

The Radcliffe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110532
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	378118
Inspection dates	23–24 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

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

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	1,057
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barney Payne
Headteacher	John O'Donnell
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 October 2009
School address	Aylesbury Street West Wolverton Milton Keynes MK12 5BT
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 27 lessons involving 27 teachers, and also observed three Year 11 English revision sessions, three tutorial sessions, one assembly and visited 12 enrichment sessions. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff, and looked at records of lesson observations, school and departmental self-evaluations, the school's analysis of performance data for 2011 and tracking data for current students. They analysed responses to questionnaires received from 138 parents and carers, 30 staff and 103 students.

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

- Students' attainment in GCSE, A-level and vocational courses in 2011, including progress in English and mathematics between Years 7 and 11.
- How effective the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is across the school.
- How effective the improvements to the quality of provision are in the sixth form.
- How effectively the school's self-evaluation of its performance leads to improvements in the quality of provision and students' achievement.

Information about the school

The Radcliffe School is an average-sized comprehensive school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The proportion identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average, and a smaller proportion than average of these students has a statement of special educational needs. The school has recently established a specialist resource unit for five students on the autistic spectrum. The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is significantly higher than the average, with the largest groups from Pakistani, Other White and Black African backgrounds. The school gained specialist sports college status in 2009.

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

1

Main findings

The Radcliffe School is a good school which has sustained and built further on improvements noted at the last inspection. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and the senior team, and their relentless drive to do the best for the students have led to significant improvements in students' attainment, which was exceptionally low in 2008 and is now well above average. The quality of provision has also improved. The curriculum and care, guidance and support, which were judged good at the last inspection, are now outstanding. The vast majority of parents, carers, students and staff are highly supportive of the school's leadership and speak very positively about the improvements seen in recent years.

The proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades in GCSE, or equivalent vocational courses, has improved from 51% in 2008 to 88% in 2011 and is now well above average. The majority of students make good progress from their starting points, with some groups of students making exceptional progress by the end of Year 11. The school's excellent and well-targeted support enables students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who make outstanding progress, and those known to be eligible for free school meals to attain significantly better results than predicted from their prior attainment.

Although the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics was below average in 2011, the majority of students made good progress in these subjects, compared with their prior attainment. Subject leaders have conducted a thorough analysis of the reasons for the decline last year, which has enabled them to implement well-considered and targeted improvement strategies this term. The school's tracking information indicates that the progress and attainment of students currently in Year 11 are already better than at the same time last year for the previous cohort.

Senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Most teaching is now at least good. Inspectors observed several outstanding lessons and none that was inadequate. However, a significant minority of lessons were satisfactory and inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment remain both within and between different subjects. Difficulties in recruiting teachers in some key subjects, such as mathematics, led to variable quality of teaching but this is now lessening as the school has successfully recruited a full complement of subject specialists in this area. While there are good arrangements for assessment and the rigorous tracking of students' progress, the frequency and quality of marking of

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work, and feedback to students on how to improve, remain too variable.

The revised curriculum has contributed substantially to improving achievement, with a good range of popular and very successful vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The school's innovative volunteering and leadership hub (VLH) involves most students in a very wide range of school and community-based enrichment activities, which contribute to raising achievement as well as enhancing considerably students' enjoyment of school.

Students say that they feel very safe in the school environment and value the extensive support they receive from teachers and other school staff. The school has excellent and productive partnerships with external agencies, which support an impressive range of innovative approaches to target support for individuals or particular groups of students, for example through the Personalised Education Centre.

School leaders have taken effective action to improve the quality of provision in the sixth form, which is now good, and most students make good progress, particularly on vocational courses. However, the school acknowledges that too few of its more-able Year 11 students pursue A-level courses within the school. The exceptional improvements seen in students' attainment, promoted by the improved curriculum and support, along with rigorous and self-critical evaluation at all levels, demonstrate the school's outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teachers' use of assessment to increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use the full range of assessment information effectively to plan work to meet students' different needs and abilities so that students all make good progress in lessons
 - ensuring that all teachers mark students' work regularly and thoroughly, in line with the best practice already evident in some subjects, providing clear guidance on how to improve, and monitoring how well students act on the improvement points given.
- Ensure that the range of AS and A-level subjects available is closely matched to students' needs and interests, and provides sufficient choice to encourage more higher-attaining students in Year 11 to progress to the school's sixth form.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enjoy their learning, make good progress in most lessons and achieve well. Many students join the school with lower-than-average prior attainment. The combination of predominantly good teaching and outstanding care and support enable many to achieve significantly better results than predicted from their starting points. The great majority of students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, and

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behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students report that incidents of bullying are rare and dealt with effectively if they occur. In a small minority of lessons, students’ progress is slowed by occasional low levels of disruption by a small number of students but most teachers deal with such instances appropriately.

