

Little Heath School

Little Heath Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5TY

Inspection dates 12–13 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- There are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4. Not all teaching is of a good or better standard over time.
- Not enough students make good progress in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- The quality of written and oral feedback to students is variable and does not help students set their own ambitious targets and know how to achieve them.
- Not all planning and teaching sufficiently promotes a range of high-quality skills in reading, writing, speaking and communication for all students.
- Senior leaders and the governing body are aware of remaining gaps in achievement of students eligible for pupil premium and for students supported through school action plus, but need more resolute action to close these gaps.
- The governing body is not demanding enough of all leaders in holding them to account for variation in students' progress and the relationship between the quality of teaching and performance management.

The school has the following strengths

- The behaviour and safety of students are good in lessons and around the school.
- The school is an inclusive learning community. Students develop good morals, values and respect for each other.
- Students are well cared for and they feel safe. Students have very good understanding of managing risks related to e-safety.
- The sixth form is good. Retention from Year 12 to 13 is high. Students enjoy their courses and achieve well from a range of starting points in Year 12. Almost all students progress into higher education, employment or further education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 33 lessons, of which six were joint observations with senior and middle leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, groups of students, a group of parents and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of four responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, and an additional 83 responses received during the inspection. The lead inspector also received several letters from parents.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work, scrutinised the school’s current data about students’ achievement, examined records relating to behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school’s work.

Inspection team

Joanna Beckford-Hall, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Meena Wood	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Peter Gale	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Margaret Faull	Additional inspector
Jenny Usher	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Little Heath School is a larger than average sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium is below that found nationally, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- Less than a quarter of students are from minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is below that found nationally. The proportion of students supported through school action and school action plus and with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A small number of students in Year 10 and Year 11 attend vocational courses at Reading College.
- The school is currently below the government's floor standard, which is the minimum expected for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching by:
 - enabling all teachers to use assessment information to plan learning that meets the needs of all students and stretches the more able students
 - using robust scrutiny of lesson observation findings to extend and evaluate the professional development programme, so that teaching staff, all leaders and the governing body better analyse the progress of students in lessons and over time.
- Raise significantly the percentage of students making expected, and better than expected, progress in mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Close the remaining gaps in achievement of students eligible for pupil premium, students who are supported through school action plus and between boys and girls in mathematics.
- Improve reading, writing, speaking and communication skills across the curriculum through a more comprehensive and shared approach to the teaching of literacy.
- Develop further the capacity of the governing body to hold leaders to account for students' achievement and to evaluate the impact of the monitoring of teaching and performance management. An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The percentage of students achieving five A* to C passes at GCSE including English and mathematics was significantly above that found nationally in 2009 and 2010, but declined in 2011 and 2012. Students' achievement in English remains higher than in mathematics. Achievement in mathematics requires improvement because the percentage of students making or exceeding expected progress in mathematics is below that found nationally, with a sharp decline in 2011.
- The school took swift action last year with a determined recovery plan for the mathematics department, monitored by leaders and the governing body. A 4% rise to 64% of students securing A* to C grades in GCSE mathematics in 2012 shows positive impact; 64% still remains below that found nationally. Progress of Year 10 and Year 11 students in mathematics is improving. Underachievement in mathematics in some Key Stage 3 classes remains.
- The percentages of students reaching A* and A grades and A* to C grades in GCSE courses show a fluctuating pattern over three years. Some subjects are significantly above national averages while other subjects have fallen to significantly below. For example, the high percentage of students attaining A* to C grades in GCSE art and design, drama, history, French and English literature and English language in 2011 reflect the good teaching in these subjects observed by inspectors. By contrast, the low percentage of students gaining A* to C grades in mathematics and physics in 2011, and eight subjects falling below average for A* and A grades, mean that not all students are making the progress of which they are capable, given their starting points. Students join the school in Year 7 with standards above those found nationally.
- The 2011 and 2012 GCSE results showed that students supported by school action plus did not achieve as well as their peers. Interventions in Key Stage 3 are starting to improve progress in mathematics and English for students supported by school action plus. Very few students eligible for free school meals attain five A* to C passes including English and mathematics.
- The school's current progress data for students eligible for pupil premium, disabled students and those who have special educational needs in Key Stages 3 and 4 indicate that students are beginning to make better progress.
- The sixth form is good. Achievement is good and shows much success in higher grades at AS level. There is an improving picture at A level but some lessons do not develop the higher order, subject-specific knowledge of more able students. The quality of teaching is better than that in Key Stages 3 and 4. The curriculum enables students to achieve qualifications that support progression to higher education, employment or further training. Retention from Year 12 into Year 13 is high. Guidance that students receive in transferring from Year 11 into Year 12 is not sufficiently detailed in helping all students quickly develop the necessary study skills to adjust from GCSE level to the skills needed at AS level.
- The small percentage of students studying courses such as construction and health and beauty at college achieve well. The curriculum supports their academic needs and career aspirations. Their progress at college is monitored closely by leaders; students are well supported and attend regularly.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because there is too much inconsistency in Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching is not of a good or outstanding quality over time.
- Students receive some outstanding and good teaching that captures their interest, challenges their thinking and promotes good progress. Students' learning from Year 7 to Year 11 is affected by the range in the quality of teaching which on occasion includes teaching that is inadequate and requires improvement.

