



Stratton Upper School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 109645
LEA Bedfordshire

Inspection number 274779
Inspection dates 25 – 26 April 2005
Reporting inspector Dr Tony Beaver

Inspection deemed to have been carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 according to section 12(3) of the same act.

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Eagle Farm Road
School category	Community		Biggleswade
Age range of students	13 – 18		Bedfordshire
			SG18 8JB
Gender of students	Mixed	Telephone number	01767 220000
Number on roll	1109	Fax number	01767 220002
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs M Russell
Date of previous inspection	27 September – 1 October 1999	Headteacher	Mr N Bramwell

Age group	Published	Reference no.
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Introduction

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the Stratton Upper School and Community College and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Stratton Upper School & Community College is comprehensive and of average size for a secondary school. Well over 1000 students aged 13 to 18 attend the school, including 236 sixth formers. Although a lower percentage of students claims free school meals than nationally, some students come from areas of economic hardship in the locality. The percentage of students with special educational needs is above the national average. Very few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school is a specialist Training School for staff. It has encountered difficulties in the recruitment of teachers.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

The school's senior management and inspectors agree that students receive a good quality of education, with some outstanding features. They agree that teaching and learning are good and that students make good progress in the main school, achieve well, and reach above average standards. The school and inspectors also agree that students' personal development and well-being are good. For example, students enjoy remarkably good relationships, and act maturely and responsibly. Inspectors found that the quality of care, guidance and support that students receive in the main school is outstanding. For example, the help that vulnerable students receive is exceptional, and students who would otherwise not attend school because of severe personal difficulties are supported to attend regularly. The curriculum gives students good opportunities to achieve well. For example, in Years 10 and 11, there is an exceptional range of courses that are well chosen to meet all needs. Consequently, irrespective of their widely differing academic abilities and backgrounds, students enjoy these learning opportunities and many achieve very well in GCSE and GNVQ examinations.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher has led the school's drive for improvement extremely well, and he is well supported by staff and governors. Consequently, improvement has been good since the last inspection in 1999. Standards have risen significantly, and most weaknesses identified in that inspection have been overcome. Parents are consulted regularly and their concerns about behaviour and teaching have led to the substantial improvement seen in this inspection. Students are also listened to and are centrally involved in research that directly influences school action, for example – in their current investigations into assessment for learning. Management makes the most of modest funding and the school gives good value for money.

There are some weaknesses in performance. Students' progress in English, although satisfactory, is not as good as in mathematics and science, because the school has encountered difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist teachers of English. Boys attain lower standards in GCSE English examinations than boys nationally. Also, the teaching and learning of personal, social and health education are not a well enough established part of the curriculum. However, the good record of improvement since 1999, and the accuracy of school self-evaluation show good capacity to improve performance further.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

The school rates the sixth form's effectiveness as satisfactory. Inspectors judge this evaluation to be correct, and consider the leadership and management of the sixth form to be satisfactory also. There are notable strengths of the leadership. For example, it ensures that the sixth form has a very positive ethos. Students have very mature attitudes to learning and exercise much responsibility towards younger members of the school. Overall, students achieve the standards that they should, given their capabilities, their earlier performance in GCSE examinations and the good teaching they receive. Although students appreciate the very good personal care and support that they receive, the use of data to direct their efforts and those of the staff to identify and overcome weaknesses in performance is not well enough developed across all subjects. The school itself recognises that this is a weakness. However, the many strengths of the sixth form, the school's recognition that data should be used more effectively in academic tutoring, and the planning already in hand to remedy the deficiency, make value for money satisfactory.

Grade: 3

What the school should do to improve further

In order to make further improvement, the school should:

- continue the work to train, deploy and retain specialist subject teachers to improve standards in English in the main school, especially those of boys
- use assessment information on sixth form students' academic performance more effectively to help them achieve higher standards
- put into effect the improvements planned for the teaching and learning of personal, social and health education (PSHE).

