



Inspection Report

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 109706
LEA BEDFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 285370
Inspection dates 7 June 2006 to 8 June 2006
Reporting inspector Ms. Margaret Jones LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Odell Road
School category	Foundation		MK44 1JL
Age range of pupils	13 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01234 782211
Number on roll	1756	Fax number	01234 782431
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Hugh Carr-Archer
Date of previous inspection	5 March 2001	Headteacher	Mr. Peter Barnard

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Sharnbrook is a large rural community school serving North Bedfordshire and beyond. It became a specialist Media Arts college in 1999 and a Vocational school in April 2006. It is also a Training school and runs its own Graduate Teacher Training programme. Around 75% of students are bussed in and out of the school each day. On Mondays and Thursdays, the teaching day is extended to accommodate the very broad sixth form programme. The school has a very large sixth form. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The school is an active member along with the local middle and lower schools of an Education Improvement Partnership. Sharnbrook has Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark and National Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree that this is an outstanding school. The school is extremely well led and managed. The Principal and head of school provide excellent leadership and energy to raise standards. There is a very good team spirit among the staff and governors, who are well motivated and want to do their best for the school and all its students. The school has a creative, innovative approach to the curriculum which is responsive to the needs of students. The move to specialist Media Arts college status and Vocational school has had a positive impact. There are excellent working arrangements with local schools, despite uncertainty about the future of the three-tier system. Teaching is of a very high standard and students enjoy learning, as a result they make rapid progress. Students achieve very high standards in national tests and examinations in Year 9, Year 11 and in the sixth form. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve very well because of the very good support they receive. Students' personal development is outstanding. They have many opportunities to take on responsibilities and participate in an outstanding range of enrichment activities. This is a school where every child matters. The students are very well cared for and feel safe and this is contributing to their desire to do well. Students understand the need for healthy lifestyles and take part in many physical activities. Provision for careers education and guidance is only satisfactory. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, enabling both staff and governors to identify what needs to be done to improve provision further. Monitoring of teaching is robust, and middle managers are extremely effective in running departments and houses. The school's systems for assessing and tracking progress are excellent. The recent transition to vertical tutor groups and the systems for academic tutoring are well liked by students and have helped to raise standards. The vast majority of parents are happy with the school. Their views are taken into account regularly and they are kept informed of developments. However, although there is a students' parliament, communication between this and the rest of the school is not always effective, and some students feel their views are not taken into account. The school's capacity to improve and raise standards further is very good. It provides excellent value for money and is adept at drawing into the school extra funding from a variety of sources. The school has clearly demonstrated that it has a very strong capacity to improve. It has successfully addressed the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school is correct to evaluate the effectiveness of the sixth form as outstanding. Students make exceptional progress and standards achieved are well above average. They have positive attitudes to learning and develop effective skills as individual learners. They have high expectations and this is encouraged by the excellent support they receive from the team of tutors and from subject teachers. It was illustrated by a student from the B.Tec Early Years programme who told us, 'My teachers kept pushing me up to a distinction'. Leadership and management are outstanding. Guidance

