

Old Buckenham High School

Abbey Road, Old Buckenham, Norfolk NR17 1RL

Inspection dates

7–8 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school's motto 'Achieving excellence together' accurately describes much of the current provision for students at Old Buckenham High School. The headteacher and the governing body have substantially raised standards in recent years. This is now a school that serves its community well.
- School leaders have improved significantly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers generally have high expectations of students and plan lessons accordingly. Students receive regular marking and feedback.
- Students make better progress than those in other schools from similar starting points. The school has markedly improved its examination results since 2013, and these gains can be seen securely in all current year groups.
- Students behave and interact with each other very well. The school ensures the safety, care and well-being of students very effectively, and students understand how to keep themselves safe.
- The school provides an excellent range of activities and provision which develop students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural experiences well.
- Students are listened to actively and encouraged to reflect on their learning. Achievements are widely celebrated and they have a well-developed understanding of the varied aspects of life in modern Britain.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Boys do not achieve as well as girls, particularly in English. In almost all subjects they achieve outcomes below those of the girls.
- Standards in English are not as high as they are in mathematics and some other key areas.
- Assessment is not used as effectively as it could be in some areas of the school. It does not always inform teachers' planning and some of the guidance students are given about how to improve could be clearer.
- The attendance of some groups of students remains below that seen nationally.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress made by boys, especially in English, by making sure that all teachers:
 - monitor the progress of boys closely and use assessment information to plan challenging and appropriate work to meet their needs
 - develop boys' writing skills in all subjects by providing excellent examples and support
 - insist upon high standards of presentation, handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

- Enable students to make excellent progress more consistently by making sure that all subject areas and teachers:
 - follow the school's new Key Stage 3 assessment methods and embed fully the requirements of the new GCSEs into their planning and marking
 - plan challenging work to ensure that students of all abilities develop the skills and knowledge that will enable them to secure the highest possible outcomes.

- Work closely with students and families to ensure that attendance, especially for disadvantaged students and students who have special educational needs, continues to improve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has led the school with passion, energy and rigour since his appointment in 2013. He has implemented a strategic vision for the school that has substantially raised standards. He places a high emphasis upon excellent communication and collaboration. As a result of his approach, and the impact it has had, he carries the overwhelming support of students, parents and staff.
- The school's strategic development and improvement plan provides a very clear vision and template for future success. The plans are ambitious and carefully mapped against clear objectives. As a result of such rigorous planning and oversight, the school is moving confidently forward.
- The structure of the school's leadership has been changed recently with one very clear aim: to further raise standards of teaching and achievement. The directors of raising achievement are successfully implementing a range of well-planned and personalised support programmes for students, and the director of teaching and learning is working closely with other school leaders to plan and deliver a wide range of training opportunities designed to improve teaching.
- Leaders have drawn judiciously upon a wide range of external support and advice. The local authority has supported the school effectively to engage with groups such as the 'All Routes 14–19' consortium and an educational challenge partner. These collaborations have helped the school develop, share and evaluate a number of improved approaches to teaching and the curriculum.
- Senior and middle leaders have developed an exciting new approach to curriculum planning and assessment at Key Stage 3. This has been carefully developed in collaboration with other schools and is being used very effectively in many lessons. However, it has not yet been fully implemented in some key subjects such as English and mathematics.
- Leaders have secured impressive improvements in the achievement of disadvantaged students as a result of a well-planned programme of support, drawing selectively upon advice and good practice in this area from other schools.
- Leaders hold teachers to account robustly by linking their pay progression to students' achievement. Senior leaders also ensure that teachers commit to improving their practice through the growing range of training opportunities that the school offers.
- Because of the sharp focus the school has had on raising the achievement of students in Key Stage 4, leaders have not always evaluated the achievement of students in other year groups closely enough. The school now has good plans in place to improve the monitoring and support for students in lower years, and is aware of the need to ensure that progress is made more consistently.
- The culture in the school is one of ambition and celebration. A reinvigorated house system works to effectively reward students; house leaders and the 'progress centre' provide a strong framework of care, guidance and discipline. Displays around the school, such as the beautiful 'achievement wall' in the school hall, celebrate students' efforts and achievements with great pride. They also exemplify the very wide range of extra-curricular opportunities the school provides in terms of clubs, sporting activities, trips and visits.
- The curriculum features a strong and explicit commitment to students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. All students in Key Stage 3 follow a well-planned and skilfully delivered programme of citizenship, which is then reinforced by CASS (citizenship and social studies) in Key Stage 4. Students were able to speak to inspectors with clarity and enthusiasm about the different traditions, cultures and values they study. They are knowledgeable about areas such as different beliefs about creation, and issues around body image and self-esteem. All students had been thoughtfully reflecting in tutor time and assemblies upon the moral dimensions to the recent refugee crisis.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced across the school and provides a good range of options to students in Key Stage 4. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that the artistic and practical subjects are valued. Many students choose these subjects and achieve well. However, the proportion of boys entered for the English Baccalaureate combination of academic subjects, particularly modern languages, is much lower than the proportion of girls entered.
- Students are given a very wide range of opportunities to lead and to be heard. A culture of service is generated through opportunities such as the student council, the senior senate, the system of prefects, the house captains, the head boy and girl, and the mentoring and support older students provide in areas such as reading. Because of such opportunities, students have a good understanding of the modern British values of democracy and the rule of law.

