



Sandy Upper School and Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109669
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288469
Inspection dates 17–18 October 2006
Reporting inspector Robert Drew

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

Type of school	Secondary	Community College address	Engayne Avenue Sandy Bedfordshire SG19 1BL
School category	Community	Telephone number	01767 680598
Age range of pupils	13–18	Fax number	01767 683543
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Chair	Peter Blaine
Number on roll (community College)	896	Headteacher	Mrs Marie Baker
Number on roll (6th form)	175		
Appropriate authority	The governing body		
Date of previous community College inspection	8 October 2001		

Age group 13–18	Inspection dates 17–18 October 2006	Inspection number 288469
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors

Description of the community College

The school is smaller than average, both overall and in the sixth form. It serves a wide rural area in east Bedfordshire. Students enter the school with average prior attainment and come from social and economic backgrounds broadly matching the national range. The great majority of students are from White British backgrounds, with small numbers coming from each of several minority ethnic groups. Only two use English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is average. Several year groups in the main school have significantly more boys than girls, while in the sixth form there are more girls than boys. The school gained specialist sports college status in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the community College

Grade: 3

This school has recently improved to the point where its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. GCSE results are still below average and fall short of the school's targets, but students are now making adequate progress during by the end of Year 11. The school has responded well to challenges such as high staff turnover and inconsistencies in subject leadership. Some improvements have taken too long to effect, but the school now has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

For several years, results at the end of Years 9 and 11 have indicated significant underachievement, but improved results in 2006 and standards in the work of current students now point to satisfactory achievement and progress. Standards are rising because core subjects responsible for these results are now more effectively led, students' work is more closely monitored and teaching quality is much improved. Boys' under-performance and the failure of the most able students to gain enough of the very highest grades were concerns. On both counts well focussed measures have brought considerable gains, especially in the results for boys at GCSE in 2006. The school, rightly, keeps the achievement of the higher attaining students as an area for improvement.

Self-evaluation is broadly satisfactory. The headteacher and governors are honest in identifying past under-performance. Areas to improve are correctly identified but some over-optimistic forecasts have been made because monitoring remains inconsistent and recent, rigorous practice has yet to impact on the school as a whole. Hence, while teaching and learning are improving and are satisfactory overall, the strengths seen in some lessons are not emulated by all staff. The fine planning, good use of data, provision for all abilities and strong pace seen in these lessons reflect the commitment of individuals or good subject leadership rather than whole-school practice. The management of behaviour, though satisfactory in general, also lacks consistency. Reduced exclusions and better attendance have been achieved by better management of these issues. The personal development of students is satisfactory because care, guidance and support arrangements are sound and also because students are responding well to education on personal safety, anti-bullying and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. However, registration periods still use considerable amounts of time ineffectively and do not promote personal development well.

The school's curriculum is satisfactory overall and is especially imaginative in Year 10. Students' enjoyment of school is satisfactory overall and high in well taught lessons. Extra-curricular provision offers many further opportunities for students to enjoy school and gain confidence. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the school is satisfactory. Sixth formers make a particularly good contribution to school life and to the wider community. Sports college status has contributed well to raising standards and has led a high proportion of students to value active involvement in sport.

The governing body recently saw a need to be more influential, so re-directed its work and became very effectively linked with subjects or aspects of school work. Governors

responded positively to recent local authority reviews and now hold senior staff to account very effectively. The headteacher and senior colleagues have been persistent in seeking to replace under-performing staff with high calibre teachers and have reorganised management to give more emphasis to raising standards. New structures and personnel have already led to marked improvements and, as a team, managers now show the leadership and management skills which are required to build on these initial gains. Consequently, the school is now providing satisfactory value for money and students' work and personal development already reflect this.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory and have good features. The quality of guidance and support is satisfactory and is valued by students. The informative induction programme is a reflection of this. Personal development is good. Students take on a wide range of responsibilities, organising charity events and acting as 'mentors' and coaches to support younger students in their learning. Students receive sound advice and preparation for higher education. Standards reached are broadly average by the end of the sixth form. The school has recently introduced a more rigorous system of monitoring performance to address variability in Year 12 performance. The quality of teaching is satisfactory, with evidence of some good practice. There are increasing opportunities for students to engage in independent learning. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A detailed action plan has been produced, but it contains insufficient emphasis on individual responsibilities and timescales for the completion of objectives.

What the community College should do to improve further

- Raise standards at GCSE by setting more realistic targets and holding staff more accountable for monitoring students' progress reliably.
- Implement existing policies for challenging the higher attaining students so that more of the very highest levels are gained by Year 9 students.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that the high quality planning and practice seen in some lessons becomes the norm.
- Make monitoring by senior managers more effective so that staff are consistent in lesson planning, setting targets, applying the behaviour policy and using registration time productively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is now satisfactory. Standards are average at Key Stage 3, but below average at GCSE. Students enter the school with attainment that is close to the national average and they are now making adequate progress by the time they leave. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have shown improvements in 2006, particularly in English.

