



SPECIALIST SCIENCE COLLEGE

Headteacher : B J Baxter B.A. (Hons)

THE COOPER SCHOOL
Churchill Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 4RS
Tel : 01869 242121
Fax : 01869 362693
Email : headteacher@thecooperschool.co.uk
Website : www.cooper.oxon.sch.uk

OFSTED INSPECTION MAY 2013 – STATEMENT FROM THE COOPER SCHOOL

After eight years of rising results, with current levels of achievement considerably higher than the national average and an outstanding grade less than two years ago, The Cooper School, Bicester, has been graded as a good school with outstanding features following its most recent Section 5 Ofsted Inspection on 1st and 2nd May 2013. This most recent inspection follows a new, tighter framework for school inspections. The new framework, introduced in September 2012, makes it increasingly difficult for Maintained Schools to be graded as 'outstanding' for overall effectiveness as has been made clear by Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools.

The Inspection Team were very impressed with, and complimentary of, many aspects of the school's work. The summary findings confirmed that:

- The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, has increased and now exceeds the national average. Across the school, students' progress is good;
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and many include the use of modern technology such as blogs;
- Students are proud of their school. They show respect to one another and to adults. Students feel safe and their behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school. ;
- The new sixth form is good. Its students are making good progress and make a positive contribution to the life of the school;
- School leaders are focusing on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Ben Baxter, Headteacher of the school, said that he was, 'very surprised at the timing of the Inspection given that it is less than two years since the last full Inspection in May 2011.' He went on to say that, 'As the school was judged 'outstanding' in 2011 this should ordinarily have made it exempt from any routine Inspection unless there were serious concerns raised. Given that the examination results and all progress measures have risen exponentially over the last two years and that the Lead Inspector himself could not tell us why we were being inspected, it is somewhat bewildering to know why The Cooper School has been, seemingly, singled-out in this way. Be that as it may we recognise that all schools can improve and that is no different for us. The key areas that the Inspection Team indicated that the school can further improve, by increasing the amount of outstanding teaching and continuing to improve student achievement, are already part of our School Development Plan. Our actions now are to address absolutely these small areas for improvement over the next few weeks and months. Indeed, work has already started on those areas pinpointed that the school agrees with.'

In terms of examination results, last year saw the school record its best ever GCSE figures with 67% achieving 5+ A*-C including English and Maths (against a national figure of 58% and an Oxfordshire figure of 56%). The Inspection Report acknowledges that this puts The Cooper School, '...significantly above the national average.'





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Councillor Michael Waine, Chair of Governors of The Bicester Federation of Learning, which includes The Cooper School and Glory Farm Primary School said: 'I would urge all people with a real interest in the school to take the time to thoroughly read the 9 page Section 5 Inspection Report which can be found on both the school's and Ofsted's website. What they will see having read through it is that this is a very favourable report on an excellent school. The fact that the overall judgement is 'good' rather than 'outstanding' does not, in the Governing Body's view, alter our high opinion of the school and its leadership. I would imagine that the irony of seeing the school 'lose' its 'outstanding' Ofsted rating at a time when both standards of achievement and the quality of teaching and learning is vastly superior than in 2011 will not be lost on the people of Bicester! I also believe that this outcome will send reverberations across other schools in Oxfordshire, surrounding counties and nationally.'



The Cooper School

Churchill Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX26 4RS

Inspection dates 1–2 May 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased and now exceeds the national average. Across the school, students' progress is good.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and many include the use of modern technology such as blogs.
- Students are proud of their school. They show respect to one another and to adults. Students feel safe and their behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school.
- The new sixth form is good. Its students are making good progress and make a positive contribution to the life of the school.
- Governors show a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- School leaders are focusing on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good so that they are well prepared to be considerate citizens.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some more able students do not make enough progress in their English and mathematics.
- The progress made by some boys and by students known to be eligible for free school meals is less than that made by girls.
- There is not enough outstanding teaching. The strengths present in the school need to be shared across all subject departments.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 lessons, of which seven were jointly observed with a member of the school’s leadership team. Inspectors visited an assembly, tutor groups and other learning activities.
- Inspectors held meetings with three groups of students, talked with students around the school and scrutinised samples of students’ work.
- Meetings were held with school senior leaders, middle managers and four members of the governing body.
- A variety of school documentation was examined, including the school’s records of current students’ progress, self-evaluation summaries and development plans, behaviour and attendance logs, records relating to safeguarding and records relating to the management of staff performance.
- Inspectors took account of a questionnaire completed by 23 staff, together with 95 responses submitted by parents and carers to the on-line questionnaire Parent View.

