

The Grange School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110488
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	378108
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Ted Wheatley

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

Type of school	Modern (none-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1333
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	148
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Noreen Pinnington
Headteacher	Vincent Murray
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 May 2009
School address	Wendover Way Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP21 7NH
Telephone number	0129 639 0900
Fax number	0129 639 0991
Email address	office@grange.bucks.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors who saw 48 lessons taught by 48 teachers. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body, the School Improvement Partner and students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation about students' progress, and policies, particularly those in respect of safeguarding, school development planning and evidence of self-evaluation. They considered 326 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Students' attainment, especially in English, mathematics and science.
- The progress made by students, especially those students the school identified as underachieving.
- The impact of unacceptable behaviour and how well it is dealt with it.
- How well the school responds to underachievement by sixth form students.

Information about the school

The Grange is larger than the average secondary school. It is a secondary modern school close to grammar schools in the vicinity. Most students are from a White British heritage and an above average proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small number of these are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language, their main other languages being Polish, Pashto and Sinhala. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Of these, most have moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals is below average. The school is a specialist business and enterprise college. It has Healthy School status, Investor in People and the International School awards.

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

The Grange is a good and improving school. Parents and carers are pleased with the quality of education, guidance and support it provides. One parent wrote, 'I have seen my child blossom and achieve and grow in confidence over the years, just as The Grange has.' The quality of care, guidance and support is good, with extensive support for individual students where necessary to ensure they enjoy school and make the most of the opportunities the school provides.

Attainment is broadly average. It is above average in English and mathematics and broadly average in science. Attainment has improved in all three subjects, though more recently in science. It is improving in most other subjects, and it continues to rise throughout the school. Students' progress is generally good. It is improving from year to year, and across the whole range of students in the school, and some make excellent progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress. Where there were some differences between different groups of students in the past, these have significantly reduced. However, in occasional lessons, learning is slower than it should be and students do not make enough progress.

Teaching is good, and occasionally excellent. This contributes successfully to the trend of improving progress. Generally, teachers make learning interesting, ensure important facts and understanding are securely learned, and match work to students' learning needs well. Questioning is typically good, but sometimes does not engage students enough in discussing their understanding and knowledge. In the great majority of lessons assessment is accurate and used effectively to plan students' work. Most students know how well they are performing, what their targets are and how to reach them. Discussions between teachers and students about progress are regular and constructive, and marking is often good. Nevertheless, sporadically students' progress is slow because work is not matched to their needs, and marking does not consistently provide the prompts to remind students of what they need to do to make further progress. The curriculum is good and well matched to the aspirations and needs of students. It has improved recently to engage those students traditionally not interested in school, and as a result their attendance and performance have improved. Literacy and numeracy activities are well integrated into most subjects to promote the improvement of students' basic skills. Specialist business and enterprise status promotes a wide range of activities to help the curriculum be relevant to students' future needs.

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Students enjoy school and their attendance is above average. They feel safe, say that rare incidents of bullying are dealt with well and that if they are worried they feel secure going to any adult for help. They make good contributions to the school and wider community and have a good grasp of the importance of following healthy lifestyles. Relationships between students from different backgrounds are harmonious. Students behave well and with some maturity recognise that occasionally some students will misbehave, but that the school deals with this well and interruptions to learning are rare. In a letter to inspectors, one student wrote, 'Students as a whole do not rebel, because as a school we are a unit. We work together, and we work together well.'

Leaders and managers have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the main school and sixth form, and act to resolve weaknesses quickly. The headteacher provides excellent direction for improvement, and is well respected by staff and parents and carers in his efforts to drive progress. Staff are well supported in their professional development, and they indicate high aspirations to drive improvements in their own classrooms and areas of responsibility. Past weaknesses in performance and provision, notably in science, have been dealt with effectively. The governing body provides a sound level of challenge for the school founded on an improving knowledge by members of the school's performance. Based on improvements in students' performance, and on the effectiveness with which the school has improved teaching, the capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make consistently good progress by improving the quality of teaching to the best seen so that:
 - available assessment information is used to make sure work is always matched to students' learning needs
 - questioning and discussion are used regularly to help students fully understand their learning
 - marking tells students what the next steps in their learning are and how to reach them.

