixth form.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is in line with the national average. Some pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is high.
- Approximately one half of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the largest group from Asian or Asian British backgrounds. More pupils speak English as an additional language than in most schools.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site provision at Foundry College and Addington School.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made visits to a total of 42 lessons in order to contribute to their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also visited an assembly and tutor times and observed pupils' conduct around the site at break and lunchtime.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body, academic and pastoral leaders, teachers and support staff, and a representative of the local authority.
- Pupils' views were gathered from meetings with groups of pupils and sixth formers. Informal conversation with pupils and students took place around the school site.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation. This included leaders' self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, information about pupils' progress and standards, the school's website, minutes of governors' meetings, records of behaviour and attendance information, and a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 85 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, surveys returned by 111 pupils and 81 questionnaires returned by staff.

## Inspection team

Matthew Newberry, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jon Whitcombe	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Robb-Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Cullum	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

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