

Sharnbrook Upper School

Odell Road, Sharnbrook, Bedford, MK44 1JL

Inspection dates

2–3 May 2013

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: This inspection: | Not previously inspected | 2 |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------|----------|
| | Good | | |
| 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 drive and the commitment of the headteacher has ensured the school has focused successfully on improving teaching and learning.
- Students make good progress and achieve well, particularly in mathematics, science and the arts. Standards of work are rising rapidly in English.
- Teaching is typically good and improving. Some is outstanding. Students are taught well by a team of dedicated teachers who are fully committed to supporting their learning.
- The provision of adapted work and individual guidance for disabled students and those who have special educational needs helps them to do well. This school supports all pupils equally.
- There are many opportunities for students to attend clubs and extra classes which enrich their learning.
- The school has good links with its local and wider community.
- This is an extremely welcoming place of learning. Students' behaviour is excellent, as seen in the high levels of concentration in lessons and in the exemplary attitudes shown by students in classrooms. They are polite, friendly and respectful to staff, visitors and each other.
- The excellent care that students receive helps them to feel safe at school. Attendance is high and improving. Exclusions are very low.
- The school prepares students well, both academically and personally, for future success.
- The sixth form is good. Students are well taught and are making good progress from their starting points to achieve well.
- The school is led and managed well. Leaders and managers, including an effective governing body, have driven the school purposefully forward. This demonstrates the school's strong capacity to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. In some lessons, work is not pitched at the right level for everyone in the class.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly, but do not always give them enough guidance on how to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 47 lessons, of which 24 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition they made a number of shorter visits to year assemblies and tutorial sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the school leadership and management and groups of staff.
- Members of the inspection team held meetings with four groups of students representing all age groups in the school. Discussions also took place with students informally.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of Governors and an additional member of the governing body.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including the school's own evaluation of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan and statistical information about students' achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- There were 147 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 60 responses to the staff questionnaires. Additional comments were received from parents and carers.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Robert Ridout, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Christine Murell | Additional Inspector |
| Chris Young | Additional Inspector |
| Mina Drever | Additional Inspector |
| David Gutmann | Additional Inspector |
| Ron Cohen | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- Sharnbrook Upper School is a larger than average sized 13 to 19 mixed comprehensive school. There are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls in the school.
- The school has specialisms in the media arts and applied learning. It holds awards for Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools.
- It is a member of the Sharnbrook Academy Federation linked to the Lincroft, Margaret Beaufort and Harrold Priory middle schools.
- Sharnbrook Upper School (SUS) is a member of the Pilgrim Learning Trust.
- Over ninety per cent of the students are from White British, Irish or other White or mixed White backgrounds. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is well below the national average. The government provides additional funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority or from service families because they are at particular risk of underachieving.
- Around 2% of the students are disabled or have special educational needs. The proportions of students supported by school action, school action plus and those with a statement of special educational need are all well below national averages.
- Provision for students on alternative programmes is arranged by the school in conjunction with Bedford College.
- The school was designated as a National Teaching School in 2012 and shares best practice with other schools within its partnership, regionally and nationally.
- The school exceeds current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and raise students' attainment so they achieve GCSE grades which are consistently and significantly above the national average in all subjects by ensuring that
 - all teachers make the fullest possible use of the information about learning to match more closely the needs of every student in the class
 - teachers consistently provide high quality marking and feedback to students so they can improve their work, and checking that they act on the feedback given to demonstrate that they have understood the steps required to secure the improvements needed.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school at the age of 13 with attainment that is generally above expectations, having previously secured results at the end of Key Stage 2 that were above average. Attainment in the sixth form is in line with national averages and data provided by the school shows it has risen considerably this year.
- In 2012, GCSE results in English and mathematics were in line with national averages. Current Year 11 students are on track to attain significantly better results, especially in terms of five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics, and are making good progress across a wide range of subjects. Students lower down the school are also making good progress and achieving well.
- Examination results have been consistently above the national averages over the past few years. There was a slight dip in 2012; English results in particular were disappointing. Leaders acted quickly and the evidence provided by the school show that the final results are set to improve this year.
- Nearly all students make the progress expected of them by the end of Key Stage 4. The proportion of students making better progress than this has grown and compares favourably with national figures. The proportions of students making and exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics compare favourably with national figures. Students achieve very well in science and the humanities.
- The option of early entry to GCSE examinations is used only when students are ready to take examinations. The good achievement of students in mathematics seen this year shows the effectiveness of the school's strategy.
- Students who are disabled or with a statement of special educational needs, including those with severe learning difficulties, achieve well because of the highly effective support that they receive.
- Students known to be eligible for free school meals attain approximately one full GCSE grade less in English and mathematics in comparison with other students in the school. However, school data, supported by inspection evidence, shows that effective additional classroom support provided by the school is now closing the gap rapidly and securely.
- The alternative courses arranged by the school enable students to achieve well and to gain valuable experiences and qualifications relevant to work. These prepare them well for the next steps in life, and help them to continue their education or secure work after leaving school.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form in the broad range of subjects offered by the school. Progress is similar to national averages but better in vocational subjects, especially those supported by the school's specialist subjects. The progress of sixth form students is monitored well and focussed support is put in place quickly for any individual underachieving. Evidence provided by the school shows that students in the sixth form are making good progress.
- Students read and write well. They are very articulate and express themselves clearly and confidently.