for those hoping to go onto higher education is thorough and detailed, though careers guidance for students going straight into employment needs to be further developed. Students feel that staff know them as individuals and there is a keen mutual respect, illustrated by the fact that teachers value the feedback on their own performance at the end of courses. Through the vertical pastoral organisation of the school the sixth formers are able to act as very effective role models for younger students. Sixth form students also play an outstanding role in the wider life of the school and the community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of careers education and guidance by reviewing and revitalising provision across the school. - Develop better communication systems so that the whole student body feel involved in the work of the school parliament.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students achieve very high standards in national tests and examinations in Year 9, Year 11 and in the sixth form. Their progress in Year 9 and in the sixth form is outstanding. However, students make slower progress during Years 10 and 11 compared with their progress in other years. Achievement in all subjects in Years 10 and 11 is good, but the progress made by Year 11 students last year in the core subjects, and particularly in mathematics, was slower than could be expected, based on their very high achievements in their Year 9 national tests. Analysis of the school's assessment information indicates that students currently in Years 10 and 11 are making faster progress than last year. In the large sixth form, the pass rate in GCE and vocational examinations is almost 100%, and most students go on to university. This is an exceptional achievement given that the school does not restrict entry into the sixth form. Overall, students make outstanding progress by the time they leave school. Students are above average on entry and begin a number of GCSE courses in Year 9. The school achieves its very demanding targets for these students. The school fell slightly short of its challenging target for Year 11 in 2005. It has recognised that its procedures for setting targets in Years 10 and 11 require further development to take better account of national standards. This is a very successful specialist Media Arts college and the students studying art, drama, music, photography, media and dance reach very high standards and make outstanding progress. In many cases they enter the school in Year 9 with little previous experience of work in these areas, but achieve results that are amongst the highest in the country. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and other groups of students, mainly achieve as well as their peers. This is because the school takes care to give all students an equal chance to succeed. In 2005, boys achieved particularly well in GCSE examinations. The school has excellent procedures, which are very much welcomed by parents, for identifying and supporting the relatively small number of students who are at risk of under achieving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students are proud of their school and enjoy their education, emerging as confident and independent learners. They display a maturity of thought and action, so that they are excellent ambassadors for their school. They demonstrate outstanding behaviour and the school operates in a calm and orderly atmosphere. Attendance is high and there are effective procedures in place for checking on absences. Bullying is rare and both students and parents have both told us that the school has dealt effectively with the cases that have occurred. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has particular strengths in the moral and social aspects. Healthy eating is encouraged and it is good to note that some of the impetus to move towards this has come from the students themselves. Students are encouraged to work safely, as was seen in practical workshop lessons. This is also true when students are challenged to extend their physical abilities in events like the outdoor activities during the Year 9 block week and in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, which are very well organised. Students are prepared for the world of work by a work experience programme and good links with industry. Students partake in a range of activities to support feeder schools, such as in sport and dance. Within the school, older students often support younger members in their pastoral groups and quite a few of the younger ones told us that they appreciated the advice from older students over such things as option choices for GCSE. Students are keen to support their community locally and nationally. Sometimes this challenges students to think about their own attitudes to the world in which they are living, such as the 'Make poverty history' campaign.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers have excellent relationships with students, and plan challenging and varied activities enabling them to make outstanding progress. Students enjoy learning very much, and both girls and boys take pride in their work, presenting it carefully. In the outstanding lessons seen students enjoyed opportunities to work productively in groups, such as Year 9 music students who were challenged to sing and drum at the same time, as if in an African village. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which they present in a lively and enthusiastic way. They use new resources such as interactive whiteboards with increasing competence. Teachers manage behaviour very well, but in a few weaker lessons students' attention sometimes wanders because tasks do not suit all abilities, and teachers' questions are not detailed enough to encourage all to respond. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported very well, often by well briefed teaching assistants. Harder tasks are set for gifted and talented students and several take some examinations early. Teachers assess work thoroughly and set students clear targets which they know and understand, and which challenge them to improve. The quality of much of the marking of students' work is constructive and helpful, ensuring

