

Mark Rutherford School

Wentworth Drive, Bedford, MK41 8PX

Inspection dates 14–15 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students' progress in English and mathematics is higher than nationally.
- Attainment in GCSEs continues to rise and is above average.
- The work of the specialist unit for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is outstanding.
- Students' behaviour is good in lessons and consistently good at break times. They are keen learners and quickly develop skills to help them work on their own and in small groups.
- Teaching and learning are good and continue to improve because of the support and guidance that teachers receive.
- Teachers plan and manage lessons well; this has improved since the previous inspection. As a result, students make good progress.
- Teachers use discussion, questioning and a variety of activities well, to help students develop their understanding of subjects.
- Strong leadership and management have led to continuous improvement at a steady rate.
- Staff manage very well the mixed arrangements for transition. As a result, students enter the school, at either Year 7 or Year 9, well prepared for their studies.
- School leaders successfully managed the change from upper school to secondary school. During this period achievements continued to improve.
- Leaders have worked well to improve the sixth form since the previous inspection. Teaching has improved as has progress monitoring and the sixth form is now good overall.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Attainment in the sixth form, although improving, is not yet good enough. Some aspects are at the national average.
- Some teaching still requires improvement. Teachers do not always engage students sufficiently well.
- Teachers do not always give students sufficiently good feedback about marked work.
- Although behaviour is good, on a few occasions students' behaviour in lessons requires improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 50 lessons, including several jointly with senior staff. In addition, the inspection team made a number of other short visits to lessons.
- Inspectors met with leaders and managers, staff and groups of students. They also held discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors looked at many examples of students' work, and planning and management documents.
- The inspection team took account of the views of the 62 parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the views of the 34 staff who returned questionnaires.

Inspection team

Derrick Baughan, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jackie Jackson-Smith	Additional Inspector
David Talbot	Additional Inspector
William Cassell	Additional Inspector
Brenda Watson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mark Rutherford School is a larger-than-average secondary school. It was previously an upper school but changed to secondary in 2010.
- The school now takes in students at Year 7 from a single feeder primary school and students at Year 9 from a number of feeder middle schools. Students from these schools have a choice of upper schools to attend.
- The school recently converted to foundation status as part of a non-governing trust, with a number of other schools.
- The school has approval to convert to an academy in January 2013.
- The school has specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs. This is in the form of a specialist unit for 11 students with ASD.
- The large majority of students are White British.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- About 13% of students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding), which is below average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well below the national average.
- The proportions of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below the national averages.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of academic year 2013/14, raise all attainment in the sixth form to above national average by building on the recent improvements in the monitoring and assessment of the progress made by students.
- Continue to improve teaching and learning so that it is all consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that teachers engage students to give them the freedom to further develop and use their independent learning skills
 - ensuring that students are always clear about how they can improve through detailed comments in marked work
 - eliminating the very small amount of low-level disruption in lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Progress in English and mathematics is good. Students enter the school with standards that are broadly average, although the proportion of higher achievers is lower than average. The proportions of students who make expected and better than expected progress in English and mathematics are above the national averages.
- Girls make better progress in English than boys and a few lower-achieving students do not make as much progress in mathematics as others. However, because of effective action by the school these gaps are closing.
- Examination results continue to improve. The proportion of students achieving five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics is above the national average. Students achieve well in other subjects. The proportions of students achieving high grades at GCSE in a wide range of subjects are higher than national averages.
- Students who enter early for GCSE mathematics achieve well, with the vast majority getting very high grades.
- Students have a good understanding of topics across a range of subjects. Their work shows clear progress and discussions with them show that teachers support them well to develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Students enjoy their learning. They participate well in both academic subjects and practical subjects. For example, inspectors observed one Year 9 group doing circuit training in physical education where the students were putting in effort that would not be out of place in a fitness class in a commercial gym.
- Sixth form students' results are improving and some indicators of success are above the national average. Students' achievement of work-related qualifications is extremely good. However, too much of the attainment is at or about the national average.
- Students' progression when they leave school is good. All of the leavers in 2012, from years 11, 12 and 13, went into either further or higher education, employment, or training. The school prepares students well for the next stage of their lives.
- Students' literacy skills are good. Inspectors saw many examples of good writing and students clearly articulate their answers to questions. Younger students are effective readers and the school helps them develop good strategies for reading and dealing with difficult words.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium. It provides a range of extra lessons for groups and individuals. It provides support from a personal coach. The vast majority of students attending these lessons are known to be eligible for the pupil premium and, as a result, they reach standards that compare favourably with national averages.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs reach their targets. Their achievements are in line with national averages.
- Students with ASD achieve exceptionally well. The school is very effective at including them in