Achievement and standards

In Years 9 to 11, the school evaluates students' achievement as good and their standards as above average. Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation.

When students enter the school in Year 9, their Year 6 National Curriculum test results, of two years earlier, show their attainment was then below average. They make good progress, overall, in the two terms before they take the Year 9 national tests and, in 2004, students reached above average standards in mathematics and science, and average standards in English. This confirms the

school's evaluation that achievement is good. Although students' progress in English in Year 9 is satisfactory, it lags behind that of the other two subjects because of difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist English teachers.

In Years 10 and 11, students of differing abilities from all backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, continue to achieve well. They generally reach the challenging targets set, and the trend in performance in GCSE examinations over five years has been impressively above that of the rising national trend. This further confirms the school's evaluation that achievement is good. In these examinations, standards are regularly above average, including the attainment of five or more GCSE grades A* to C. However, there is variation across subject performances, as the school's self-evaluation correctly makes clear. For example, students reach higher standards in history, design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT) and modern foreign languages than they do in their other subjects. Students are less successful in English, art, geography, physical education and music, each of which has an improvement plan. In general, girls achieve standards above those of boys, especially in English. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, boys' standards in English were below the national average reached by boys, and well below those reached by girls in the school. Nevertheless, boys' standards, overall, are ahead of those of boys nationally.

In the sixth form, the school considers that students achieve satisfactorily, and inspectors agree with this evaluation. Progress and achievement are satisfactory, overall, given students' prior attainment in GCSE examinations. However, there are variations in performance. The most competent students usually achieve well on advanced courses because of good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching – as seen during the inspection. Students have a wider choice of courses than at the last inspection, and entry is very inclusive and not restricted to only those with high academic results. Consequently, some students of average ability, who gained a sound range of qualifications in GCSE and GNVQ examinations in Year 11, and are sufficiently qualified to begin advanced work, find difficulties with this level of work, despite good teaching and helpful personal support. This is particularly apparent in ICT, where students report considerable difficulties in transferring from GNVQ standard in Year 11 to advanced work in Year 12. Therefore, results of advanced courses, overall, are not usually above average, and were a little below average in 2004. Sound results were gained from intermediate-level courses.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development and well-being are good, with some outstanding features. They attend regularly, show interest in their lessons, and enjoy their education. They work well in small groups and contribute willingly to class discussions. Sixth form students speak enthusiastically about their courses and the opportunities to develop social skills. Almost all students throughout the school behave well and act responsibly and maturely. Consequently, students feel safe at school. Although some students have been excluded this year because of unacceptable behaviour, the number of exclusions is falling. Relationships among learners from all social and ethnic backgrounds are remarkably good. Many sixth form students train as counsellors and support younger pupils who encounter personal difficulties. The students' willingness to take responsibility is impressive; the school council takes its role very seriously. There are many examples of students' ideas improving school procedures. For example, they have made it easy to order healthy meals, and they have ensured access to, and responsible use of, ICT rooms at lunchtimes. Such positive contributions to the school community prepare them well for life as active citizens.

The teachers' evident respect for students and the civilised atmosphere in the school have a beneficial effect on students' moral and social development. Students show consideration for others. For example, they queue in very orderly fashion for meals and respect each other's property. Students' growth in self-confidence is a sign of their spiritual development, although teachers miss some opportunities to encourage more reflection during assemblies and in time with tutors in the mornings. Many activities after school, including sport, enable students to adopt healthy lifestyles. They respect, in practice, the cultures and traditions of others from varied ethnic backgrounds, but there are relatively few opportunities for them to develop knowledge about life in our culturally diverse society.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Inspectors agree with the school that teaching and learning are good. As a consequence, progress is good and standards are above average in the main school, and equally so for able students in the sixth form. In discussions, students reported that relationships with teachers are very good and all enjoy

learning. Inspectors saw good teaching in general, and some outstanding work that helped the students gain new insights and enabled them to learn proficiently.

