

# The Bulmershe School

Chequers Way, Woodley, Reading, RG5 3EL

**Inspection dates** 20–21 November 2013

|                                |                      |              |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory | 3        |
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Good</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Good         | 2        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Good         | 2        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Good         | 2        |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Good         | 2        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Students make good progress overall. The standards they attain in English, mathematics, science and a range of other subjects are at, or above, the national average. The school is improving quickly.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Lessons are well planned and paced so that students are engaged in their learning.
- The sixth form is good. Students have made good progress by the end of Year 13 and an increasing number of them attain the highest grades at A level.
- Students' behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is very good. Students' very positive attitudes to learning contribute to their good progress in lessons.
- The school is a harmonious community with good relationships between students and staff. Students feel very safe and the school promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- School leaders track the progress of students carefully to ensure that they meet challenging targets. Well-planned support is quickly put in place if they are falling behind. As a result of this, any gaps in achievement between different groups of students in the school are rapidly closing.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear vision and sense of purpose which are shared across the school. Governors have taken decisive actions since the last inspection to secure improvements in students' achievement and the quality of teaching.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students do not make consistently good progress in all subjects in Key Stage 4 and in Year 12.
- There is not yet enough outstanding teaching. Some lessons do not provide sufficient challenge, especially for the more-able students.
- Opportunities are sometimes missed to promote students' literacy and numeracy during lessons.
- Teachers' marking does not always help students to make the progress of which they are capable.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 part lessons and made seven joint observations with senior staff. They held meetings with groups of students in all key stages and looked at students' work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle managers and other members of staff. The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's development plan and self-evaluation, information about students' attainment in the 2013 examinations, performance management data, and the minutes of meetings of the governing body. They also looked at documentation relating to safeguarding.
- The inspection team observed the work of the school, including activity in social spaces and at break and lunch times, spoke informally to students and visited an assembly.
- Inspectors took into account 47 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 30 responses to the staff questionnaire. They also looked at surveys of the views of parents and staff carried out by the school.

## Inspection team

|                             |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| John Meinke, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Richard Butler              | Additional Inspector |
| Keith Homewood              | Additional Inspector |
| John Worgan                 | Additional Inspector |

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Bulmershe School is smaller than the average-sized comprehensive school.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- The percentage of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The percentage supported at school action plus or by a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The percentage of students eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding provided for children in the care of the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families, is in line with the national average.
- An above-average proportion of students join the school after the start of Year 7.
- About one fifth of students in Years 7 and 8 benefit from the nationally funded catch-up programme.
- The school is a specialist sports college.
- A small number of students attend some or all of their education off-site at the Aspire training centre, Berkshire College of Agriculture, Brambles Children's Centre, Creative Sports' Body Rocks Life Skills Training Scheme, The Piggott School, Skilzshop and Thrive.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher joined the school in January 2013.

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

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that students consistently make as good progress in all subjects in Key Stage 4 and in Year 12, as they do in Key Stage 3, by making sure that:
  - all teachers plan activities that provide appropriate challenge
  - there are more opportunities in lessons for students to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy, for example through independent extended writing
  - the very good practice in marking seen in some subjects is consistently applied across the school and that students are given time to respond to teachers' feedback so that the students all know exactly what they need to do to improve.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students enter the school with levels of attainment below the national average. They generally achieve standards in their GCSE examinations which are in line with, or above, the national average, including in English, mathematics and science. Overall, all groups of students have made good progress by the end of Key Stage 4, including those from minority ethnic groups.
- Students make good or better progress throughout Key Stage 3 and in the majority of subjects at Key Stage 4. However, there are a few subjects in Key Stage 4 where their progress is not always as good as it could be because students have not yet made up for the ground lost when teaching was less effective in the past.
- In 2012, students eligible for the pupil premium achieved GCSE grades in English and mathematics which were one-and-a-half grades below that of other students in the school. Decisive action was taken, supported by the effective use of pupil premium funding, to close this gap so that it reduced to half a grade in 2013 in both subjects.
- Good use has been made of the Year 7 catch-up funding for younger students. Reading and writing are taught effectively and interventions are well matched to students' needs. Effective systems are in place to support students who enter the school after the start of Year 7 to make sure that they settle quickly and make good progress.
- The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs is good. Their progress is carefully tracked to make sure that the support they receive helps them to learn well. The students who speak English as an additional language are assessed when they join the school so that tailored support can be put in place and this group of students also makes good progress.
- Early entry for examinations has been carefully used to promote high aspirations and enable students to achieve the highest grades, without holding back the most-able students. The school does not plan to use early entry in the future.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form is good, although less good in Year 12 than in Year 13. Those students studying A levels have made good progress by the end of Year 13, and in 2013 the proportion achieving the highest grades increased. Effective action has been taken to address the disparity between the progress made by students in Years 12 and 13, and evidence shows that, for the current Year 12 cohort, progress is now better across all subjects.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is good, and sometimes outstanding, which enables students to make good progress overall. Examples of outstanding teaching were seen in design and technology, English, history and music. However, there is not yet enough outstanding teaching in all subjects and the most-able students do not always do as well as they might.
- Teachers usually use their very good subject knowledge to plan activities which are well matched to students' needs and engage students quickly. Occasionally, teachers' planning does not plan work that is sufficiently challenging for the most able. Students' very positive attitudes to learning mean that students quickly settle to work and time is not wasted. Teachers use questioning well to check students' knowledge and understanding, make changes to activities and provide additional support if students do not fully understand a topic or have misconceptions.
- Students work well together to support each other's learning and will work independently of the teacher, even on challenging activities. For example, in an outstanding Year 9 music lesson about composition, students were able to make choices about what instrument to use and the more-able students were quickly working independently. This allowed the teacher to support students who were less confident, resulting in all students making rapid progress. However, in some lessons, students are too dependent on the teacher and do not make the progress they

should.