The quality of teaching is good

- There is now a relentless focus on raising the quality of teaching in the school. The result is that teaching is improving, is typically good, and sometimes outstanding.
- Teachers know their subjects well. They routinely set clear targets for learning so that students know what they are expected to achieve. In the best lessons, teachers also break down the targets into smaller steps to help accelerate progress.
- Many teachers use information about students' progress and abilities to plan activities that are matched closely to their students' needs. However, tasks are not always consistently matched well to the abilities of learners and they are sometimes too easy for some students and too difficult for others. This slows the progress of learners.
- Where teaching is good or better and learning is very rapid, students are provided with well-structured tasks that help them to develop their skills and understanding. They enjoy the opportunities where they are actively engaged and are required to work with others in groups or pairs.
- In a Year 12 physical education lesson, students had a very clear knowledge and understanding of their own learning needs and what they were striving to achieve before the end of the lesson. Each student was required to review and evaluate their own progress and that of their peers. All were required to consider the next steps they would take to improve their own learning and achieve the highest standards by the end of the lesson.
- Some of the very best lessons were seen in the Sixth Form. Students demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning, especially when teaching is aimed at developing their analytical and reflective skills. Students are most confident here when applying their skills, knowledge and understanding to new and real learning situations.
- Teachers use their good knowledge of their subjects to ask questions that encourage and help students to think more deeply about their subject and to come up with their own ideas and answers to the problems set. Teachers also use questioning widely to check how well students are learning and have grasped the concepts being taught.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent. While some is of exemplary quality, especially in physical education and media, in some subjects it does not give students a clear enough explanation of how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve their work. Even when marking is thorough, teachers do not always check to see if students are acting on the advice given. Opportunities for self and peer assessment are not used sufficiently.
- Literacy skills are taught well, with the result that students are making good progress in reading and writing. Numeracy is also taught effectively, with the result that students are able to apply their prior learning to new and real-life situations.
- Where teaching is less than outstanding, this is mainly because planning does not take full account of the particular needs of individuals within a class. As a result students are not always provided with work at levels to match their abilities, and there are too few opportunities for students to work on their own or as part of a group. Sometimes, teachers spend too long introducing a lesson or leading discussions from the front of the class. In these cases, students

