

# Elms Bank Special Arts College

Ripon Avenue, Whitefield, Bury, M45 8PJ

## Inspection dates

21–22 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- The inspirational and outstanding leadership from the headteacher, senior leaders and managers has enabled the school to build on the many strengths identified at the previous inspection.
- The governing body is highly effective in challenging and supporting the senior leadership team because governors are very well informed and continuously involved in the daily life of the school.
- Leaders have revised the curriculum and successfully implemented their own systems to assess and record students' achievements.
- There is a wide range of ability among the students but they all make excellent progress from their starting points, as a result of the individualised support they receive.
- The creative curriculum is a particular strength of the school's work and offers opportunities for students to take part in a wide range of additional activities. The exceptionally high standard of performance of the school choir is one example of the many outstanding achievements of the students.
- Staff work in very close partnership with a range of therapists, outside agencies and the school nurse to ensure the very best care is taken of all students.
- Through every aspect of school life, the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary.
- Teaching is outstanding and has a very strong impact on students' learning and progress over time.
- All teaching staff are highly dedicated to meeting the specific needs of all students.
- Post-16 students make outstanding progress and are very well prepared to develop independence and life skills to support them in the transition to further education and life in the community.
- Behaviour is generally very good. The challenging behaviour exhibited by some is sensitively managed and does not impede the progress and learning of other students.
- Students say they feel safe, enjoy school and feel confident to talk with anyone at school if they feel worried or concerned about anything.
- Parents speak very highly about all aspects of school life. Ninety-five percent of parents who completed a response to the online questionnaire, Parent View, expressed the opinion that their children enjoy school, are safe and make good progress and 100% would recommend this school to another parent.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 25 lessons during the inspection. Two lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at samples of students' work with the senior leadership team and some students were heard reading.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders for English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) and other middle leaders, the Acting Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, a representative of local authority and the school nurse.
- The inspection team considered the 58 responses to the online survey (Parent View), looked at parents' comments in home-school books, spoke informally with a small number of parents and took account of the 66 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors talked with two groups of students.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's view of its performance, information on students' progress and development in Key Stages 3 and 4, the progress and destination of students on leaving the sixth form, minutes of governing body meetings, the headteacher's reports to the governing body, safeguarding policies, records of behaviour and attendance figures.

## Inspection team

Maureen Coleman, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Marilyn Massey

Additional Inspector

John Ellwood

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Elms Bank Specialist Arts College is a special, co-educational day school for students aged 11 to 19 who have severe or profound learning difficulties, those on the autistic spectrum and others who have additional complex learning needs.
- Every student is in receipt of a statement of special educational needs.
- The number of students on roll has increased since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is significantly above the national average. This is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who looked after by the local authority.
- A small proportion of students are of minority ethnic heritages, mainly from Pakistani backgrounds.
- The school was designated a National Teaching School in April 2014.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

There are no significant issues for the school to address.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are outstanding

- The strong, dynamic vision of the headteacher is shared by the senior leadership team. They are passionate in their commitment to meet the needs of every student and to enable them to reach their full potential and live their lives to the fullest possible extent.
- A well-established culture of high expectations and dedication from all staff supports students exceptionally well in achieving the highest possible academic and personal development.
- An increase in student numbers and the current extensive building programme have been managed exceptionally well by the headteacher, senior leaders and governing body.
- The school has demonstrated, through the continued outstanding progress of students, its ability to develop the outstanding practice found in the previous inspection. The school makes excellent use of additional government funding, the pupil premium, to ensure eligible students make the same rate of progress as their peers.
- Middle leaders provide effective support to the leadership team, who work continuously to provide a stimulating vibrant learning environment in which students thrive.
- The senior leadership team has been working closely with all teachers and governors to develop the curriculum and robust systems for assessment.
- Strong emphasis is placed on developing students' communication, literacy and numeracy skills, together with an appropriate range of subjects to support students' enjoyment and excellent achievement in art, music and drama. Arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and together with the positive relationships that are seen throughout the school, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well.
- Accurate and careful monitoring of individual student's progress and the progress of different groups ensures learning is broken down into small steps, which are closely linked to individual targets.
- Rigorous procedures for managing teachers' performance ensure that only the most effective teaching leads to financial reward.
- The school's leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance and this information is used very well in setting priorities for further development.
- Links with parents are strong and parents speak very highly of the school. This highly effective partnership enables parents to become active participants in their children's development.
- The school is held in high esteem by the local authority, which recognises the high level of expertise available at all levels within the school and fully supports the move for it to be a Teaching School.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are highly committed and effective in carrying out all their legal responsibilities, including safeguarding.
  - Members of the governing body make sure that the school's finances are managed well and collect information for themselves through regular visits and through holding the senior leadership to account. For example, they have been influential in contributing to the design and refurbishment of the new building through meetings with the senior leadership team, talking to students and listening to and taking account of students' views.
  - The senior leadership team is constantly challenged by governors to ensure high quality provision and the promotion of equality of opportunity is at the centre of all decision making.
  - Governors have good knowledge and understanding of students' progress data and confidently challenge the school in its monitoring, tracking of progress and in the individual development of students.
  - Governors are fully aware of the links between teachers' performance and financial reward. They are also fully aware of how the school attempts to improve the quality of teaching even further.
  - The governing body includes a number of parent governors who provide a most impressive insight into how well the school meets the needs of individual students.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

#### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- The school has highly effective systems for managing students' behaviour. The systematic approach,

consistent use of the behaviour policy and skilled behaviour management result in students with more challenging behaviour making exceptional progress in gaining self-control and re-engaging with learning within a very short space of time.