Inspection team

Sean Thornton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Tracey Briggs	Additional Inspector
Jamie Clarke	Additional Inspector
Duncan Millard	Additional Inspector
Ogugua Okolo-Angus	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school; its sixth form opened in September 2011.
- A lower than average proportion of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students from service families and those known to be entitled to free school meals. Almost all of these students in this school are those eligible for free school meals.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of students whose first language is not English is much below the national average.
- The proportions of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action and school action plus are average but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school is part of a federation with a partner primary school and has a joint governing body.
- The school does not make use of any additional provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that the features of outstanding teaching present in the school relating to pace, challenge and questioning are understood and implemented fully by all teaching staff
 - making sure that students' work is marked frequently and provides them with advice on how to improve
 - developing the strategies that have been introduced to improve literacy in all subjects so that they are consistently applied across the school.
- Improve student achievement by:
 - ensuring that all groups of students, including boys and those eligible for free school meals, make outstanding progress and that they make equally strong progress across the curriculum
 - enabling more able students to make better progress in English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students generally join the school with attainment that is similar to the national average. However, the attainment of the Year 11 students who completed their studies in 2012 was significantly lower than average when they joined the school.
- The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics is increasing and in 2012 was significantly above the national average.
- Very large numbers of students study three sciences to GCSE level and gain good results. High standards of attainment are also shown in other subjects, such as history, French and German.
- Girls make very strong progress across the school. However, some boys and students eligible for free school meals make less rapid progress although better than the national averages for these groups.
- Some of the students who join the school with high attainment do not make as much progress as they could. They make the progress expected but do not exceed it.
- The school no longer uses early entry for GCSE.
- Students in the recently established sixth form are now making good progress towards demanding targets and the school's tracking indicates that A Level results will be above average in 2013.
- The needs of disabled students and those who have special educational needs are considered carefully when they join the school. Appropriate interventions are then provided throughout the school. This enables these students to make good progress. The small number of students with English as an additional language make progress equal to that of their peers.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium funding to provide extra staffing and intervention programmes to help student make good progress. Students of all abilities are supported, for example by ensuring that they can attend cultural enrichment activities. Results in English and mathematics for these students have been approximately one grade lower than their peers. However, the progress made by these students in English is now equal to that of their peers and the school is working to reduce the gap in mathematics.
- The school is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its students.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium is being used to provide one-to-one teaching in English and mathematics as well as to provide extra small groups. Almost half of the entitled students have now caught up with their peers in both these subjects.
- In the mixed-age tutor groups, older students act as mentors for younger ones, for example helping them to improve their reading and giving advice on organising their study. This helps the younger students to make progress.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The overall quality of teaching is good; students' good progress is evidence of the impact of teaching over time. Some examples of outstanding teaching were observed in a number of subjects.
- Teachers show good subject knowledge. They set high expectations and show enthusiasm for their subjects, and students respond well to the tasks provided for them, extending their knowledge and deepening their understanding.
- In the good and outstanding lessons seen, teachers ensured that work was provided at the right level for all students, probed understanding with skilful questioning and ensured that the lesson proceeded at a good pace. In other lessons, these features were less apparent.
- Lessons are well planned. In a Year 11 sociology lesson, a wide range of independent activities was provided for the students so that all were challenged and had a clear understanding of the

requirements for their forthcoming examination.