the mainstream provision. As a result, they learn well how to live and work with others.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students' progress and the standards they reach are improving because teaching is continually improving and much is good or outstanding. However, some still requires improvement.
- Teachers are very good at planning lessons to meet the individual needs of all students. This has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Teachers are good at setting different, but challenging, targets for learners who work at different speeds. As a result, all students make good progress in most lessons.
- Most teachers use questioning and discussion particularly well to engage students in lessons. Students develop a clear understanding of their subjects and are very good at helping each other learn.
- Teachers help students develop good skills to work on their own and in small groups. Most teachers use a variety of activities to ensure that students have plenty of opportunities to use these skills.
- Teachers check students' progress regularly both in lessons and over time, with good use of detailed progress monitoring. Work is usually marked well. However, in a few cases teachers do not mark students' work in sufficient detail for them to understand how to make progress.
- Teaching in the specialist unit is outstanding. Teachers are highly effective at helping these students progress. As a result, they integrate well with the rest of the school and many take part in mainstream school lessons.
- In a few lessons, teachers talk too much. They do not give students the freedom to contribute to developing their understanding or use their skills to work independently.
- In most lessons teachers help students develop their reading and writing skills. As a result, students are good readers, confident speakers and clear writers.
- Teaching and support in class are adapted well to meet the needs of disabled students and those who have special educational needs and those who are eligible for the pupil premium. As a result, these students make progress in line with national averages.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour around the school is good. They are courteous to each other and visitors and enjoy their learning. Staff, students and parents talk positively about the behaviour at the school. Students' behaviour for learning is usually very good. However, very occasionally it can disrupt learning.
- The school is particularly effective at developing students' abilities to work on their own and in small groups. Students usually settle down to work straight away. Teachers use initial activities to ensure students focus on the subject quickly, for example the introduction of a starter activity in mathematics where students have to solve problems without the aid of books or calculators.

- The school's absence policies have been effective at reducing the number of persistent absences from well above national averages in 2009 to about national average in 2011. The school has reduced this figure further in 2012.
- The school's policies for attendance are highly effective. Exclusions are generally below the national averages. Students attend well and are punctual to school and lessons.
- The school has highly effective behaviour management policies. Staff use these well to minimise the impact of the occasional low-level disruptions that do happen. Inspectors noted that teachers do not raise their voices to deal with such disruption.
- The school deals well with bullying. Parents and staff do not consider this as a concern within the school and none of the students spoken to raised any issues about bullying. Students have a very clear understanding of the different types of bullying.

The leadership and management are good

- The principal's clear drive for improvement through a very thoughtful and measured approach has resulted in steady and sustainable improvement. Staff at all levels work well to implement the shared vision. As a result, the school manages well the impact of the change to a secondary school and the challenge of students entering the school in different year groups.
- Staff are very clear about their involvement in making decisions and the fact that they have the opportunity to try out new ideas. As a result, staff at all levels contribute fully to managing change and making improvements and the school's capacity to improve is strong.
- The leadership of the specialist unit is outstanding. Staff manage the resources extremely well and ensure that teaching meets the needs of the students exactly. An excellent focus on these needs results in outstanding achievement.
- The school has improved the sixth form overall. Achievements are increasing and staff monitor students' progress much more rigorously. Because of improved information, advice and guidance students are on courses that meet their needs and retention is improving.
- Teaching is improving because of the very effective approach taken by the school. An innovative teaching and learning group provides an excellent focus for sharing good practice. The school monitors the impact of this group very well by ensuring that teachers who implement ideas provide detailed feedback on their impact.
- Arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching are rigorous. The school links previous observation findings with current observations. As a result, it has a clear picture of the impact of staff development. Joint observations with inspectors showed that senior staff are extremely good at identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching.
- The school offers students a wide range of subjects to study. They have a good choice of academic and work-related options at GCSE and A level, or equivalent. The school regularly reviews the curriculum to ensure it continues to meet the needs of its students.
- Most students attend the wide range of after-school activities. As well as sporting activities, the school offers others, for example an engineering society, which carries out a range of projects

such as students designing and building their own electric racing cars. The school uses its previous arts speciality well, to engage students in a range of musical and performing activities.

- Assemblies and tutor-group lessons work well to develop students' understanding of social, moral, spiritual, and cultural matters. For example, inspectors observed sixth form students discussing the election of police and crime commissioners in detail. Teachers use a range of lessons, such as religious education, to develop students' good understanding of cultural differences.
- The school promotes equality well. Discrimination is exceedingly rare. Relations between students and staff are good with mixed ethnicity groups of students working and playing well. Because of good promotion of equality and diversity, the school is a harmonious place.
- The school manages its resources well. Accommodation is limited due to the current numbers of students, but staff are very effective at monitoring resource usage and providing flexible options. For example, they identified that students rarely used one set of toilets and converted this into a classroom.
- The school knows itself very well. Self-evaluation at departmental level is detailed and senior managers integrate these analyses well into a whole school development plan. Senior staff rigorously monitor the progress of departments in implementing action plans and meeting challenging targets, for example, the recent improvements in the sixth form.
- The school has good arrangements for getting the views of students and their parents and carers. Parental surveys are extremely positive about the school and their ability to check students' progress online. Student voice arrangements have resulted in very clear improvements to their experience, for example by improving toilet facilities.
- The school works well with members of the local authority, who give good support, for example, the support they have given towards the school's plans for converting to an academy.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is very strong. Governors are rigorous in ensuring that they meet their statutory responsibilities, including those for safeguarding. Governors have a thorough and detailed knowledge about the work of the school and what it needs to do to improve. They use well their specialist knowledge and the detailed training that they receive, to help the school improve. They are clear about the quality of teaching and how the school uses performance management, including reward, to recognise good teachers and tackle underperformance. Governors have very strong links with all departments within the school. They use these links to hold the whole school, and individual departments to account for the delivery of challenging targets, for example to close the achievement gap in English between girls and boys. Sixth form students play a good role in governance. The governors have an excellent relationship with the principal who they hold to account very well; for example, in how he uses the pupil premium, and salary progression and promotion issues for staff. Governors work particularly well with colleagues from other schools in the trust, to check the performance of the school in comparison with other schools.

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	109674
Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	400192

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1258
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Darlow
Headteacher	Stephen Peacey
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2010
Telephone number	01234 290200
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