

Vandyke Upper School and Community College

Vandyke Road, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 3DY

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils	Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching	Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement is not yet good because not enough students make good progress. Too few students achieve the highest grades in their examinations.
- Not all teaching is good. Sometimes, teachers do not ask questions which help students think, and the work students have is not hard enough. Teachers do not always plan for students to take an active part in the lesson.
- The quality of marking varies. Students do not have enough opportunity to follow up the comments teachers make in their books.
- Leadership requires improvement. Leaders collect a wealth of information about students' attainment, but do not use it well enough to set challenging targets and to check whether sufficient improvements are being made.
- The way in which school leaders check teaching does not focus sufficiently on how much progress students are making.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students do not consistently achieve as well as they could in their different subjects. This is because the quality of teaching varies.

The school has the following strengths

- Achievement in mathematics has improved considerably because of good teaching and leadership.
- Students behave well and feel safe. They speak highly of their teachers. Students' attendance is above average.
- There is a good range of training for teachers, which is helping to improve teaching.
- The curriculum, including in the sixth form, contributes well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Governors know the school well. They are helping the school to improve by supporting school leaders and holding them to account for students' achievement and the quality of teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons taught by 38 teachers, of which six lessons were observed together with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made shorter visits to lessons in the school’s Achievement and Support Centre. They listened to students read, attended an assembly and observed tutor-group activities and break times.
- Meetings were held with three groups of students, two groups of governors, school leaders and other staff. Informal discussions took place with staff and students.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and read a wide range of documents, including the school’s self-evaluation and plans for improvement, data on students’ current progress and the school’s review of examination results, and records of behaviour and attendance. They checked on how the school keeps its students safe and also looked at students’ books, records of checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings and external reports. Prior to the inspection, inspectors looked at the school’s website.
- Inspectors took account of 47 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and considered information from 54 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Cooper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Rachel Bendefy	Additional Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
Roger Waddingham	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Vandyke Upper School is an average-sized secondary school for students from Years 9 to 13. Most students come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. In this school, the pupil premium provides additional funding for looked-after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The school does not use alternative provision. A small number of Year 11 students take part in work experience for one or two days each week at local businesses.
- The school holds International School status and Healthy Schools status, and has the Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold awards.
- Vandyke Upper School converted to academy status in August 2011. When its predecessor school (of the same name) was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good, by making sure that:
 - all tasks are planned at the right level of challenge for each student
 - students have more opportunities to contribute actively to their learning in lessons
 - teachers probe and extend students' thinking by using more searching questions
 - students are more involved in checking their own work and are given sufficient time to respond to their teachers' feedback in their books.
- Improve the achievement of students across the school, so that standards in most subjects are at or above national levels, by making sure that:
 - progress data are checked rigorously to spot any students who make less progress than they should
 - different groups of students, especially boys and higher-attaining students, are making sufficient progress.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - making better use of data to set more demanding targets and to decide how effective the school is in raising attainment
 - ensuring that leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and marking focus on the progress students make.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students join the school with levels of attainment which are either in line with or slightly below the national average. The proportion of students who gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C including English and mathematics in 2012 was in line with the national average. Results have improved over time, especially in mathematics, where most students do well, with some making much better progress than expected. However, not all students made progress as good as this in their other subjects including English.
- Fewer students gained A*-A grades, including in English language, and attainment at A*-C in some of the foundation subjects was below the national averages.
- The number of students making expected progress in English language has risen slightly but is only just above the national average, as students' learning is not consistently good. However, progress in English literature is good.
- The progress made by different groups of students and in different subjects is uneven. Boys make less progress than girls, and the more-able students do not achieve as well as they should.
- In 2012, most disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action did well, but the progress of students on school action plus or with a statement was not as good. Students with disabilities and those who have special educational needs in the school are making good progress now, however, because the school uses its very varied programme of extra support to help individual students achieve.
- Almost all students were entered early for GCSE mathematics, taking the examination again in the summer of Year 11. This allowed most students to improve on their grades, as well as preparing more-able students for sixth form study.
- Most students are entered for GCSE examinations, with a few subjects preparing students for BTEC qualifications. The use of BTEC science as well as GCSE courses meant that progress overall was good in science.
- Teachers make sure that students know the key words required in their subjects, and students' writing and numeracy skills are developing across the school. Intensive reading sessions have helped the least-able students to make rapid progress in reading.
- Pupil premium funding has paid for extra support for students, school visits and revision guides. In 2012, students known to be eligible for free school meals were over a year behind other students in English and mathematics. However, students eligible for the pupil premium made better progress in mathematics than students who were not. The gap between students eligible for the pupil premium and those who are not eligible is closing and is now just under a year. This is because the extra support is helping eligible students achieve better in both English and mathematics. There were too few looked-after children in the school to comment on their standards without identifying individuals.
- A small number of students took part in work experience for one or two days a week, while continuing their education at Vandyke. They gained English, mathematics and other work-related qualifications at school, which helped them move on to the next stage in their education.

