



# Sharples School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 105259  
**Local Authority** Bolton  
**Inspection number** 287177  
**Inspection dates** 4–5 October 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ross Parker

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Hill Cot Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Sharples, Bolton
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Lancashire BL1 8SN
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01204 333253
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1023	<b>Fax number</b>	01204 333250
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Lynne Porter
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 October 2001		

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Sharples Specialist Science College serves an urban area in Bolton. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. About one third of the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a small number are at an early stage of learning English. The new build for the specialist status was completed in September 2006, and coincided with the arrival of a new headteacher.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 3**

Sharples School provides a satisfactory standard of education and satisfactory value for money. Since the previous inspection a sequence of staffing difficulties undermined the quality of teaching and disrupted both leadership and management. In the academic year 2003/04, tensions between groups of pupils undermined behaviour, and distracted boys in particular from their learning. As a result, the school's rate of progress in GCSE examination results did not match the improvements in schools nationally. Achievement declined and, because of personnel shortages at senior leadership level, any benefits of successfully gaining specialist school status were lost for more than a year.

A new, experienced headteacher took up her post in September 2006 and has already gained a good understanding of what is needed to improve the school. Over the previous twelve months, committed and well informed governors managed to strengthen the teaching staff and the temporary leadership team used the specialist college funding to build capacity which is now beginning to benefit pupils.

Behaviour has improved and, when they are supervised, pupils behave well. Attitudes to learning are good in most lessons. Pupils feel safe, increasingly able to contribute to developments in school and beyond, and are building the skills needed for adult life. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with an increasing amount of good practice, particularly amongst the more recent appointments. Standards remain below average, but are improving, and achievement is now satisfactory, though boys' achievement lags too far behind that of girls. Some teachers still concentrate more on controlling pupils and do not offer them enough opportunities to think freely or to work independently. Too few teachers make the steps between average grades and higher grades clear enough to pupils, or plan enough challenging activity for the more able pupils in their lessons.

The arrival of a permanent headteacher has restored the confidence of all of the staff. She recognises that the difficulties in recent years have prevented both senior and middle managers from keeping up to date with the most recent developments that have been driving standards up elsewhere. The school's self-evaluation is extensive but inconsistently rigorous. Data on pupils' learning are now readily available in the school, but not all managers understand how to use this information most effectively. In addition, large parts of the curriculum, community links and approaches to behaviour management are very new and need to be evaluated carefully. Recent progress in improving classrooms, strengthening subject teaching teams, and managing behaviour are already having a positive impact on students' learning, and demonstrate the capacity to improve further. This is being enhanced by the clarity of the headteacher's vision.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve boys' achievement by extending the range of teaching styles, and making better use of data to check how well they are doing.

- Improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation across all levels of leadership and management to give a clearer picture of what is going well and what needs further improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to provide more challenge for the more able students and more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

In 2005 results in the Key Stage 3 tests were exceptionally low in English and below average in mathematics and science. In 2006 standards improved to be average overall. Achievement is now satisfactory. Results in English improved significantly, though they remained below average. Results also improved in science and mathematics, and were average in both subjects; the school made particular progress in raising the number of pupils reaching the higher levels in science.

In 2005 results in GCSE examinations were below average, and the achievement of boys and some pupils with learning difficulties was exceptionally low. 2006 saw some improvement, for example in the number of pupils with learning difficulties who met or exceeded their targets. However, the underachievement of boys remained. This was a legacy of disrupted teaching and learning caused by staffing difficulties and some poor behaviour.

Improvements to teaching and a significant improvement in behaviour mean that pupils in Year 11 are now on track to meet their targets. Standards are still below average but achievement seen in modular examination results, teacher assessments and work in lessons is now satisfactory. This is an improvement on the school's position as described in its self-evaluation last year. Boys still lag further behind girls than is the case nationally and, although there are clear signs that boys are more engaged in learning than they have been, the gap is still too wide.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and are keen to make progress, as seen in their satisfactory but improving attendance. They feel valued as individuals and understand that the school wants to hear what they have to say.

The well established school councils have made significant contributions to improving the school facilities and helping pupils feel more secure, as well as promoting healthy eating at lunchtime.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The school places a particular emphasis on developing students' awareness of the impact they can make on the lives of others. However, this is not always reflected in the behaviour of individual pupils and in unsupervised situations, they do not always show respect and

consideration for others. Pupils are enthusiastic and well behaved in lessons and in other supervised areas of the school. Recent improvements in the management of behaviour have led to a significant reduction in the number of pupil exclusions.

Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities that develop their physical fitness and widen their learning experiences, such as the visits to France and Wales for water sports, skiing and other outdoor pursuits.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teachers plan carefully to build on what most pupils have already learned. They mark pupils' work regularly and there is a system to show targets and levels clearly in their exercise books. Pupils behave well in lessons, and respond well to clearly established routines. Provision for pupils at an early stage of learning English is good and, along with pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, they make satisfactory progress.

Teachers do not adjust questions aimed at different individuals to stretch their thinking effectively. In one mathematics lesson there was a discernible pause as the most able pupils absorbed the difficulty of the challenge in front of them, but, in general, high-attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently. Currently pupils are not clear about what they have to do to progress to the next level. Peer and self-assessment which help pupils to appreciate these differences are only happening in a minority of lessons. Some teachers focus too much on controlling behaviour. This allows pupils too few opportunities to work independently, or to discuss and speculate.

Over the past two years the influx of newly qualified teachers has improved overall awareness of how to use assessment and varied teaching styles to meet individual needs more effectively.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The school provides a satisfactory and improving curriculum which is constantly being reviewed and adapted to meet changing needs. Recent developments have focused sharply on preparation for success in adult life. For example, there is now a nurture group for Year 7 pupils who need help with the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills. An alternative curriculum is being developed and is having a positive effect particularly on disaffected boys who find it hard to meet the demands of GCSE. It includes a strong focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills required in adult life. National vocational qualifications (NVQ) courses provide more relevant qualifications for these pupils and outdoor activities develop their self-esteem and the ability to work effectively with other people.

Departments have become increasingly collaborative so there are strong links between subjects. There is a popular range of enrichment activities including a breakfast club

incorporating study and homework sessions. External agencies have a positive influence on pupils' achievement and enjoyment, particularly enterprise. The schools was recently involved in a 'Make your Mark' challenge when learners designed greeting cards to sell and pupils in the alternative curriculum group designed and built a go-cart.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils are fully established and understood by all staff. The school works well with outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils.

Good links with partner primary schools and a well structured induction programme ensure that most pupils settle quickly and confidently into the life of the school. Pupils feel safe and secure and are well supported by staff and other pupils, in particular the Year 10 peer listeners.

The school pastoral system provides good support for the well-being of pupils and links with parents have been strengthened through the appointment of key stage managers. This is having a positive impact on behaviour and helping pupils to concentrate more on their learning and achievement. The newly created post of learning director provides the opportunity for quicker and more secure identification of pupils not doing as well as they should.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Some strong features are counter-balanced by weaknesses and inconsistencies in the rigour and reliability of monitoring and evaluation.

The new headteacher is providing a clear lead that is emphatically focusing on raising standards, improving achievement and providing better care. Teachers and pupils support the persuasively argued agenda for improvement. Teachers also welcome the clarity with which the headteacher lays out a vision for further improvement.

The headteacher has rightly identified the development of leadership and management skills at both senior and middle management levels as a priority for improvement. Despite some effective practice, there is too much variation in the quality of monitoring and evaluation of how well both the school and subjects are doing. Although lessons are observed regularly, not every leader and manager has a secure understanding of what constitutes effective teaching, learning and achievement. There is not a widespread and shared understanding about how carefully analysing examination and test results can improve learning and raise standards. Consequently capacity for further improvement is no more than satisfactory.

The governing body is a constant strength of the school. During the recent turbulent period of changes at headteacher level, it helped both to maintain stability and add

momentum. Governors continue to take decisive and effective action to achieve improvement, such as reorganising provision in music following the recommendations of a recent subject inspection and through the recruitment of good quality teachers.



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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

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

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for your positive and helpful contribution to the recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and are grateful to all of those who spoke to us in lessons, around the school, and during lunchtime.

- We decided that the best parts of the school were some of the teaching and the way that you responded to it.
- We were also impressed with the way the school council is helping to improve the school and the support that students give to charities.
- You told us that you feel safe, and appreciate recent improvements in teaching and the school environment.
- We also recognised that the school has improved recently and the headteacher knows how to keep it improving. Her plans include helping to make more of the teaching as good as the best, and making more use of assessment to set challenging targets for each of you.
- GCSE results have been below average recently and boys in particular could do better.
- We think that if the school increases the proportion of lessons where you have a chance to work independently this will improve your achievement.
- We think that those of you who are capable of getting the highest grades in exams should be challenged to think and work at higher levels in every lesson.
- We know that your results will get better when you have a clearer idea about exactly what you need to do to move up from one grade to the next.

You can help this improvement by continuing to behave well in and out of lessons, and making sure you really know how well you are doing, and what you could do better.

Thank you once again for your cooperation.