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

Students start school with below average levels of attainment. By the end of Year 11 attainment is above average in English and mathematics and is broadly average elsewhere. Where it occasionally falls below average, this is because of the prior abilities of students choosing those subjects. Attainment is steadily improving and in the case of English, mathematics and science it is improving rapidly. For example, in a good Year 10 science lesson, students explained how to work out the quantities of chemicals involved in a chemical reaction from the results of their own experiments. They did this well, with careful calculation and good consultation with each other to ensure they were tackling the problem accurately. Past underperformance by Pakistani boys has been dealt with effectively, and these students now do as well as

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other students. Students’ literacy and numeracy skills are good. As a rule, students express their understanding well orally and in writing and have good mathematical skills. Good progress is seen in most lessons. For example, in a mathematics lesson on solving algebraic equations, students made good progress because they had a secure understanding of mathematical processes, the order in which particular calculations should be carried out, and of basic errors to avoid. They showed considerable ability in explaining their thinking using mathematical terminology accurately, and this contributed to their good progress effectively. Progress slows a little for some students when they do not have opportunities to discuss their understanding, or if the work does not challenge them enough. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good and sometimes excellent. This is due to sensitive, well-planned support for individual students that encourages them to work independently.

Students enjoy learning. Although some of them were not sure of how well they would do at the school when they first arrived, most now feel challenged, well supported and feel that they are achieving well. They are proud of the school. Many students take on responsibilities and carry them out well. For example, students are involved in enterprise activities, act as peer mentors, help resolve disagreements between students, arrange student conferences and take on leadership roles in sports and other activities. The student conferences enable year representatives to find out what other students’ views are and to bring them to the notice of staff. The school has the Healthy School award because of the take up of physical activities and involvement in encouraging healthy eating. Students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students have a good understanding of and respect for the diverse cultures in the school and community. They work well together in lessons and work hard to sustain these relationships outside of the classroom.

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	2

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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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Learning is generally challenging and underpinned by consistent approaches to teaching that ensure students learn the terminology of each subject and fundamental rules that apply to it. For example, they learn about correct grammatical structures and basic numeracy processes so that they have a good understanding of English and mathematics that helps them learn successfully. Activities are interesting and teachers usually engage students in discussion, respect their contributions and respond to their questions and learning difficulties quickly and effectively. As a rule, students feel valued and supported. However, occasionally questioning is too focused on obtaining the right answer rather than enabling students to explore or consolidate their learning. Marking is regular. It usually indicates how well students perform, sets targets and tells students how to improve their work. However, occasionally, feedback to students is dependent on unrecorded oral guidance that students then become a little vague about. Assessment is accurate, and for the most part is used effectively to plan learning. On the few occasions it is not, students learn slowly and their attention wanders.

The curriculum is well organised to meet students' academic and vocational needs and interests. Good and improving links with other institutions enable students to be guided towards vocational courses that sustain their interest and commitment to learning. Academic routes are well organised to successfully meet students' and parents' and carers' aspirations. For example, separate sciences and modern languages open opportunities for post-16 academic courses. The business and enterprise specialism drives the Grange Enterprise and Learning Skills (GELS) which increasingly helps students to develop personal and social skills, which in turn contribute to their improving communication and self-management skills. Business partnership and cross-curricular theme days contribute well to widening students' understanding of the world around them. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of well-attended after-school clubs and activities.

The school has a wide range of internal support arrangements to effectively address most students' problems and concerns. The quality of support for students and families whose challenging circumstances make them vulnerable is very good, and underpinned by very good links with external support agencies. Other students contribute well to supporting each other too. The support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective and involves parents and carers extensively. Transition arrangements between schools are good, and especially to support students moving on from Year 11 into Year 12 or to other institutions. Strategies to promote good attendance are effective and the small number of students who are persistently absent is reducing. Procedures to reduce unacceptable

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behaviour are equally effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	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?

The school has a culture of ambition and high aspirations evident in the work it does to raise attainment and improve progress. This is a reflection of the headteacher's determination for the school's success. Evaluation procedures are extensive and accurate, and leaders at all levels are involved in monitoring school performance. Teachers are keen to improve their own skills and there is a high level of collaboration in sharing effective teaching and leadership skills and participating in training courses. This has resulted in the school gaining the Investor in People award. The school has effective links with parents and carers that it uses well to promote learning. Attendance at consultation evenings is good; the school communicates with all parents and carers electronically, and organises well-supported activities to engage parents and carers in helping their children learn. Partnerships to promote students' learning and well-being are good, with good and improving links with other schools and colleges, good business links and productive relationships with external medical and social agencies.

