

Radcliffe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110532
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	335190
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Limm HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	906
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	Interim executive
Chair	Mr Roger Conibear
Headteacher	Mr John O'Donnell
Date of previous school inspection	0 January 2008
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Introduction

When the Radcliffe School was last inspected in January 2008 it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to provide an acceptable standard of education for its students. Subsequently, Her Majesty's Inspectors have made four visits to monitor the school's progress. This inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 28 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), the National Challenge Adviser for the school, staff, and groups of students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- students' recent and current progress and learning and the extent to which attainment is being raised across all subjects
- the quality of teaching and learning, especially the use of assessment to improve learning
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels on improving outcomes for students
- how well the small sixth form meets students' needs
- the school's procedures for safeguarding students.

Information about the school

The Radcliffe School is a smaller than average comprehensive. The community it serves is mixed both economically and socially. About one fifth of students are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. Most students are from White British backgrounds, although a sizeable proportion are from Pakistani backgrounds and a very small minority are from Black British and other minority ethnic groups. Almost a quarter of students speak a language other than English at home and many of these are at an early stage of learning English. A high proportion of students join the school during the school year. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. The school now provides a good education for its students.

The headteacher's clear-sighted leadership, combined with rigorous challenge from the Interim Executive Board, have been pivotal in the school's improvement. His vision for the school's development is supported by good strategic planning, founded on accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. He has drawn together an able, committed senior team and together they have established the key systems required to move the school forward. Middle leaders are able to take responsibility for their part in implementing these good whole-school procedures. Thorough monitoring of lessons has led to significant improvements so that the quality of teaching and learning is now good. As a consequence, students, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making good progress to reach broadly average standards of attainment in examinations. Some variation across subjects remains due to previous deficits in learning, and not all teachers use assessment information as well as the best to plan activities that enable students to make rapid progress. Teaching is satisfactory in the sixth form and students attain broadly average results. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations to raise sixth-form attainment further.

Well-founded targets in all subjects are set for every student and their progress towards these is checked through regular assessments. Those falling behind are helped to get back on track in a range of effective ways, such as mentoring. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive well-tailored support because arrangements for identifying their needs and evaluating their progress are good. The care, guidance and support provided for students are good. The school goes to great lengths to ensure no student is left to struggle alone with their problems.

Students are responding well to the improvements in school life. They say they feel safe in school and that any incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Increased enjoyment of lessons has resulted in positive attitudes to learning, especially in mathematics. As a consequence of this and good monitoring procedures, attendance has risen and is now above average. Behaviour is generally good, although some students become restless when, in a small number of lessons, learning is too heavily directed by the teacher. A clear system of rewards and sanctions is effective in underpinning the school's high expectations of students' conduct. Students appreciate the opportunities they have to express their views through student councils and feel that their ideas are taken into account when decisions are made. The school has gained national recognition for its work on countering bullying and creating a cohesive school

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community where diversity is celebrated. As a consequence, students say they are proud of their school now.

The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and meets the needs of students well. Despite this, the school acknowledges that provision is restricted for students who wish to follow on with some of their vocational courses into the sixth form.

In bringing about these significant improvements, the headteacher, senior leaders and Interim Executive Board have demonstrated that the school has good capacity to improve. It provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding learning and teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 by ensuring that all teachers use assessment information as accurately as the best to plan more engaging and active lessons and raise attainment further.
- Provide more appropriate sixth-form courses for those students who wish to follow on their learning from Year 11 but cannot do so currently.
- Raise teachers' expectations of what sixth formers can achieve so that sixth-form attainment improves further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students enjoy school. Their attendance is above average, and they arrive at lessons properly equipped and ready to learn. They behave well. In the best lessons, students make rapid progress, are often excited about their tasks, know how well they are doing in that subject, and are clear about what they will be learning and what is expected of them. In some lessons, learning is less successful and some students become restless.

The rate of students' progress in Years 7 to 11 since the last inspection has been good, though better in English and mathematics than in science. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress. Those at an early stage of learning English also make good progress. The 2009 GCSE results show that attainment is broadly average but students made much better progress than their peers last year and met, or exceeded, their challenging targets. Students say they have noticed a big improvement in the quality of their lessons over the past year and that their teachers keep a close watch on their progress and constantly challenge them to improve.

Because the school fosters it so well and in many varied ways, students' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Cultural development is good. Students are very polite, show a great concern for the needs of others in the school community and beyond, and have a keen sensitivity to and awareness of the feelings and beliefs of others. They say the school constantly encourages them to live healthy lifestyles and they praise staff for their support. They feel able to seek help readily if troubled in any way. Students develop well many of the skills they need for their future lives. The development of their basic literacy and numeracy skills and the application of these across the curriculum are good.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Common features of the good teaching seen by inspectors were excellent subject knowledge and clear explanations to help students learn quickly. Techniques to assess students' progress quickly and refocus their learning are in evidence across the school. These are increasingly effective, though they are embedded in some areas of the curriculum better than in others. The best lessons provided students with many opportunities to work in collaborative small groups, as well as learn on their own when appropriate. In these lessons, students worked with pace and enthusiasm. Here, teacher support and peer- and self-assessment with clear criteria were being used well to help students move on quickly. Some lessons are more pedestrian. A common feature of these less successful lessons is that students work on the same task for too long, they lack appropriate challenge and make slower progress.