Staffing issues which have had a negative impact on performance in mathematics and science have now been resolved. Assessment information is being used well by many staff to identify the specific needs of individual students. Achievement through Key Stage 4 is satisfactory, with no group performing significantly lower than expectations. The under-performance of boys, quite marked in the past, has been much reduced. Performance in the higher grades (A*-C) at GCSE has been improving in recent years. Better attendance figures are contributing to a greater consistency in progress and students are benefiting from improved teaching and stronger subject leadership. Students with statements related to learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. The school's post-16 results show satisfactory progress overall. Standards at GCE A level are generally around the national average, with a better performance in vocational courses. Attainment in the AS examinations at the end of Year 12 is below average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. In the sixth form, they are good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Students know the importance of healthy eating and drinking. Sixth formers contribute well to the school community by their support for younger students. Students develop a range of work-related learning skills through work experience and there are now much improved links with the Connexions service. Attendance has improved and unauthorised absence levels have fallen dramatically following the appointment of a highly effective student services manager. Parents' concerns over behaviour have some foundation: it is satisfactory but not yet good, because the carefully structured policy is not being followed consistently in lessons. The key stage managers and form tutors ensure that pastoral needs are met, but the quality of teaching in tutor time and during guidance and monitoring sessions is inconsistent.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning now have a satisfactory impact on students' progress. There is some outstanding practice and much that is good, but a minority of lessons are inadequate. Overall, this represents a marked improvement on the quality noted last year by the school's local authority. There is still some lack of consistency and parents are right to show concern over this matter. In good lessons, behaviour is managed very well, firmly but without confrontation, preventing situations from escalating. Excellent practice was illustrated in some history and business studies lessons, where a common

thread was the teacher's outstanding subject expertise and the variety of challenging activities. There was also strong pace, a good match of work to the range of ability in the class and high overall expectations. Occasionally, however, lessons set undemanding work and pace can be pedestrian. Furthermore, some teachers tolerate low-level disruption or act slowly in the face of unacceptable behaviour. Teachers' use of assessment information is variable and, whilst satisfactory overall, there are too few tasks to stretch the more able, especially at Key Stage 3.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school accurately judges the curriculum for the school as a whole to be satisfactory. However, the new provision, currently in Year 10 and soon to be across Year 11 as well, is good. Last year's re-organisation for Key Stage 4 is now providing more breadth, including the option of college placements, combined with various ICT and basic skills courses. This has paid off in terms of improving students' attendance and self-esteem.

An innovative move where students start their new year groups in June has been received well and will be further refined next year. Extra-curricular sporting activities are very good with a wide range of sporting, musical and other events on offer and at least half of all students participating. This has reaped huge benefits by improving students' health and lifestyle and contributes to their confidence and enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Arrangements for care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Procedures for safeguarding students meet current requirements. The needs of vulnerable students are managed well using external professional support where appropriate. The re-organised Special Educational Needs department is well led and managed. The increase in the number of teaching assistants and the practice of linking them to particular curricular areas is having a positive impact, boosting the academic and personal development of students with learning difficulties or disabilities and helping those around them, who observe their increasingly positive approach. Individual students with particular needs are identified at an early stage and closely monitored by the key stage managers. Strong relationships are fostered with local middle schools and new procedures are in place to strengthen links with families prior to their children starting at the school, thereby enabling effective induction and more careful monitoring of their progress. Support from the Connexions service is now stronger. Students receive satisfactory academic guidance. They are set demanding targets and are becoming more aware of their standards, although consistency in this regard is incomplete.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's leaders and managers now ensure that students make satisfactory progress. They have brought about key improvements through a range of decisions. Previously, for instance, progress had not been satisfactory because of serious staffing problems, the ineffective leadership of some departments and too much weak teaching. Poor attendance aggravated these problems. Action on these issues has been late in coming but is now taking effect. Most staff responsible for poor teaching have been replaced, good appointments have been made in subject leadership, attendance and behaviour both benefit from better management procedures and student-tracking systems are much improved. School self-evaluation and the monitoring of standards have improved and are now satisfactory overall, although differences in the quality of this work between departments mean that good practice is not consistent throughout the school. Governors, after reassessing their own effectiveness, have become very well informed and highly beneficial to the school. They give good strategic support and hold senior staff to account effectively. The specialist sports college status has directly boosted GCSE results and enhanced the curriculum and the school's links with the community.

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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>	Community College 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	3
How well does the community College work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the community College's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

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	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	Yes
Does this community College require special measures?	No	
Does this community College require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 October 2006

Dear Students

Sandy Upper School and Community College, Engayne Avenue, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 1BL

Thank you for the welcome you gave us during the recent inspection. Special thanks are due to those who gave up their lunch time to speak with us on Tuesday.

We enjoyed our visit because the school is improving noticeably and doing well in several areas:

- It now gives you a satisfactory education
- In some lessons, there is very good teaching and the quality overall is satisfactory
- The headteacher and governors have put good staff in charge of all key subjects
- Sixth- form students contribute well to school life
- Sports College status has improved the school's results and the activities on offer

To improve further the school needs to:

- Raise GCSE results even more by checking your progress more closely in all subjects
- Make sure lessons and other activities stretch gifted and talented students so that they achieve more high levels in Year 9 tests
- Increase the amount of good teaching by helping all staff use the successful approaches seen in some lessons
- Make sure all staff apply school policy consistently, especially on behaviour, use of registration time, setting targets and planning lessons carefully.

We wish you well with the rest of your time at Sandy Upper.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Drew (Lead inspector)