In the best lessons, teachers' excellent subject knowledge interested and inspired students to learn and to achieve well. In such lessons, students were admirably involved in learning for themselves. For example, excellent teaching of a Year 10 NVQ land-based studies course inspired great commitment and interest in students, many of whom had special educational needs. Equally, in an A-level history lesson, the students were challenged at the right level by a searching task to improve their analytical and evaluative skills by judging the impact of economic change in Germany in the 1930s.

Teachers' marking of students' work is helpful, and assessment is used particularly well in the main school, so that students know what standard they are reaching and what they must do to improve. However, the use of assessment information to help sixth formers improve the standard of their work is inconsistent across subjects.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

The inspection team agrees with the school that the curriculum gives students a broad range of worthwhile learning opportunities at all ages. It meets the needs of all students well, and almost all statutory requirements are met. The diversity of academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 is outstanding. There are very successful and popular courses for students with special educational needs, and for those at risk of not completing their secondary education. For example, land-based studies on the farm enable students to gain NVQ qualifications, and contribute considerably to their personal development.

Although students have essential guidance in sexual matters and substance abuse, the school acknowledges, and inspectors agree, that PSHE remains a key priority for improvement. Citizenship is satisfactorily provided for, as shown by students' sensible exercise of responsibility throughout the school.

The sixth form curriculum is good. It provides well for an unusually wide range of capabilities and needs, so that students can choose from an extensive range of advanced courses, augmented by suitable intermediate courses. The many extra-curricular clubs and activities enjoyed by students enrich the curriculum well, in all year groups.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

The school evaluates its quality of care, guidance and support as good. Inspection evidence reveals exceptional features which make it outstanding overall. For example, support for students of all ages with learning difficulties and other vulnerable children is exemplary. Records of their progress are meticulous. The provision of a "retreat" for students with more severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties enables them to continue attending school, despite their complex needs. There is close contact with parents and carers of these children, and very good relationships with outside specialists ensure that further support is available when necessary.

Requirements for child protection are fully applied; members of staff are well aware of procedures and follow them to the letter. Students feel safe and very well supported by teachers, and report that any incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Excellent links with middle schools help students to settle in quickly in Year 9 and to feel confident and secure in their new school. Teachers ensure that Year 9 students are very well prepared for their courses of study in Years 10 and 11. They respect students' views and respond to them positively. For example, they support students who are working with the local authority to improve safe parking arrangements for buses and the safer use of bicycles. They willingly involve students as researchers in practical projects to improve teaching and learning.

Students in the main school value the clear, helpful information they are given by teachers on how well they are progressing. Teachers skilfully involve them in assessing their own work through self-evaluation and peer-assessment. They make sure that students know the targets that they are expected to achieve, and share these with parents.

Sixth form students speak highly of the helpful support they get from the head of sixth form. Students are very well cared for and feel very well supported when changes of course are necessary. They are introduced very well to sixth form studies and effectively guided to consider career options and opportunities in higher education. However, although pastoral support for students is very good, academic tutoring by subject staff does not provide precise enough guidance as to how students can improve their work.

Grade: 1

Leadership and management

Inspectors find that the school's leaders' and managers' evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate. This self-evaluation prompts appropriate action to implement change. Overall, leadership and management in the main school are good. The headteacher has led the school's good rate of improvement since the last inspection outstandingly well. Expectations of what students of all abilities, irrespective of social or ethnic background, can achieve have risen. The expectations of what staff themselves can achieve have also been raised. Consequently, students have progressed more rapidly than at the time of the last inspection in the main school and achieve much higher standards from the rich range of courses that are provided. Managers at all levels support this drive for improvement and give it practical effect. There have been particular difficulties in the recruitment of teachers of English. The school has partly overcome this difficulty by gaining the status of a Training School. All teachers increasingly enhance their skills from the opportunities provided by the school's training activities. The effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have helped to maintain their good quality.