- Equality of opportunity and diversity is promoted widely. Students have a well-developed understanding of the different forms of bullying and have confidence in the school's ability to deal with the rare incidences of it. Students are confident that this is a school where differences are accepted. As one student put it, 'We're open-minded here.'
- Students are safe and feel safe in the school. Leaders implement and manage effective safeguarding procedures. Children at risk are identified, and the training of staff in the identification and reporting of risk is rigorous.
- The care and support received by vulnerable students is of a high standard. However, some of the recording and administration in this area needs to be more rigorous and timely.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The recently reconstituted governing body provides excellent supportive leadership of the school. Governors have a clear vision for the future and have been central to devising the strategic development and improvement plan. Because of this, they are sharply focused on ensuring that school leaders deliver. They ask challenging questions of leaders, and insist upon receiving more detailed information when they feel that they are not able to adequately monitor the progress the school is making.
 - Governors possess a wide range of skills and have engaged in a great deal of training to sharpen those areas where they have identified the need for improved expertise. As a result, they fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and can challenge leaders knowledgeably on the most important aspects of their work.
 - Governors are a regular presence in the school and actively check areas such as child protection processes to ensure that the correct procedures are being followed. They know the school well and are rightly proud of the improvements that have been made.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is well planned, engaging and challenging. Much of the teaching succeeds as a result of the strong relationships and mutual respect between teachers and students. Teachers create a friendly and purposeful learning climate in which the large majority of students achieve well.
- Effective use of assessment is a feature of some of the best teaching in the school. For example, in Key Stage 3 French lessons, teachers used a very wide range of activities and short tests to ensure that all students understood the grammatical construction they were learning. As a result, the students had real confidence in their learning and understood their strengths and weaknesses well.
- Teaching is less effective where it is not carefully planned around securing key skills and knowledge. In some English lessons, for example, teachers did not provide students with a clear enough sense of the purpose of the lesson or the key skills they needed to develop or apply in different situations.
- Teachers are developing the reading and communication skills of students well. There is a culture of reading in the school and inspectors saw a number of examples of students engaging well with challenging texts. All students are encouraged to read independently in tutor time, and the school library and reading programmes are popular and well utilised. Students' speaking and listening skills are well developed. Teachers use classroom discussion, debate and the sharing of ideas effectively in many areas of the school.
- Approaches to the teaching of writing are not as consistent across the school. The quality of presentation and handwriting varies rather too widely, and at times too little explanation or structure is provided for written tasks. In most lessons, teachers have a clear and common system for identifying spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors when marking. However, not all teachers are picking these errors up routinely.
- The teaching of mathematics is excellent. Year 7 students were enthusiastic about the progress they had made in such a short space of time and were keen to share their work in algebra with inspectors. Teachers apply well-established systems for securing and practising mathematical skills, generating consistently excellent outcomes. Inspectors also saw students exploring a variety of mathematical methods and teachers introducing problem-solving tasks to great effect.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly in all areas of the school in line with school policy. In most cases, the feedback students receive provides clear direction and advice that inspectors could see was helping students to improve. Where marking is less effective, it simply offers praise or lacks clarity. Homework is

