

Sharples School Science Specialist College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105259
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	355741
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Patrick Geraghty HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	915
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clr Christine Wild
Headteacher	Mrs Lynne Porter
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2006
School address	Hill Cot Road Sharples, Bolton Lancashire BL1 8SN
Telephone number	01204 333253
Fax number	01204 333250
Email address	headteacher@sharples.bolton.sch.uk

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 39 lessons taught by 39 teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of students, the School Improvement Partner, the local authority, and members of the governing body. Documentation was scrutinised including: information related to the tracking of the academic and personal progress of students; detailed analysis of students' attainment and progress; school development planning; school and subject self-evaluation; records of recent classroom monitoring; minutes from meetings of the governing body; and evidence to demonstrate how the school supports students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Inspectors also examined evaluations undertaken by the school to ensure that it meets statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding. In addition, 386 parental questionnaires were scrutinised along with questionnaires returned by a representative sample of students.

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

- Whether strategies to improve student attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 have been effective.
- Whether teaching and learning are sufficiently challenging to promote better outcomes for students.
- Whether attainment data is used to ensure that lessons are more challenging.
- If leaders and managers, at all levels, have the necessary capacity to improve the outcomes for students more rapidly.

Information about the school

Sharples School is an average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of minority ethnic students is above average, with students of Indian heritage making up approximately 30% of the school's population. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average but of those, the number with a statement of special educational needs is high. The school has a specialist unit for approximately 24 hearing impaired students from Bolton and neighbouring authorities. Provision includes specialist teaching in the unit and in-class support for mainstream lessons. The school is a specialist science college and has gained the Investors in People award. Other awards received include, Sportsmark, Healthy School status, International School foundation award and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Cultural Diversity Award at gold standard. The school was subject to a Notice to Improve at its last inspection.

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

2

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires a notice to improve.

This is a good school. When students join the school in Year 7, their attainment is broadly average. A period of underperformance has been effectively tackled by the headteacher and senior leadership team. Clear strategic and improvement priorities have been identified and pursued with rigour. Systematic monitoring and tracking systems have been established. Self-evaluation is accurate and self-critical. Data is used effectively to identify underperformance. Performance management systems have been strengthened as has the accountability of all levels of management. Members of the governing body are rigorous in challenging the school's performance and in offering their support to the school's developing culture of ambition. Attainment and achievement indicators have improved and evidence indicates that these trends will continue upwards and are sustainable. The behaviour of students is very good and underscores the positive and vibrant learning culture of the school. The school acknowledges in its self-evaluation the need to increase the attainment and progress of students on free school meals and White British boys.

Central to this improvement has been a transformation in the quality of teaching and learning. Internal and external monitoring has shown rapid improvement in teaching over the last 18 months. This was confirmed by inspection findings where well over three-quarters of lessons observed were good or better including some 18% which were outstanding. No inadequate lessons were observed. Teaching is well planned, set at a brisk pace and challenging. Learning is cooperative, lively, developmental and enjoyable. The curriculum has enhanced improvements because it is broad and flexible and caters for the needs of all students. A key role has been played by the specialism in science through the development of new courses, external partnerships and dissemination of its good practice in teaching. The leadership and management of the specialism are outstanding. Care, support and guidance are good. Progression throughout is well planned. Students are cared for and well supported to achieve to their ability. Students feel safe and safeguarding procedures are good. The monitoring of classroom provision and support for special needs students on school action is not sufficiently robust. Strong senior leadership coupled with effective middle managers and much good and better teaching gives the school a good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment at Key Stage 4 so that outcomes for five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, exceed the national average by 2012. In particular to raise more rapidly the attainment and achievement of;

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- students on free school meals and
- White British boys.
- Improve the monitoring of classroom provision and support for special educational needs and/or disabilities students on school action intervention.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

One of the key characteristics of the school's improvement has been how well organised and resourced pair and group work engenders a sense of challenge, enquiry and enjoyment among students. Learning is active and students make good progress. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is generally good. At Key Stage 3, a strong literacy programme has enhanced improving student attainment and achievement. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE rose significantly in 2010 to well above the national average. The proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, increased by 17%. The most recent examination results and scrutiny of current tracking information indicates that the strong trend of improvement is continuing, especially in English and mathematics. The current quality of work in students' books and engagement in lessons observed by inspectors were good. Gaps in performance between most groups of students are narrowing as a result of very focused intervention. However, the school is aware of the continuing need to ensure that students on free school meals and White British boys make better progress.

Students report that they feel safe in school and that any issues of safety and behaviour raised are dealt with quickly. Behaviour around the school and in classrooms is very good and reflects harmonious relationships between students. This is particularly noticeable within lessons when they work in pairs and groups. Older students act as positive role models for younger students. Students understand many of the different factors which affect different aspects of their health. Take-up of a wide range of extra-curricular sports activities is good. However, some concerns were raised by a few parents and students around the promotion of healthy living. Students make a good contribution to the school and wider community through fund-raising activities and through numerous community links, many developed through the science specialism. Students are keen to take responsibility within the school, exemplified through the work of student school leaders and the very active school council. Attendance shows an improving trend over three years and is now good. Literacy programmes at Key Stage 3 are impacting on students' attainment, progress and ambition. Through the broad curriculum and community partnerships students develop wider skills and aptitudes. The percentage of those not in education, employment or training is low and progression to further education or training is high. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

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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	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good with a number of examples of outstanding practice. A wide and well planned range of teaching activities help students to actively engage in their learning. Exemplary group work, with individual and group needs and challenges, seamlessly woven into activities, was observed across a wide range of subjects including English, mathematics, science and drama. Resources are well designed and used effectively. Lessons are set at a brisk pace. Probing questions are used to deepen student learning. Teachers use praise and encouragement to promote high expectations. In satisfactory lessons, students were not sufficiently challenged and the lessons were too teacher focused. Marking is consistently good across the school and as a result, students know how well they are doing and have a clear idea of what they need to do to improve. Data is used well to plan lessons and group activities that are suitably matched to students' abilities. Initiatives to improve teaching have been influenced by consistently good practice in the science specialism.