Heads of department are encouraged to augment their management skills, and apply these to benefit students' learning, especially those students with special educational needs. Outside links for those students with particular needs are managed very well. The views of parents and students are regularly sought by the school, and a positive response is made to their concerns. For example, the school's direct response to parental concerns of two years ago about behaviour and the quality of teaching in some lessons in a small number of subjects has led to substantial improvement.

Governors contribute well to the good quality of leadership. They set priorities for the school's further development with the management and support the drive for improvement that is led so effectively by the headteacher. However, they do not meet all statutory requirements. Students do not all receive the opportunity for an act of collective worship every day. Some statutory policies are not fully in place.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. They ensure a very positive ethos among sixth formers, who are expected to contribute to the school community and respond willingly and well to the lead they are given. Students enjoy learning and have a keen sense of purpose to achieve well. Overall, the examination results of advanced courses are satisfactory, given students' attainment on entry to the sixth form; competent students attain well above average results. Management ensures that the quality of teaching is as

good as that in the main school. However, the school aspires to raise standards further in the sixth form, as it has done so successfully in the main school. The capacity of the senior managers to ensure that sixth form results match the quality of those in the main school is good.

Grade: 2

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INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key to judgements: Grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16-19
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OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The <i>standards</i> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners' make <i>progress</i> , taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	2

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community.	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2
How well does the provision promote the well-being of learners?	1	1

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	Yes/No/NA
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are taught about sexual health risks	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe.	Yes/No/NA
Procedures for Child Protection meet the requirements of <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children</i>	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
How well learners enjoy and achieve	Yes/No/NA
Support is given to learners with poor behaviour and attendance	Yes
Learners' personal and academic development are monitored	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	Yes/No/NA
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, are consulted when key decisions affecting them have to be made and their views are listened to	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	Yes/No/NA
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop their enterprise and financial skills, and work in teams	Yes
Education and training for all learners in 14-19 is co-ordinated to give experience of work based learning	Yes

Alexandra House T 0207 421 6800
33 Kingsway F 0207 421 6707
London WC2B 6SE www.ofsted.gov.uk



Stratton Upper School and Community College
Eagle Farm Road
Biggleswade
SG18 8JB

May 2005

To the School Council and to all students of Stratton Upper School & Community College:
Your school was inspected a few weeks ago, and I thank those of you who gave time to speak to me and my colleagues about your experience of the school. I am now writing to tell you what our findings from the inspection were.

The inspection team's main judgement is that your school is a **good** one, and it has **some outstanding features**. This will come as no surprise to the many of you who told us that you enjoyed being a student at Stratton, how safe you feel there, and how well you get on.

Some of the main strengths that we observed about your school are:

- You make good progress with your work and get good results in Years 9 to 11. Sixth formers usually achieve their potential.
- The vast majority of you behave well and get on well together. Some of you, especially many sixth formers, show great maturity and act most responsibly towards younger members of the school. Inspectors congratulate those of you who make such a positive commitment to your school community.
- The teaching you get is generally good. Some is excellent. The vast majority of you learn successfully because you work so well with your teachers, and take advantage of their knowledge and expertise.
- The range of courses that you can choose from is good, especially in Years 10 and 11. Inspectors were very impressed with the vocational courses, including work seen at the farm.
- Inspectors also consider that the care and personal support you get from the staff is exceptional. We found a spirit of genuine care for you, as individuals, in the school.
- No school works well without good leadership from the headteacher onwards, and your school certainly has that.

Inspectors judge that the school can do better in three ways:

- Many of you, especially the boys, could achieve higher standards in English in Years 9 to 11.
- More consistent use across subjects of information on sixth formers' previous academic performance could help students improve the standard of their work.
- The essential course in PSHE is not good enough.

Very best wishes to you, and congratulations to the vast majority of you for making the most of your opportunities at Stratton.

Dr Tony Beaver
Lead inspector