Students make most progress when lessons provide ample opportunity for them to be actively involved in their learning, for example, through practical activities, pair and small group work, and discussions with peers and teachers. The focus on developing personal learning and thinking skills through the revised Key Stage 3 curriculum is now being extended through the school. This is having a positive impact in developing students’ confidence and independence, and in helping them to reflect on and evaluate their own progress.

When teachers consistently enforce high expectations and standards, students rise to the challenge and take pride in producing and presenting high-quality work. In a GCSE English lesson, where the teacher expected all students to exceed the targets set, students extended their writing skills through more detailed explanation and critical evaluation of key points and made excellent progress as a result.

High levels of participation in sports activities, the school’s robust system for monitoring students’ food choices and guidance on healthy eating ensure that students have an excellent understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Students’ social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is developed well through opportunities to discuss and reflect on key issues in lessons and tutorials, and through good opportunities for participating in arts events.

Students readily take on additional responsibilities and make an outstanding contribution to their school and wider community through, for example, peer mentoring, leading activities in the VLH, acting as representatives in house and school councils, and working with younger pupils in local primary schools. Frequent opportunities to work alongside local community groups and employers help students to develop their communication and team-working skills and confidence, preparing them well for progression to further education or employment.

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	2
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	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1

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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Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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?

Most teaching is effective in motivating students and helping them to make good progress, although in a small minority of lessons, progress remains satisfactory. Many teachers make creative and innovative use of good learning resources to inspire students, and are adept at grouping students to work together, enabling them to give constructive criticism to help improve each other's work. For example, in an outstanding drama lesson, students observing their peers rehearsing a scene gave a thoughtful critique on the performance, enabling the actors to improve their work in each subsequent run of the scene.

When teachers use questioning well to elicit extended responses, students deepen their understanding of the subject well and use this to improve the quality of their written answers. In an outstanding history lesson, skilful questioning by the teacher helped students to make valid connections between historical and contemporary events, drawing on a wide range of sources to identify key social, political, cultural and economic influences.

In some satisfactory lessons, teachers' introductions are overlong, leaving too little time for the main work of the lessons. Students sometimes repeat tasks at the same level, rather than progressing to more challenging work quickly enough. Questioning to check learning remains too superficial and does not fully explore or extend students' understanding. In a few lessons, teachers had planned different activities to meet students' different abilities, but in practice, all worked on the same tasks at the same pace.

Students' progress towards their targets is tracked regularly by teachers and monitored closely by senior staff. In the better lessons, teachers make very good use of assessment information to tailor tasks to students' abilities and prior learning, and adapt the lesson in response to the checks they make on learning and students' feedback. However, the quality of marking and feedback is inconsistent, with students commenting on how this varies between different teachers. Where the best practice exists, teachers mark work regularly and give detailed feedback and clear targets for improvement.

The school has improved its curriculum since the last inspection to provide a highly

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personalised curriculum which has enabled students to achieve well. The broad range of GCSE and vocational courses available is well tailored to meet individual needs, and prepares students effectively for progression to post-16 provision, in the school or with other local providers. Productive partnerships with external training providers provide guaranteed progression routes for students who take these courses. The sports specialism is already making a strong contribution to raising attainment and improving teaching and learning, for example, through sharing good practice in assessment and cross-curricular work with mathematics and modern foreign languages. It has also reinforced and extended the school’s strong links within the local community.

Outstanding care, guidance and support play a key role in improving students’ achievement and supporting students’ personal development and well-being. Pastoral support is strongly promoted through the vertical tutoring and house systems, where students of different ages mix well together and older students provide good support and role models for younger ones. Excellent work with external agencies ensures that all students are supported in school and, where appropriate, outside school. Improved arrangements for monitoring attendance and supporting students and their families have been successful in improving attendance overall, particularly in reducing the proportion of persistent absence.

Provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very well tailored to individuals, through close involvement of parents and carers in decision making and planning provision. The recently introduced specialist provision for those on the autistic spectrum is already helping to integrate these students well into all aspects of school life. Teaching assistants provide them with carefully tailored support in lessons. The school provides extensive support for students at risk of not achieving their target grades, but also encourages them to take increasing responsibility for their own progress throughout the year, and not to rely too much on catch-up and revision sessions.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, ably supported by a strong senior leadership team and the governing body, has transformed the school over the last three years and secured significant improvements in students’ achievement and the overall quality of provision. Rigorous and detailed analysis of achievement data for different groups of

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students and subjects means that leaders and governors have a very good understanding of the school’s performance and a sharp focus on those areas requiring further improvements. As a result, all students are given equal opportunities to succeed. Even where there have already been significant improvements, staff are not complacent but are ambitious to improve students’ achievements further, for example, by increasing the proportion who attain the highest grades. The school sets very challenging targets to raise students’ attainment further.

