



New Mills School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 112936
LEA DERBYSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 279059
Inspection dates 8 February 2006 to 9 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Colin Humphreys LI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Church Lane
School category	Community		SK22 4NR
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01663 743284
Number on roll	908	Fax number	01663 745134
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Barbara Tier
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr. Jesse Elms

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 8 February 2006 - 9 February 2006	Inspection number 279059
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

New Mills School and Sixth Form Centre is an average sized comprehensive school, situated in the northwest of Derbyshire. It is a business and enterprise specialist school. Students enter the school with standards which are slightly above average. Some of the more able children from the primary schools the students would normally transfer from are educated in local independent schools or in selective schools in the neighbouring local authority. The school is one of 11 secondary schools in a federation called 'Peak 11', who work collaboratively to improve the education they provide. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals (9%) is below average. Just over 10% of the students have been identified as having learning difficulties, which is also below average. Most of the students are White British, but a few are from mixed or minority ethnic backgrounds. The school caters for students from a mixture of economic backgrounds, including a high number from families who commute to work in Manchester and also from more established local families, some of whom are on low incomes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school and inspectors agree that this is a satisfactory and improving school. Standards are broadly average. Overall, students make satisfactory progress. The higher ability students generally make good progress. However, the middle and lower ability students, particularly the boys, do not all make as much progress as they should, often because they have not developed secure enough learning routines. Students with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress. The students' personal development is satisfactory. Their behaviour is often mature, although a significant minority still have a tendency to misbehave. The students' attendance is broadly average, but the punctuality of some, particularly in Year 11, is lax. The quality of teaching is satisfactory but improving, and there are examples of good and outstanding teaching. Relationships between students and teachers are generally good. Students are set clear targets and know how to improve their work, although not all of their books are marked consistently well. The curriculum is good and the school is responding well to local circumstances by developing more vocational options for some students. There are further exciting plans to expand this in the future. The quality of care and guidance is good and the school works well with a number of support agencies. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory and there are good elements. The headteacher has a clear vision of a school that will better meet the needs of students of all abilities. The success in gaining business and enterprise specialist status has been a significant achievement. The governors have improved their work and have satisfactory systems for checking the school's work. However, not all initiatives in the school are implemented consistently and so do not have the full impact they should on improving areas of weakness. Nonetheless, with well considered plans for the future and positive new appointments to the senior leadership team, the school has a good capacity for further improvement. It provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school feels that its sixth form provision is good and the inspectors agree. Students make good progress and standards in recent years have been in line with or above average. A high proportion of students go on to higher education. The sixth form curriculum is currently undergoing some significant and positive changes so that it will better meet the needs of more students. The traditional academic provision to A level is being maintained, but there are well-considered plans to expand the range of vocational courses. Not enough is done to develop the sixth formers' study skills, and this needs attention.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that all students develop good learning routines and make as much progress as possible. - Improve students' punctuality to school. - Tackle the remaining misbehaviour. - Ensure that whole-school initiatives are consistently implemented and

have the impact that they should. - Develop the provision for study skills in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory. The examination results in the sixth form in recent years have been in line with or above average and these students make good progress. The specialist status as a business and enterprise school is already having a positive impact on achievement and standards. In the GCSE results for 2005 significantly more students gained five or more higher grades than in recent years, bringing the Year 11 results up to broadly average. This was a positive achievement for staff and students. Students achieve higher results in some subjects at GCSE level than others: results were notably good in media studies, but there is scope for improving the results in design and technology and history. Although the 2005 results of the national tests for fourteen year olds were lower than in 2004, particularly in English, compared with the national figure the school has a history of results that show pupils have reached good standards in the past. However, given their ability when they enter the school, the progress of students in their first three years is lower than it ought to be. Although the students' progress in Years 10 and 11 has recently improved and is at least satisfactory, their overall progress across their five years at school should be greater than it is. The higher ability students make better progress than the middle and lower ability students, particularly than some boys. Students with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall, although in the sixth form they are good. Students work and socialise around the school safely and mostly enjoy being at school. They respond well to the school's promotion of healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle. For example, over 30% of them participate in a wide range of keep-fit activities provided by the school, in conjunction with local amenities. The increasing prominence that the school places on work-related and enterprise activities has a favourable impact on students' awareness of the skills needed for their future economic well-being. Involvement in the local community is satisfactory; for example, some students support local senior citizens at Christmas time, and some perform music concerts in the community. Students' development spiritually, morally, socially and culturally is satisfactory. They form positive relationships with each other and mostly act responsibly. Their behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school are satisfactory overall; amongst the great majority of pupils, they are good. In many lessons, pupils' behaviour is mature and pupils are well motivated. However, a small but significant minority have a tendency to misbehave, often because they

have not developed secure enough working routines. This is countered reasonably well in many situations, but it inevitably interrupts their own learning and that of others. Serious misbehaviour is dealt with consistently and well, but there is scope to handle low level disruption better. Attendance is average. Punctuality, particularly, but not exclusively, in Year 11, is often lax. Students do not fully exploit their good opportunities, for example, through the school council, to be sufficiently involved with decision-making about issues around the school, and more should be done to develop this. However, sixth form students are mature in their outlook and involve themselves well in the opportunities offered to them for further personal development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school judges its teaching to be satisfactory and inspectors agree. Improving the quality of teaching and learning is rightly part of its strategy for raising standards. There have been two well-considered main strands to this strategy; firstly by the improved and now well-established monitoring of classroom standards by managers, and secondly, by a team of teachers from all levels of the school who are developing models of good practice. Due to this work, instances of weaker teaching have been successfully reduced and staff are much more aware of the features of good teaching. Teaching pace is improving. The learning skills of middle and lower ability students, particularly some boys, need consolidation to match the faster paced teaching. Teachers have good relationships with their students and generally exert friendly control over their classes. Some behaviour is less than satisfactory, which has a negative impact on the learning of the whole class. The amount of good teaching is increasing, but there is more to do to make teaching good overall. The better lessons start with clear targets for pupils and move systematically and interestingly through a range of focused tasks, culminating in a clear summary and review to consolidate learning. Skilfully managed question and answer sessions give opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their understanding. The best lessons ensure that all pupils are given appropriate opportunities to make consistent good progress. Marking varies across subjects, with the result that students get very mixed information from their teachers. Some books are seldom marked, whereas others have levels and helpful comments that identify how the work can be improved. Clear, negotiated targets are set regularly and students know how well they are doing. Most learners respond effectively to teachers' expectations and make steady progress. Achievement by pupils with learning difficulties is also satisfactory. Sixth form teaching is often good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