- Results in the sixth form in 2012 were better than in previous years, but students' progress in different subjects is uneven because not all teaching is good.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good across the school because it does not allow all students to make good progress. Although there is evidence of good or better teaching in all subjects, there are some lessons where the quality of teaching requires improvement.
- Where teaching is less successful, teachers plan lessons that are not sufficiently demanding, and this means that students do not have the chance to try harder work. Some teachers do not check students' progress regularly enough during the course of the lesson to find out if they need more help or extra work. In some of the other lessons seen, students all had exactly the same work to complete, and this meant that some students could not make as much progress.
- When students are actively involved in the lesson, they usually learn better. For example, in a Year 11 life skills lesson, students could choose different activities which really interested them. They were quick to move to the new tasks and made outstanding progress in thinking about how they learnt. However, in some other lessons, students have fewer opportunities to make an active contribution to the lesson – for example, through discussion or group work.
- Some teachers are more skilled than others at asking questions which require students to explain their answers in more detail. This occurred in an outstanding French lesson in Year 10, where students gained an excellent grasp of how to improve their answers in examinations because of the teacher's questions about the use of the future tenses. However, not all teachers make the best use of questioning to check how much students know or understand.
- Most teachers give feedback to students in lessons and mark students' books, often praising students' efforts and suggesting ways to improve. However, students rarely have the opportunity to correct their own mistakes or to follow up the advice given by their teachers, and this means that students do not learn as well from their work.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement. Although teachers know their subjects well, they often do not vary how they teach students. This results in students having a less active part in lessons, with fewer opportunities to show whether they can explain what they have learnt.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. For instance, in an outstanding drama lesson in Year 9, students showed in their performances how deeply they thought about the lack of rights for a prisoner of conscience.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Students behave well in lessons and around the school. Students are keen to learn and they speak highly of their teachers. Even where teaching seen required improvement, students' behaviour was usually good, with students willing to take part in lessons and do their work.
- Students say that the school is a safe place and that they always know who to go to if they have a concern. They understand the different forms of bullying and are very aware of how to use the internet safely. Students say that the very few incidents of bullying are dealt with 'quickly, effectively and subtly'. The school is good at helping students sort out any conflicts or problems.

- The school knows its students well, and the Achievement and Inclusion Centre helps students who find it harder to cope with school rules and routines. The number of students who are not allowed to be in school for a short period because of poor behaviour is small. The number of permanent exclusions has been relatively high but is forecast to fall with the forthcoming opening in the county of the Alternative Provision Free School for students who find it difficult to behave well in school.
- The responses to Parent View show that parents agree that students behave well, are safe and are cared for well. Staff say that behaviour is good and well managed at the school. Records confirm this view.
- Attendance is above average in the school and improving year by year. Students arrive punctually to school and are usually on time to their lessons.
- Students in the sixth form spoke enthusiastically to inspectors about their time in the school. They appreciate having responsibilities in the school, including organising the whole-school charity week. Many act as mentors to younger students and help students with their reading.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher is committed to helping all students succeed, including those who struggle with school. Quoting from the school motto, one member of staff said, 'Everyone really does matter'.
- Although senior leaders' description of the school as good is over-generous, they have chosen the right priorities to help the school move forward, especially to improve teaching. Teaching still requires improvement because achievement is not yet good, but the measures taken to remove any inadequate teaching have paid off.
- The school gathers a lot of information about individual students' attainment and abilities. However, targets are not sufficiently demanding. The way in which the school analyses students' performance does not always help staff know whether students are making enough progress.
- Staff training is helping teachers to improve the quality of their teaching. The Learning Fair sparked great enthusiasm amongst teachers, who are keen to learn from each other. This is a relatively recent development.
- Senior leaders were accurate about the quality of teaching in the joint observations during the inspection. However, the school's own records show that observers do not focus enough on judging how much progress students make during the lessons being viewed.
- The headteacher has done much to improve the school's reputation in the local community. Most parents who took part in the online questionnaire (Parent View) would recommend this school to another parent.
- The curriculum offers a broad and balanced range of subjects. Many students study two languages from Year 9. Although most subjects lead to GCSE, students can choose more vocational courses including in construction, horticulture and health and social care. The school has many extra-curricular activities, including a highly successful chess club.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and meet statutory requirements.
- Sixth form students and staff alike find the new system of setting targets easier to use, and the

head of sixth form does not hesitate to ask questions if students are not making enough progress. Some changes to the subjects on offer have helped to motivate students to stay on to the sixth form, though it is too soon to see the impact of this in terms of achievement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors know the strengths of the school and which areas to improve further. They use their knowledge of the school's results to ask searching questions of the school's leaders.
- Governors come to the school regularly to check the school's work and meet with staff and students. They visit lessons and know what makes teaching good. Governors make sure that teachers' pay and promotion are linked to good teaching. They supported the school in tackling inadequate teaching.
- The governors' development plan sets out appropriate priorities. Governors make sure that training helps them to understand their role better. The chair of governors meets with governors from other schools in the local authority to share ideas on improving leadership.
- Governors are fully involved in the performance management of the headteacher and in controlling the school's budget. They make sure that the pupil premium is spent wisely to help eligible students make progress. Governors looked at anonymised information about eligible students to help them decide to appoint a mentor to support students with their learning.

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	137169
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	412812

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

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	934
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Packer
Headteacher	Tim Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01525 636700
Fax number	01525 636701
Email address	office@vandyke.cbeds.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