The school's good, broad and flexible curriculum has impacted on improving students' outcomes. The school consistently reviews the curriculum to better meet the needs of students. At Key Stage 3, strong literacy support has impacted on improved student attainment and progress. There is a wide range of GCSE and BTEC courses. Partnerships with other schools and colleges have enhanced the range of options. Alternative curricular provision for potentially disaffected students is impacting positively on their attainment,

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rate of progress and progression opportunities. Enrichment activities are extensive with a high take-up. The specialism has had a strong impact on further developing curriculum options in science and information and communication technology (ICT). The use of ICT is good. Progression rates to further education courses and to work-based learning programmes are high.

Care, guidance and support are good. Students comment favourably on the quality of information, advice and guidance which they receive. Progression is managed effectively. Good partnerships have been established with both primary schools and local colleges of further education to ensure smooth transition. The school works effectively with parents and carers as well as external agencies to support vulnerable students and augment good student welfare and support programmes. Effective strategies have led to improved attendance and a reduction in persistent absence. Registration sessions are managed effectively to support improvement planning and literacy and numeracy programmes. The monitoring of classroom provision and support for special needs students on school action is not sufficiently robust.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is the driving force behind a strong focus on improvement. Her tenacity, strategic and planning skills and sense of urgency have borne fruit. She has assembled a very strong, well-focused and able senior leadership team. Challenging targets are now set for students and teachers. Potential underachievement is rapidly identified and intervention programmes put in place within curriculum time. Successful strategies to raise attainment have been introduced and robust systems to track and monitor students' progress are now embedded. The management of teaching and learning is strong. Effective and systematic lesson observation processes link well with excellent staff training programmes, many developed and delivered by school staff. The four weekly monitoring cycle has played a significant role in holding all managers and teachers to account and assessing the impact of training. Self-evaluation is accurate and self-critical. Governance is good with appropriately strong challenge and evaluation of the school's performance. The governing body is fully involved in monitoring the school's work. Partnerships are good, well promoted and enhanced by the school's specialism in science. Strong links with local schools and colleges add to the students' learning opportunities. Links with a variety of other agencies add to the good quality of care, support and guidance for students. Parents and carers are supportive of the school and links with them are good. There is effective promotion of equality of opportunity through pastoral programmes and the broad and balanced curriculum. Effective analysis of the performance of different groups of students

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has enhanced improved outcomes. Community cohesion is good. The school has established good links with the local community and developed beneficial international links. Safeguarding is good. Policies and procedures are comprehensive in range and coverage. The school's value for money, set against outcomes, is good.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

An analysis of responses to the questionnaire indicates that the majority of parents and carers are happy with their child's experience at school and that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that their child is well prepared for the future. However, a small minority expressed concerns about ineffective communication, healthy lifestyles and behaviour. Inspectors noted these parental concerns and have asked the school to work more actively with parents and carers so as to more fully involve all of them in their child's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sharples School Science Specialist College 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 386 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 915 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	122	32	236	61	23	6	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	132	34	234	61	20	5	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	168	44	196	51	20	5	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	118	31	232	60	30	8	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	95	25	262	68	21	5	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	94	24	243	63	36	9	5	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	88	23	242	63	37	10	7	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)	121	31	231	60	17	4	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	97	25	244	63	26	7	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	97	25	229	59	40	10	12	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	73	19	243	63	45	12	7	2
The school is led and managed effectively	101	26	249	65	19	5	5	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	139	36	224	58	13	3	8	2

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 2009 to 31 August 2010 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 2009/10 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.



29 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Sharples School Science Specialist College, Bolton, BL1 8SN

Thank you for the warm and friendly welcome that you gave my colleagues and me when we inspected your school this week. We would also like to commend you for your very good behaviour, and your commitment to making the school a harmonious place to work in. As you know your school was given a Notice to Improve at its inspection in December 2009. We were delighted to take it out of that category and grade it as a good school. We were very impressed with your behaviour and how well you worked with each other. We would particularly like to thank those of you who spoke with us.

Our inspection found: Yours is now a good school. You are making better progress throughout your time at the school. Your results are improving. There is much good and some outstanding teaching in the school. In these lessons, you respond well to the teachers' high expectations. Your curriculum options are good. The teachers and support staff give you good care, guidance and support.

The leaders in your school worked with us to decide on some ways in which your provision could be better. We decided that to achieve this, the school should;

- improve your results in GCSE examinations and particularly in English and mathematics so that they match and exceed national averages
- improve the monitoring of classroom provision and support for some special educational needs students.

You can help your school to improve further by ensuring everyone focuses on the pursuit of excellence for all of you and trying hard in your studies so that you can achieve your full potential in life.

I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Geraghty

Her Majesty's Inspector

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