- Teachers help students to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. For example, in a religious studies lesson, students were encouraged to correct spelling, punctuation and grammar and expand their vocabulary in order to improve an answer to an examination question. However, in some lessons, opportunities are missed to develop students' literacy, for example through extended writing. Students who enter the school with weak literacy are well supported and quickly become fluent and confident readers, while a dedicated numeracy assistant has been employed to support students who have weak numeracy skills.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are supported well in lessons. Activities planned by teachers meet their needs and additional adults are well deployed.
- There is some very good marking in the school where students are able to respond to detailed feedback and are clear about what they need to do next to improve. However, this good practice is not yet consistently applied across the school. Marking is sometimes too brief to be helpful and students are not encouraged to respond to feedback.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good, particularly in Year 13. In the best lessons, teachers' excellent subject knowledge is used to plan challenging lessons which capture students' interest and enable the students to make rapid progress. For example, in an outstanding English lesson, the teacher's very good planning and questioning enabled students to analyse a text confidently and in great detail.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Students' behaviour is very good. All groups of students get on together very well, showing respect and consideration for each other. They behave well in all areas of the school, including places where the design of the building invites congestion. Older students provide good role models. Behaviour and safety are not outstanding because there are not yet enough opportunities for students to develop the leadership skills necessary for them to manage their own behaviour.
- Students' good behaviour in lessons helps their learning. Relationships between students and staff are positive and are based on mutual respect. Students demonstrate independence and resilience and disruptive behaviour is extremely rare.
- Discussions with students, responses to parent and staff questionnaires, and scrutiny of the school's behaviour records indicate that the very good behaviour seen during the inspection is typical of that over time. Older students who have been in the school for some time described how behaviour has improved.
- Incidences of bullying are very rare and students feel that they are dealt with quickly. Students are fully aware of what constitutes bullying, including name calling, cyber bullying and racist and homophobic incidents. They feel safe at school and know how to keep themselves and others safe.
- The pastoral support team has been restructured so that staff can quickly resolve concerns about behaviour at an early stage, including by working with parents and carers when needed. This has significantly reduced the number of exclusions. Students talk very positively about this support and how it helps them to behave well.
- Effective actions have been taken to improve attendance and it has improved since the last inspection so that it is now in line with the national average.
- Senior staff carefully monitor the attendance and progress of those students who attend off-site provision, and the quality of the education they receive there, ensuring that these students make the same good progress as other students.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The new headteacher has worked with vigour to develop teams of staff focused on raising standards across the school. A determination that all students should make rapid progress,

based on outstanding teaching combined with a high level of care for the individual child, is shared across the school.

- There is still a very small amount of teaching which requires improvement and students do not yet make the progress that they could in all subjects. Nevertheless, GCSE results are improving, and the school's capacity for further improvement is strong.
- The leadership of the sixth form is good and has been strengthened in order to secure further improvement.
- Senior leaders and governors have a very accurate view of the school and know its strengths and weaknesses well. This enables them to tackle weaknesses successfully.
- Subject leaders and heads of year are rigorously held to account for their areas of responsibility. They work together effectively, scrutinising information about students' progress in order to identify any who may be falling behind, so that support can be put in place. This not only helps students to make very good progress but, by carefully checking the progress of individuals and groups, it also means that equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination is not tolerated.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. A cycle of lesson observations is firmly established and teachers get constructive feedback. An effective coaching programme supports staff whose teaching is not judged to be consistently good and other training is matched to individual need. The performance management of staff is effective.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and equips students well for the next stages in their education or for employment; hardly any students leave the school without a known destination. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides a range of pathways to meet students' needs. The sixth form curriculum has been recently changed to offer a more appropriate range of courses and students get clear information to help them to make choices about what to study.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported by a wide range of after-school clubs, trips, performances and increasing opportunities for student leadership. The school's sports college specialism makes a valuable contribution to the school, for example by offering a wide range of clubs and teams and developing partnerships with other local schools.
- The local authority provides an appropriate level of support for the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have taken decisive actions to secure improvement since the last inspection, including commissioning external reviews, recruiting the new headteacher and evaluating the impact of their work. They are now much better placed to make strategic decisions and challenge school leaders to improve the school further. Governors have accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, partly because they receive timely and clear information from school leaders. They have a good understanding of how well students achieve in comparison to other schools.
  - Governors are knowledgeable about the quality of teaching at the school and the impact it has on students' achievement. They are involved in decisions about salary progression.
  - The governing body is involved in deciding how pupil premium funding is used and receives regular information about its impact. Governors receive regular training on key issues and they check that the school meets statutory requirements for safeguarding students and child protection.

## 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

|                                |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 110062    |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Wokingham |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 428947    |

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

|   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                         | Comprehensive                     |
| <b>School category</b>                        | Community                         |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                    | 11–18                             |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                       | Mixed                             |
| <b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>     | Mixed                             |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>    | 893                               |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b> | 181                               |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                  | The governing body                |
| <b>Chair</b>                                  | Richard Tyndall                   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                            | Emma Reynolds                     |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>     | 16–17 May 2012                    |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                       | 01189 353353                      |
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