- In good and outstanding lessons, teachers match the pace of learning to the needs of all students very well. Probing questioning, quick switching from independent to whole-class work and good use of peer feedback and self-assessment require students to sustain their attention in lessons. In an outstanding art lesson, the teaching combined good feedback to students linked to their targets, praise was used well to raise ambition and students were actively engaged in reflecting about their progress and quality of sketching.
- Challenge for more able students is lacking in some lessons because of missed opportunities to deepen knowledge through evaluative skills and setting harder work.
- Some teaching does not capitalise upon students' good attitudes to learning, limiting students' progress. This is because:
 - lesson planning is not based on detailed analysis of assessment data
 - teaching uses the same work for all students with insufficient difference in questions, time to complete work, content, resources and homework tasks
 - teachers miss opportunities to check students' progress in lessons and give feedback that consolidates and moves learning forward
 - teachers talk for too long, inhibiting work in pairs or small groups to debate ideas.
- Setting and marking of homework are irregular. Good quality marking, such as in history, is not typical in all departments. Students occasionally receive clear targets for improvement and step-by-step feedback on how to improve subject knowledge, apply skills and improve their writing. A small minority of parents rightly remain concerned about the irregularity of homework.
- The impact of leaders work in developing a whole-school approach to teaching high quality reading, writing, speaking and communication skills is emerging. It is not yet fully embedded across the curriculum. In subjects such as physical education, art and drama students develop good oracy skills because they use specialist language in peer review and self-assessment.
- Joint lesson planning by teaching assistants and teachers is not routine across the school. In a few lessons where inspectors saw effective planning, teaching assistants quickly adjusted their work and met the needs of students because they knew how to increase students' confidence and support good progress. Leaders are reviewing the structure for, and deployment of, teaching assistants and their training needs.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The overwhelming majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school. Low-level disruption in lessons is uncommon. In rare instances of disquiet, teaching is not sustaining students' interest in learning, students become inattentive and progress falters.
- Students confirm that behaviour is typically good and is continually improving because the relationship between good conduct, respect and positive attitudes to learning is reiterated by staff and upheld by most students. Most parents judge that behaviour is good at the school.
- Students feel safe and well cared for. They are confident in raising any worries they have with tutors and leaders. Almost all students attend regularly and persistent absence is low. Systematic and well-coordinated pastoral support provides comprehensive guidance for students who are vulnerable and those with behavioural, social and emotional needs.
- Most students enjoy the inclusive and friendly community at the school. The respectful school ethos militates against discrimination through racist or homophobic language. On rare occasions, if issues arise, leaders take immediate action. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and students from different ethnic groups, socialise and study well together. Very few students receive fixed period exclusions because good mediation and resolution of friendship issues quickly calm minor incidents.
- Students possess excellent understanding of the damaging impact of cyber bullying. They are well attuned to contemporary issues they face in using social networking sites and

understand how to stay safe using the internet. Students receive excellent guidance about how to report issues of e-safety. Leaders evaluate and report on the quality of e-safety to the governing body.

- The positive ethos is conducive to good quality spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Extra-curricular activities, including international expeditions, fundraising days and sporting opportunities, unite students in working together.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders have sustained good quality care for students who are vulnerable and who need specialist medical or psychological support. The school has good partnerships with external agencies, benefiting students in challenging circumstances.
- Systems for quality assuring teaching, professional development for teachers and systems for tracking students' progress are improving. Leaders focus on improving the quality of teaching through regular formal lesson observations with constructive feedback to staff. Since the last inspection, the reduction in inadequate and satisfactory teaching is testimony to this but some variability in the overall quality of teaching remains. Judgements from leaders' internal joint lesson observations are at times overly generous. Criteria used for observing teaching place too much emphasis upon teaching styles and conduct rather than analysing students' learning and achievement.
- Senior leaders' identification of strengths and weaknesses in teaching broadly match those identified by inspectors. Even so, standardising of lesson observations, unannounced scrutiny of work and understanding what constitutes outstanding learning is not shared widely across the school.
- Senior leaders encourage middle leaders to take ownership of leading change. This works well in English and drama. However, not all department self-evaluations give sufficient emphasis to the impact of teaching on students' learning and achievement.
- Curriculum provision at Key Stages 4 and 5 meets students' interests but the planning of the mathematics curriculum requires improvement. Leaders' plans for a new Key Stage 3 curriculum are clear in setting out how to address differing literacy levels in Years 7 and 8 and support better transition from Year 6 to Year 7.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good and is sustaining students' positive experience in Years 12 and 13. Leaders are continuing to reduce difference in students' progress in subjects at AS level and A level.
- The governing body supports the headteacher in challenging weaker practice. Senior leaders make difficult decisions to promote higher expectations of staff for performance management and progression. The governing body has improved some aspects of its work since the last inspection. Restructuring of the governing body is better defining responsibilities of each committee. Linking of governors to departments and use of joint lesson observations with leaders are developing skills in observing teaching. Despite these developments the governing body is not secure in detailed scrutiny of assessment data. The governing body has not kept pace with inspection criteria used in judging requirements for good and outstanding education.
- Self-evaluation is generous overall but includes examples of insightful analysis of what needs improving, how and why. There are clear links between departments' plans for action and those of the school as a whole. However, in some departments, timescales and success criteria for improvement are not tight enough to close the remaining gaps in the achievement of some groups.
- The local authority supports the school through regular visits from the school improvement partner.
- All statutory safeguarding requirements are met.

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

Unique reference number	110063
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	395298

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
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	1715
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jean Charmak
Headteacher	Mr David Ramsden
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2009
Telephone number	0118 9427337
Fax number	0118 9421933
Email address	lhs@littleheath.org.uk

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