- As a result of exceptionally good behaviour management, any kind of disruption is rare and there have been no exclusions within the past year. Behaviour in and around classrooms, during break and lunchtime is exemplary.
- Students' excellent behaviour impacts very well on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as they grow increasingly in confidence and become well prepared for life in Britain.
- Students very much enjoy their learning and their books show that they take a great pride in their work. They always try their best and attempt to complete the tasks set for them. Their excellent attitudes are reflected in their high participation in the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, for example, the school choir and lunch time clubs.
- Students' above average attendance is monitored very closely and is continuing to improve.
- Post-16 students provide excellent role models for younger students and show the same positive attitudes towards their learning as others.
- Students have excellent relationships with adults and show kindness and respect towards each other. They say they feel safe, enjoy school and make good friends.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Robust safeguarding policies and procedures are in place.
- Meticulous recording of any behavioural incidents, including the use of restraint, are kept and analysed by staff, in order to identify any patterns.
- Students say there is no bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect.
- Staff work successfully to ensure students have a good understanding of risk and an increasing number of students learn to travel safely and independently.

### The quality of teaching

**is outstanding**

- Students' written work and the school's information about students' progress over time show that teaching is never less than good and is outstanding over time.
- Teachers have high expectations, a thorough knowledge of each student and their learning difficulties and use assessments exceptionally well to inform activities that engage and interest students, enabling them to make rapid and sustained progress in all areas of learning and particularly in music, art and drama.
- Staff are very skilled and knowledgeable in meeting the needs of students with complex learning difficulties. Exemplary teaching demonstrates the way multiple learning difficulties are provided for and result in high levels of concentration and positive responses from students.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together in lessons to support the progress of individual students. Tasks are well matched to their learning needs and written comments about students' work show good and often outstanding progress and clearly identify the next steps in learning.
- Subject leaders and the senior management team scrutinise work carefully and check that it is challenging and well matched to their abilities and interests.
- The teaching of communication, literacy and numeracy is very effective. Teachers and teaching assistants use signing, symbols, pictures and objects in lessons, which effectively support students' understanding and progress.
- Resources are of high quality and extremely well chosen, as seen in art where the sounds of a rain forest were used to inspire and motivate students in their work.

### The achievement of pupils

**is outstanding**

- Students in Key Stages 3 and 4, and those in the sixth form, make significant and sustained progress from their starting points. As a result of highly effective support, a stimulating and vibrant curriculum and outstanding teaching they learn exceptionally well.
- Students' work and assessment files, together with evidence from inspectors' visits to lessons, show they make at least good and often outstanding progress across different subjects. Progress in communication is

particularly strong as a result of highly effective support and planning by speech and language therapists and teachers. The excellent ethos which permeates every aspect of school life and strong, trusting relationships enable students to make very good progress in personal, social and health education.

- The achievement of some students was expressed well when they made choices and responded to activities through movement, gesture and vocalisation. This was of particular note during a visit from a local theatre company, which creatively used sound and light to develop communication skills.
- The highly successful and popular school choir sings and performs at a range of concerts and events. In these events, students demonstrate their outstanding progress in music and also in their self-confidence.
- All students are given opportunities to develop and increase their confidence in walking or in operating wheelchairs. The school's pet dog, Angie, encourages students' confidence and enables all students, including those who are visually impaired, to learn how to look after animals.
- Students are fully assessed on joining the school and this enables staff to measure accurately progress from their starting points. The comprehensive and easy-to-understand system the school has adapted assesses current levels of attainment and provides detailed information for teachers, students, parents and governors.
- Rigorous monitoring of each student's achievement and progress is carried out by the senior leadership team. The information gained informs the regular progress meetings held with staff and parents to ensure everyone has an accurate picture of the progress being made by individual students. It also ensures that challenging measurable targets are set for future progress.
- The more able students learn about the sounds letters make (phonics) and are able to read with understanding and expression. In mathematics, they gain an understanding of number value, can do simple addition sums and identify various shapes and patterns with accuracy.
- Students from minority ethnic heritages and also students eligible for support through the pupil premium make the same outstanding progress as their classmates.
- Pupil premium funding is spent wisely and carefully and provides additional support for reading, financial support for the school residential activity, funding for instrumental lessons, and the purchase of iPads for students who would benefit from their use in lessons. It also supports after-school club provision.

### **The sixth form provision**

### **is outstanding**

- The leadership of the sixth form is highly effective. Senior leaders provide vision, direction and are excellent role models for students. Expectations are high and students are motivated to achieve, to do well in their studies and to develop skills to enable them to be as independent as they can be to equip them for life in today's society.
- The Life and Living course ensures all students to gain academic recognition for their work.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form is outstanding, resulting from high expectations and outstanding teaching over time.
- Outstanding opportunities are provided for students to develop independence and life skills through engaging in internal and external placements, which are exceptionally well matched to the individual needs and interests of students. This is further enhanced by students taking part in work-related activities every day and opportunities to work in the school house together with the availability of weekly residential visits.
- Students' excellent attitudes to learning are confirmed by their above-average attendance. Students take a pride in their work and benefit from high-quality support and teaching which focuses on meeting individual needs. There is close and effective liaison with local colleges to ensure students are well placed and supported when they transfer to the next stage in their education.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	105378
<b>Local authority</b>	Bury
<b>Inspection number</b>	448136

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	173
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	48
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Pat Walton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Elaine Parkinson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 February 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 766 1597
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