being used consistently in most subjects to consolidate learning in line with school policy. Students felt that what they receive is generally consistent and useful, and the large majority of parents are satisfied with the homework being set.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good.
- The curriculum provides students with an excellent range of information about how to keep safe. Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and the curriculum promotes healthy lifestyles in a variety of ways. Participation levels in sporting activities are high.
- Incidents of bullying have declined substantially in the last two years. Students from all year groups feel safe in and around all areas of the school. They say, 'This is a school where it is ok to be different', and some students explained to inspectors how much better their experience of school has been since starting at Old Buckenham High School.
- The school has a well-planned programme of impartial careers advice and guidance that begins in Year 7. Events take place through the year at which employers, further education and apprenticeship providers contribute to students' understanding of their future career options. Impartial advice is provided to all students.
- Staff are well informed about how to safeguard students' mental well-being, and all have received training in the 'Prevent' strategy for combating radicalisation. The school works with a mental health charity to provide support when it is required.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students are considerate, punctual and polite. The large majority of lessons are calm and purposeful, enabling students to learn free from low-level disruption. Whether they are required to work independently or as part of a group, students are almost always cooperative and demonstrate impressive effort.
- Students' pride in their school is typified by their smart approach to uniform: blazers are often adorned with numerous badges to indicate various responsibilities and achievements. Different coloured ties indicate which house a student belongs to, and are worn with pride.
- Students exercise good self-discipline, both in lessons and around the site. Teachers rarely have to ask twice to establish quiet. Incidents of students being removed from lessons have declined substantially in the last year. Parents and staff have high confidence that students are generally well behaved. At break and lunchtime, prefects in high-visibility jackets are stationed in the canteen and communal areas to help supervise, and to be a friendly point of contact for younger students.
- Overall attendance has improved in the last year and is now around the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs who are persistently absent has improved in the last year, but remains high when compared with national figures. The school is working with families and students to reduce this further.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Overall, students now make better progress from similar starting points than students in other schools. This strong progress is evident in the majority of areas of the school. Students achieve particularly strongly in mathematics, the humanities and modern languages. The overall progress made by students in these areas is well in excess of that found nationally.
- Progress throughout the school in English is generally stronger in literature than it is in English language. While overall outcomes in English have improved strongly since 2013, the progress made by boys in 2015 was not as strong as that made by girls.
- There is a significant difference between the progress of boys and girls in the school. The overall progress made by boys across their subjects fell below the national average in 2015. This gap in outcomes is still present in other years, but is improving. The school recognises this as an important area for improvement, and a range of support and strategies are planned to address it.

- Standards and achievement have been improving in science. The overall progress made by students in 2015 exceeded that found nationally, and the achievement of students throughout the school is rising as a result of improved teaching.
- Disadvantaged students have made significantly improved progress since 2013 as a result of rigorous support and the careful allocation of the additional student premium funding the school receives. The gap between the progress disadvantaged students make and that made by other students in the school is now much narrower than the gap found nationally. School leaders have identified the elimination of this gap as a major priority.
- Overall, the most-able students make progress that is slightly better than that found nationally. In the best lessons, they receive challenging questions and demanding work that enables them to secure higher outcomes. They are also challenged by the wide range of extra-curricular provision and leadership opportunities they engage in.
- Provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is excellent and they are making progress that is similar to other pupils in the school. The provision and support they are receiving in school is carefully mapped against individual needs, and this is helping to ensure that they achieve well and secure suitable further education, training or employment.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 121169 |
| Local Authority | Norfolk |
| Inspection Number | 10001896 |
| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 582 |
| Appropriate authority | Norfolk |
| Chair | James Mason |
| Headteacher | Aron Whiles |
| Telephone number | 01953 860233 |
| Website | www.obhs.co.uk |
| Email address | office@oldbuckenhamhigh.norfolk.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 9–10 October 2013 |

Information about this school

- Old Buckenham High School is a smaller than average 11–16 comprehensive school serving a rural area of Norfolk.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of students who come from minority ethnic groups is well below average. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is very low.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support students who are in the care of the local authority or who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly average.
- The school meets the government’s floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students’ attainment and progress.
- There are currently no students educated offsite or through alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students in 35 lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some of these observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher or with other members of the school leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the governing body, school leaders, teachers and support staff with various responsibilities, groups of students and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation including that relating to policies, the minutes of governors' meetings, annual review documents, self-evaluation documents, student achievement, behaviour and attendance data, and a wide range of student work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 80 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and in 33 questionnaires returned by school staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the school uses, including the website and information sent to parents and other stakeholders.

Inspection team

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|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Richard Spencer, lead inspector | Seconded Inspector |
| Carol Lowery | Ofsted Inspector |
| Judith Wakeling | Ofsted Inspector |

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