The governing body meets its statutory responsibilities. It has established procedures to increase the level of engagement of its members so that they are better informed than they have been in supporting the school in its development. On a day-to-day basis safeguarding procedures are good, although some administrative requirements are not fully up to date, but are being dealt with urgently. The school promotes equal opportunities well. The gap in progress between different groups of students has narrowed considerably. Procedures to eliminate all forms of discrimination are very effective. Community cohesion is promoted well in the school curriculum, especially in GELS, and students' understanding of the values and beliefs of other cultures around the world is good. This has earned the school the International School award.

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

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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

Students make good progress, given their starting points, and achieve broadly average examination results, although a significant minority of students do well and go on to university. Students do well in vocational subjects. After some disappointing results at AS level in the recent past, the school has improved the quality of guidance given to students on applying to continue in the sixth form. Students appreciate the improved support to develop their study skills and the clearly explained high expectations of examination courses. Progress in lessons is good because teaching is challenging, based on students' learning needs and includes high levels of advice and guidance for students. Students value the UCAS advice they receive, the clear learning objectives of lessons and the closeness with which their work is monitored. The school provides an increasingly wide curriculum. It includes sciences, psychology, mathematics, English, government and politics, and applied leisure. However, it cannot offer all subjects itself, so provides some after-school lessons, for example in physics, and uses local schools and colleges effectively to extend its provision. Arrangements are good so that students can travel easily to other sites, and the routes through the courses ensure students experience courses well tailored to their needs. Students' personal development is good, with overseas trips, work experience and opportunities to help younger students in The Grange and local primary schools. Leadership and management are effective. Planning ahead is good and leaders respond to difficulties in timetabling and subject choices swiftly and effectively.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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Views of parents and carers

About one quarter of parents and carers responded to the parent and carer questionnaire, which is around average. Overall, their comments were very positive and the great majority are pleased with the school, and their children's experience. A small proportion of parents and carers feel the school does not deal with unacceptable behaviour well enough. Inspectors saw almost entirely good behaviour, and students reported that behaviour is good and rare poor behaviour is dealt with swiftly. A small number of parents and carers commented on there being too many supply teachers. There have been a small number of staff absences and supply staff have been employed to cover them. During the inspection the two supply staff seen had appropriate work for students, and students were actively engaged in learning. In general, parents and carers praised the quality of support and guidance for students, the curriculum and opportunities for students, and the quality of school leadership.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Grange School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 326 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,333 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	159	49	154	47	8	2	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	162	50	162	50	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	130	40	181	56	10	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	128	39	184	56	7	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	100	31	206	63	7	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	127	39	175	54	18	6	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	86	26	201	62	25	8	3	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	115	35	187	57	6	2	1	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	132	40	183	56	3	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	136	42	162	50	13	4	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	88	27	194	60	12	4	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	164	50	153	47	4	1	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	192	59	124	38	4	1	3	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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:	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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 pupils' 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.



14 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Grange School, Aylesbury, HP21 7NH

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. You told us a lot about the school which helped us to judge that it is good and improving.

The following things are particular strengths of the school.

- You make good and sometimes excellent progress.
- Teaching is good, work is challenging and there are many activities and courses that make learning interesting and prepare you well for the future.
- The headteacher, staff and governors work hard to make sure the school continues to improve.
- The school takes good care of you. Relationships are very good, so there is always someone to help you. The school works very well with outside organisations to provide good care for you. It also works well with your families to help them understand how you learn so that they can help you.
- Your behaviour is good, you are very considerate towards each other, and respect each other so that everyone enjoys school.
- Many of you have responsibilities, and you carry them out well.
- You know about the importance of being healthy and most of you eat sensibly and take part in some of the many physical activities available.

In order for the school to be even better, we have asked your teachers to:

- ensure that all of you make good progress by using available assessment information to make sure work is always challenging, use questioning and discussion so that you develop a good understanding of what you learn, and keep you well informed about what the next steps in learning are and how you can achieve them.

You can help by making sure you let teachers know if you find work too easy, and by asking for guidance on how to improve your work.

Yours sincerely

Ted Wheatley
Lead inspector

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