are not actively involved and this slows their learning. As a result, students do not fully engage with their learning and lose some concentration.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- This is a calm and purposeful school. It is a very friendly and welcoming place for staff, students and visitors. Students get on extremely well together and are most respectful to all.
- Students' attitudes towards learning are exemplary. In lessons they are attentive, self-disciplined and sustain high levels of concentration. They are hungry to learn. Their behaviour outside of lessons is excellent and students manage themselves extremely well on very open, university styled campus. Misbehaviours are extremely rare and the behaviour seen during the inspection is typical of the school over time.
- Students spoken to during the inspection were very keen to stress that behaviour is excellent and they feel very safe and secure. They promote a respectful, safe and tolerant culture within the school and exclusions are extremely rare.
- Students were well informed about the different forms of bullying that can take place. However, all considered that bullying of any kind, including cyber bullying, was very rare and were confident that in the rare event it should take place the school would deal with it quickly and effectively. Discrimination of any kind was not tolerated.
- Parents and carers support their children's views and a significant majority believe them to be happy, safe and free from bullying at the school. Staff strongly agreed that the behaviour of their students was excellent and this was confirmed by inspectors during their visit.
- Relationships between staff and students are very positive and supportive. The increasing focus on high quality teaching has ensured that students are more and more engaged in their learning and are largely self-managing in and out of the classroom. Teachers are generous with their time and students benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Well planned and focussed support programmes are available to individuals before, during and after the normal school day.
- Assemblies, tutor time and the school's personal, social and health education all contribute well to the students' strong spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. The weekly broadcast is a particularly creative and successful feature which promotes the excellent atmosphere within the wider school community.
- Attendance levels are high and continuing to rise because students enjoy their learning and value what the school offers them.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and governors are ambitious for the school to be the best. Their vision for the future is well communicated to staff, students, governors, parents and carers. The school's continuing good reputation in the local area is testimony to this.

- The headteacher's leading role within the Trust has strengthened links between the four federated partner schools and has promoted greater continuity in learning as students move between the schools. The burden of leading these developments has been acute, however, and it will be difficult for the headteacher to continue to lead developments effectively without additional support from the Trust and its other partners.
 - As a result of the good leadership of the headteacher and a sustained focus on continuous improvement, achievement at the school is at least good in many aspects of its work but there is still some scope to improve both teaching and achievement in some subjects in the main school. Leadership in the sixth form is improving rapidly.
 - All leaders and managers, including those responsible for governance, have high expectations and are now contributing well to the improvement of the school. The impact of this is evident in the rising standards in English, mathematics and science but has yet to be seen fully in some other areas of the school, including the sixth form where improvements have been more recent.
 - The school's improvement targets are challenging and the school compares its performance carefully with national and local benchmarks. The senior leadership team has been remodelled to focus on school development priorities. The impact of this is already being seen in improvements in both teaching and standards.
 - A performance management system is in place. This is currently under review following recent national changes and plans are in place to link successful salary progression with high quality teaching and the good progress of all students. These changes are planned to be implemented in the new academic year.
 - The school tracks students' progress well, and acts quickly to support individual students who are not progressing as well as they should be. The progress of different groups is also examined and compared with that of others. However, the resulting information is not always analysed and used well at a classroom level. As a result, governors and staff are not getting the clearest picture of progress to support their part in improvement planning.
 - Teaching programmes generally take good account of students' aspirations and needs. Courses provide a good breadth, especially in the sixth form. Good alternative provision, offered by the school in conjunction with Bedford College and supported by the applied learning specialism, supports students whose circumstances make them vulnerable well.
 - Many of the features that were judged to be outstanding when the predecessor school was last inspected remain strong, such as the care, guidance and support, the range of subjects taught, the wide range of out of school activities, especially in sports, media and the arts, and the opportunities for students to take responsibility and extend their wide understanding of the world beyond Sharnbrook.
 - Systems and processes that keep students safe meet requirements well.
 - Parents' and carers' responses to Parent View are very positive and a significant majority of them have confidence in the school and would recommend it to others.
- The governance of the school:**
- The Governing Body takes an active interest in the work of the school and holds the school rigorously to account. It uses information about the school's performance astutely to compare

its effectiveness with other schools to identify what it could do better and its intention to strive to secure greater progress for its students is to be applauded. Governors play a key role in setting the targets for the headteacher's performance. The governing body knows the quality of teaching and has fully supported senior leaders in the push to improve its quality since the recent headteacher's appointment. Governors fully understand the operation of performance management in the school and monitor closely its links with salary progression. Plans are in place to strengthen the link between student progress, teaching performance and successful salary progression. They are prudent about how funding is spent and whether it provides good value for money. For example, they add additional funds to the pupil premium to ensure it makes a real difference to students' learning and their wider development. Governors take part in regular training led by representatives from the National College so that they maintain their skills and hold the school to account for its effectiveness.

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

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| Unique reference number | 136740 |
| Local authority | Bedford |
| Inspection number | 413326 |

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

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| Type of school | Academy converter |
| School category | Non-maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 13-18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1919 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 682 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Hugh Carr Archer |
| Headteacher | Iain Denning |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 01234 782211 |
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