- Teaching in the sixth form aims at developing students as independent learners. In an outstanding English literature lesson, students worked in groups to analyse examples of other students' written work, using clear assessment criteria. They showed sustained commitment and concentration, resulting in excellent progress.
- Students are articulate and eager to discuss their ideas and their work. In a Year 9 graphics lesson, students were engrossed in a variety of computer-based activities that they had chosen and they described their progress with great enthusiasm.
- Skilled teaching in English ensures that nearly all students, including those with special educational needs, can read and write well enough to make good progress in their other subjects. The school's recent focus on developing literacy in all subjects is beginning to show impact.
- Teachers use a variety of modern technology to support students' learning, including a wide variety of computer software, on-line learning and blogs.
- Most students know their targets and are helped by their teachers to move on to the next level. However, students are often not clear about exactly how to improve their work because the quality of marking is very variable. There are examples of marking that praises the specific good aspects of students' work and provides them with clear guidance for improvement. Other marking, however, is less detailed and offers less advice.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' outstanding behaviour makes a strong contribution to their learning and personal development. Students pay close attention in lessons, follow instructions carefully, share their own ideas and listen respectfully to the views of others.
- Teachers are skilled in managing students' behaviour and they follow consistent policies so that students know that there are high expectations.
- Students show courtesy and respect to one another and to all adults as they move around the school. They are punctual for their lessons, moving purposefully between the different parts of this large school site.
- Sixth form students display mature good manners and act as excellent role models for younger students.
- Students feel safe in school and the curriculum supports them well in learning how to stay safe. They have a very good understanding of e-safety.
- Students report that incidents of all types of bullying, including cyber bullying, are rare and are dealt with swiftly by the school's staff. The very strong and respectful relationships within the school ensure that there is hardly any evidence of racial or other prejudice-based bullying. The school will not tolerate any form of discrimination.
- Students' attendance is broadly average for secondary schools. The school deals firmly with families who wish to take a student on holiday during term-time and is placing a focus on raising attendance.
- The frequency of fixed-term exclusions is below average and there have been no permanent exclusions during the last three years.
- The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who expressed a view considered that behaviour is managed well. They also said that their child is happy at the school and feels safe. The school has appointed full-time non-teaching staff to work with vulnerable students and their families to ensure the welfare and safety of these students.

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders set high expectations of staff and students. They have taken effective action to raise students' attainment and standards of teaching. The headteacher's commitment and drive to improve all aspects of the school are shared by staff and governors.
- The school's development plan is concise and is focused on raising standards of teaching.
- There is regular monitoring and evaluation of students' achievement, including for those in the sixth form. However, the school's tracking information is more focused on attainment than students' progress so that comparisons between the progress of different groups of students are not always made. The school is now improving this system to pay greater attention to progress.
- The management of teaching and its impact on learning is good. Joint observations during the inspection showed that the school's judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. However, school leaders had not fully implemented the requirements for teaching to be judged as outstanding overall.
- The results of departmental evaluations are used to provide a wide range of appropriate professional development which responds to the needs of the staff, including developing leaders.
- The system of performance management is well organised and effective and it has been updated to respond to recent national changes. There is evidence that salary progression is taken seriously and that it occurs only when merited by sustained good performance.
- The school's range of subjects and courses provides well for the needs and interests of its students, with a good balance between high-quality vocational courses and more academic subjects. There is also a strong programme of other learning activities, such as learn-to-learn sessions and house competitions. In the sixth form, a large number of A-Level courses are already in place and the school is planning to extend its provision.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, both in the curriculum and in the wider life of the school. It is fostered by visits and by the wide variety of opportunities in music, art, sport, drama and school assemblies and through religious education lessons that give many opportunities for students to reflect on serious issues. The school uses on-line resources to develop students' understanding of the cultures of other parts of their own country.
- All aspects of safeguarding are fully met. The governing body and senior leaders consider that keeping students safe is one of their prime responsibilities.
- Parents and carers agree that the school is well led and managed. Of the parents who offered their views, almost all would recommend the school to other parents and carers.
- The local authority have helped the school by providing financial support for the capital projects needed to establish the school's sixth form and provide additional laboratories. There was no evidence of other support being provided.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is highly effective and has been strengthened as a result of the school's federation with one of its partner primary schools. Governors benefit from regular training. They have good understanding of how well the school is doing and the quality of teaching and learning. They check the school's performance through analysis of examination results, reports from senior leaders and middle leaders, and discussions with relevant staff. They make sure the pupil premium is targeted correctly and have started to evaluate its impact. Governors are fully involved in the performance management system for all teaching staff; all promotions, with their financial consequences, are discussed in a governor committee.

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	123234
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	400208
Type of school	Secondary
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	1249
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Waine
Headteacher	Mr B Baxter
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2011
Telephone number	01869 242121
Fax number	01869 362693
Email address	headteacher@thecooperschool.co.uk

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