The school’s excellent arrangements for safeguarding ensure that staff are well trained and confident in knowing how to deal with concerns. Parents and carers confirm that their children are safe in school. The designated governor’s considerable expertise in children’s services contributes to very robust actions when any concerns are identified.

The school’s detailed knowledge of and commitment to serving its local community make an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Staff work assiduously to remove potential barriers to learning for students, and to engage and integrate the local community in its work. Students’ understanding of wider social and global issues is very well developed through productive links with a school in Bangalore, opportunities for visits abroad and through the curriculum.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Good leadership and the revised curriculum have made an important contribution to raising achievement. Students join the sixth form with below average attainment, and make good progress by the end of Year 13. Results in AS and A-level

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examinations are broadly in line with national averages, but are above average for vocational courses, where a high proportion of students attain merit and distinction awards. Progression to higher education or employment is good.

The quality of teaching and learning is good; the majority of lessons are engaging, well planned and enable students to make good progress. Teachers encourage independent working and provide good opportunities for self- and peer-assessment. Students develop confidence and good communication skills, for example, through presenting and discussing their work with others. Teachers track students' progress regularly so that students know how well they are doing and how to improve or attain higher grades.

Good partnerships with two local schools have increased the breadth of subject choice, while still enabling students to belong to the cohesive community of the sixth form within the school. While the proportion taking vocational courses has increased, the school is aware that the current A-level offer is not attracting many of the more-able Year 11 students, who often choose other providers for their A-level courses.

Students really enjoy their sixth form experiences and value the excellent working relationships with staff and the very good support they receive. They enthusiastically take up charity fund-raising, mentoring younger students, and undertake a wide range of responsibilities, both in school and local community groups.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
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

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was similar to that seen in other secondary schools. The vast majority were very positive about the improvements in the school and the quality of education and care it provides. Parents and carers are very supportive of the headteacher and appreciate the considerable improvements seen in recent years. A number of parents and carers commented specifically on how well the school has helped to develop their children into confident and well-rounded young people and prepared them well for their future. A few commented on the variability in the quality of teaching between different teachers or subjects and inconsistencies in setting and marking homework. A small minority were unsure whether their children are making as much progress as they could. Inspection evidence indicated that the great majority of students made at least good progress from their starting points, but progress was slower in a small minority of lessons.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Radcliffe 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 138 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,057 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	48	35	76	55	5	4	8	6
The school keeps my child safe	46	33	82	59	8	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	49	36	78	57	8	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	25	79	57	16	12	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	31	22	88	64	6	4	5	4
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	25	18	81	59	21	15	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	19	88	64	14	10	3	2
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)	35	25	86	62	6	4	1	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	38	28	80	58	8	6	5	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	30	75	54	7	5	8	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	36	26	82	59	11	8	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	57	41	73	53	5	4	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	56	41	67	49	8	6	5	4

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.

25 November 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of The Radcliffe School, Milton Keynes MK12 5BT

Thank you for making us so welcome and helping us with the inspection. We have taken your views and those of your parents, carers and school staff into account in arriving at our judgement that your school is good overall. There have been many improvements since the last inspection, so that the curriculum and care, guidance and support are now outstanding and the sixth form is good.

You make good progress at school and achieve good results on GCSE and vocational courses, which enable you to progress well to further study, training or employment. However, results in GCSE English and mathematics declined last year, and the school is working hard to ensure that these improve in the current year. You can all do your part, not only by working well in class and attending revision sessions, but also by working independently outside lessons to improve your work and understanding.

Most of you enjoy school, find lessons interesting and enjoy the wide range of activities available, including the VLH and opportunities for sports, trips and arts events. Most teaching is good, and you respond well when teachers plan opportunities for you to work in pairs and small groups, to contribute to discussions and evaluate your own and others' work. However, you also told us that the quality of teaching and marking of work varies between different teachers and subjects, and our evidence confirmed this. We have asked the school to ensure that all teachers plan activities which meet everybody's interests and abilities and that they all provide good feedback on how to improve your work, as the best ones already do.

The school is aware that many Year 11 students, who achieve good GCSE results, do not stay at school for their A-level courses, and is seeking to ensure the right courses are available to provide greater choice.

Your headteacher and other staff in the school are very committed to achieving the best they can for you and are ambitious for the school to become outstanding. We think that if you all continue to work hard, with their excellent support, standards can improve even further.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector

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