The good curriculum is central to the good and improving outcomes for students from the full ability range. It is under constant review to ensure the best possible experience for all students. The two-year programme in Years 7 and 8 enables students to study more thoroughly and well for their GCSE examination courses. Younger students are

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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given good insights into the world of work through a discrete enterprise course which also encourages their social responsibility through raising funds for a local hospice. Increased applied and vocational provision for older students has resulted in improved outcomes, particularly for those who might not otherwise have attained highly. There is a good range of activities for the more gifted and talented students. The development of occasional themed days has supported the provision of cross-curricular links and enabled the school to promote community cohesion more rigorously over the past year. A group of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities spoke highly of the good relationships they enjoy with their teachers and the caring ethos within the school. These students achieve as well as their peers. Students say that staff ensure there are opportunities for them to catch up when they fall behind or miss work. Transitions are carefully planned, including through effective liaison with primary schools.

Care, guidance and support are good. Changes to the staffing structure, with clearer definition of roles and responsibilities of heads of house, have led to good quality, well-coordinated pastoral care and support. There are effective channels of communication at all levels and, as a consequence, staff have a much clearer picture of students' individual needs. A high level of support is provided for individuals or groups of students who are vulnerable or experiencing problems of any kind. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with good support so they achieve as well as others. Academic progress is tracked effectively and students know how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has responded with increasing confidence to the issues raised by the previous inspection and now provides sharply focused leadership which has contributed well to thoroughgoing improvement. He has gained the commitment of staff at all levels to his vision for the school's future. In working towards this goal, he is ably supported by the senior team who have stepped up to the challenge of rapidly securing the necessary improvements. A range of well-considered systems has been established to achieve this, the effects of which are becoming increasingly evident. Improved assessment and tracking of students' progress are having a positive impact so that attainment is rising. Systems for supporting

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students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are comprehensive, well matched to their needs and effectively managed. Improved procedures and capacity mean that the school can evaluate its provision accurately, identify suitable priorities for the future and plan effectively to achieve these. The headteacher has made the development of leadership skills a high priority and this is bearing fruit. The roles of middle leaders have been articulated clearly, and regular, well-focused training has been provided to support them in discharging their roles. As a consequence, there is a shared understanding of responsibilities and a growing consistency in meeting these. This increase in the skills of middle leaders is having a positive impact on the school's drive to raise attainment through improved provision.

The school has developed a number of effective methods for communicating regularly with and seeking the views of both parents and the wider community. It works well with parents to support students' well-being and learning and ensure that the school community is both cohesive and harmonious.

Since the last inspection the Interim Executive Board has contributed significantly to the improvements seen in the school. It has been particularly good at holding the school rigorously to account for its performance and student outcomes. The school fulfils all statutory duties in terms of equalities. Statutory requirements for safeguarding are robust and systematic in implementation. Risk assessments are detailed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Attainment is broadly average

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but progress is good. This is related, in part, to better tracking of students' progress by teachers. The quality of teaching and learning, while satisfactory, is becoming more interactive and engaging. Examples of good and outstanding teaching and learning challenged the students to develop their thinking and to adopt an intellectual rigour in their work. In lessons where students are less involved, they make steady but comparatively slower progress and teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are not high enough. The curriculum is limited, but adequately meets the needs of students who remain in the sixth form. There are too few opportunities for Key Stage 4 students to progress to suitable vocational courses after GCSE and as a consequence only 51% of students enter the sixth form from Year 11. Students take responsibility and are rightly proud of their contribution to the main school. They are good listeners to any problems other students might have. This is because they are themselves treated with respect and are well prepared for their future. Behaviour is exemplary. Good provision for students' personal development and well-being results in proud and loyal members of the school community. Enrichment is satisfactory and includes a wide range of well-attended activities. The new head of sixth form has not had time to make an impact on student outcomes, but his embryonic planning indicates clearly that the curriculum is to be reviewed and developed further, especially in relation to providing more vocational courses.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

This inspection was unannounced and there was no time for the school to canvass the views of parents in the usual way. However, the school had undertaken a survey of parents' views in July, using the template for Ofsted inspection questionnaires to parents. Twenty-seven parents responded and the inspectors took their views into account. Most of the parents who responded were happy with their child's experiences at school. A number of parents wrote positive comments about the support their children receive and the effective transition arrangements for transfer from primary school. A very small minority of parents felt that the school did not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour, but inspectors found no evidence to support this view.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be. ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Radcliffe School, Wolverton, MK12 5BT

No doubt you have heard the good news by now! When we visited your school recently we judged that it is providing you with a good education so special measures are no longer required.

Our thanks to all of you who shared your views about the school with us. We were impressed by your pride in the school and loyalty to it. Your headteacher and all the staff have worked very hard to make the changes that were needed and you told us how much you appreciated this. The main points we want to report about your school are as follows.

- You are enjoying lessons more because they are interesting and as a result you are making more progress. You have positive attitudes to learning, although some of you get distracted when you're not directly involved in the lesson.
- Results have improved, particularly in English and mathematics. However, there is still room for improvement. You work hard to meet your targets. We have asked the school to ensure that lessons always engage you fully and stimulate you to attain even better results.
- The staff make every effort to provide you with all the support you need to do well. They set you targets and help those of you who are struggling to meet these. Those of you who find learning difficult or have disabilities are provided with support that matches your needs well and helps you make good progress.
- You told us that you feel safe in school and that any bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively. Behaviour has improved and so has your attendance. Please keep this up.
- You study a suitable range of subjects in Years 9, 10 and 11 but we have asked the school to include more vocational courses that you can follow on with if you enter the sixth form.
- Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Sixth-form students make a good contribution to school life. We have asked the school to have even higher expectations about what sixth formers can attain and achieve.

We think The Radcliffe School will continue to improve. You can play an important part

in making that happen.

We wish you every success in the future.

Peter Limm

Her Majesty's Inspector

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