This school has a good curriculum which responds well to local circumstances and its membership of the 'Peak 11' federation of schools has contributed well to the school's thinking. Exciting and innovative plans to create a 'vocational warehouse' of construction skills and crafts demonstrate the school's commitment to expanding the practical curriculum further. The school is at an early stage of implementing its status as a business and enterprise specialist school, although enterprise days and business enterprise lessons for Year 11 have been a positive start. All students up to Year 11 have a good basic curriculum. New initiatives, such as the pilot literacy project for Year 8 boys, are ensuring a good continued focus on basic skills. Older pupils benefit from having a wide range of optional subjects including the chance to take three languages. There is a wide-ranging number of extra-curricular activities at lunchtimes and after school, and Year 7 students all have the chance of a residential visit in the Derbyshire Dales. In response to local need, work with the Youth Service and Connexions is providing much needed recreational activities on site. Sixth-form students follow a satisfactory range of advanced level courses. Innovative on-line learning, for example in critical thinking and law, is adding variety and interest, and there are appropriate plans to develop more vocational courses. Not enough is done to develop study skills with sixth-form students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care and guidance is good. Child protection procedures are clearly understood. Monthly meetings between school and support agencies, focused on potentially vulnerable students, are working well. There are a good number of support mechanisms to help students cope with the pressures of everyday life. The pastoral system has been strengthened and students benefit from the services of a school counsellor, productive relationships with the Youth Service and a valuable peer mentoring programme run by sixth-formers. Due care and attention is given to matters of health and safety. Students have a good idea how they are getting on, because they and their parents receive three progress reports per year. However, the ten minute tutor time in the mornings is not used well for guidance. The personal, social and health education programme and the drug education programme have been improved. Students in the sixth form appreciate the support and guidance currently offered. The new Student Development Centre is well managed and is already having a motivational effect upon vulnerable or disaffected students, some of whom are at risk of fixed term exclusions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, and there are good elements. The headteacher has a clear vision of a school that better meets the needs of all pupils.

The success in gaining business and enterprise specialist status has been a significant achievement towards realising this vision. He has moved the school forward at a measured pace and has worked effectively to win the hearts and minds of the staff and the community. This has not always been an easy task. His evaluation of the school is honest and often incisive. He knows what still needs to be done. He is ably supported by a recently appointed enthusiastic deputy headteacher. Some of the other recently appointed assistant headteachers are already having a positive impact in the areas of teaching and learning and inclusion. The chair of governors has a perceptive grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and supports the school well. The governing body has improved its work and has satisfactory systems for checking on the school's progress. Middle managers have benefited from an appropriate programme of training to develop their skills and this has helped to improve their work, particularly in their understanding and use of assessment information. Systems for monitoring teaching and learning are well established at all levels. A range of worthwhile initiatives to improve the work of the school has been introduced. Staff training for these has generally been good and teachers are mostly clear about how these new initiatives are to be implemented. However, they are not implemented with sufficient consistency by all. As an outcome of this, the impact of some of the school's work is not as great as the collective effort they are making to secure improvement. Despite the efforts being made, there is still more to do to sharpen pupils' punctuality and behaviour, to raise standards further and to improve the progress that all pupils make. Nevertheless, the school has exciting plans for the future and a strong commitment from most staff to move forward with more urgency than before. The capacity for further improvement is good. There is a budget deficit that the school is tackling. Within this context, the school is providing satisfactory value for money.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	3	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
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?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	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?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, a group of inspectors visited your school recently. I am writing to tell you what judgements we made about your school, but first I want to thank all of you who helped with the inspection by talking with us and sharing your views. You spoke with honesty and openness. We judged that your school provides you with a satisfactory education with some positive features. More importantly, we thought, and your school agreed with us, that it is an improving school. Standards are broadly average. The higher ability students mostly make good progress and achieve good results. The GCSE results in 2005 were the best for quite a while. Some of the middle and lower ability students make less progress than they should, although students with learning difficulties progress reasonably well. Sixth form students do well. Most of you behave very well, but a few of you let the school down by misbehaving, and this spoils some of the lessons for the other students. Also, too many of you, especially in Year 11, are late for school. You have some good and some very good teachers, and overall we thought teaching was satisfactory. All teachers need to use the school's procedures more consistently. We recognised that the school works hard to improve the lessons and you must play your part by always having the right attitude to your learning. The school's curriculum is good and staff give you good guidance about the subject choices you make. The school has successfully developed a range of worthwhile vocational courses as part of its new Business and Enterprise specialist status and there are exciting plans for more developments in the future. Mr Elms and the other senior staff have a clear vision for the kind of school they want New Mills School to be, and want students of all abilities to do as well as they can. The school is well placed to continue to improve. We have asked them to work on the issues that we have mentioned in this letter. I wish you all the best for the future.