students make as much progress as possible. The school has a long history of being in the forefront of research projects where staff help students identify ways they can achieve more, and share good ideas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is good overall for Years 9 to 11 and the Sixth Form. Many aspects are outstanding. The curriculum for art, English, drama, music, media and dance is exceptional, and ensures a rewarding and rich experience for all students. The school gives excellent support to other local schools and community groups. Younger students are able to learn two modern foreign languages as well as Latin. The curriculum is further broadened by the system of electives. This gives students an excellent enrichment programme that includes kayaking, golf and web design. Students in Years 10 and 11 have an exceptionally wide range of GCSE subjects to choose from, but there is currently only a narrow range of vocational courses. Many more have been timetabled for next year. There is excellent provision to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Students have only restricted opportunities to contribute to school decision making through the school parliament. The provision for careers education is underdeveloped. It does not provide students with a full knowledge and understanding of the wide range of options available to them for future careers. The sixth form curriculum is outstanding. It caters very well for those students for whom a GCE A level course is appropriate. There is also an excellent range of vocational courses, including highly successful media, film and television courses. There is good provision for core and key skills in the sixth form. However, the overall breadth of provision has squeezed the time available for some subjects for which all students should have an entitlement. The provision for physical education for all in the sixth form is restricted and the school does not meet the statutory requirement to teach religious education to all students. There is an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, clubs and trips and a very high proportion of students participate. There are excellent opportunities to get involved in the local community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is outstanding. Teachers and support professionals work very hard to help students develop as mature people in their studies and personal life. The thorough assessment process and academic review days allow students to review progress regularly. Teachers set targets to help students understand how they can improve work. Staff know students extremely well, and quickly deal with areas of concern, such as absence and occasional incidents of bullying. Individual students, including those with learning difficulties, receive outstanding support in lessons and through the excellent pastoral system based on an effective tutor group system that combines all years and helps young people learn from each other. Links with outside agencies are very strong and the school is

developing several of its own counselling facilities. Exclusion rates are low, although the school has its share of typical adolescent problems. Students report that they feel safe and secure around school. There are satisfactory links with the Connexions service. The vast majority of parents are positive about the school and confirm the school's view that their children receive outstanding care, guidance and support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The combination of a Principal who is a strategic thinker and a Head of School who has a command of implementation is a very powerful partnership. The senior leadership team work together efficiently and are very experienced. They know the school well and have accurately identified areas for development. A clear system of line management is in operation and managers at all levels understand what is expected of them. Middle management is very strong and is enhanced by well focused training and development. The governing body contains a wealth of professional expertise which is effectively deployed for the benefit of the school. The ethos of the school is open and risk taking. It is a self critical organisation and takes seriously the views of parents and other partners. Accurate evaluation of teaching has taken place and inspectors agree with the school's judgements. Regular reviews of the work of departments is having a positive impact. As a result of the implementation of an effective range of strategies, students of all abilities are succeeding. The capacity to improve even further is good. The specialist Media Arts college status has been successfully used to improve uptake and standards in the expressive arts, provide better accommodation and introduce curriculum innovation. The school successfully trains many of its own teachers and is excellent at spotting new talent and promoting good teachers to management posts. Accommodation is well maintained and provides a stimulating learning environment. The school has built excellent facilities for sport which it shares with the community. However, facilities for science are limited.

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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?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
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	2	

The quality of provision

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

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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

Thank you for all the help you gave the inspectors when we visited your school on the 7 and 8 June. We enjoyed talking with you. You told us that you are proud of Sharnbrook and we think you are right to be so. It is an excellent school. We thought you would like to know what was outstanding about your school and how we thought it could get even better: - The school is extremely well led and managed and there is a very good team spirit among the staff and governors, who are well motivated and want to do their best by all of you. - There is an exciting curriculum with lots of different courses to suit different students. This will be even better when more vocational courses are introduced for Years 10 and 11 next year. - You enjoy the wide range of activities that are provided for you, especially in the arts and sports. - Becoming a specialist media arts college and a vocational school has brought big advantages. - The links with the middle schools work very well and this means you settle very quickly at the upper school. - Teaching is outstanding and you achieve very well in your subjects. Standards in examination results are very high. - You like the vertical tutor groups, behave very well and enjoy attending school. Things we thought could be improved: - More work needs to be done on improving the quality of careers education and guidance you receive. - Communication between the school parliament and those of you who are not representatives needs to be strengthened, so that you all feel you have a voice. We wish all of you success in your studies and thank you once again for your help with this inspection.