



Vandyke Upper School and Community College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109678
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288471
Inspection dates 13–14 December 2006
Reporting inspector Alan Clamp HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Vandyke Road
School category	Community		Leighton Buzzard
Age range of pupils	13–18		Bedfordshire LU7 3DY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01525 636700
Number on roll (school)	1026	Fax number	01525 636701
Number on roll (6th form)	261	Chair	Ms A Gomersall
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mr T Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
13–18	13–14 December 2006	288471

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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

Vandyke Upper School and Community College is a mixed 13-18 community school based in Leighton Buzzard. Since September 2005 the school has been designated as a Specialist Sports College. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly lower than the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is half the national figure, and a small proportion of students do not have English as their first language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school is good. The school has taken effective steps to promote improvements since the last inspection. Significant improvements have been made in achievement and standards in the last three years. The attainment of students on entry to the school is slightly below average but progress and achievement are good and students subsequently obtain results that are similar to the national averages. Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress and achieve broadly average standards. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Attendance is satisfactory. Students generally enjoy their studies, behave well and mature into self-confident young people. Students take advantage of a wide range of opportunities to make an outstanding contribution to the school and the local community. Students feel their views are taken seriously and the various Student Voice Action Committees and the Executive Council are a very effective force for change. The school has done some very good work to encourage students to adopt healthy lifestyles. This includes healthier eating options in the canteen, good participation in sporting activities and some highly effective health promotion events, such as an annual drugs and alcohol awareness day for students in Year 10.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers plan lessons carefully and many students benefit from a wide range of learning activities and make good progress. Progress is less effective in a small minority of lessons in which teachers do not focus sufficiently on low level inattention or disruption. The school provides a good curriculum, including a wide range of extra-curricular activities. It has broadened the choice of subjects available to students but recognises that there is scope to improve the match between provision and individual students' needs. Students benefit from good care, guidance and support. Support is particularly effective for vulnerable students and those with physical disabilities.

The leadership and management of the school are good. Leadership is strong and staff share a clear vision of improvement in all aspects of the school's work. Self-evaluation is accurate and strong governance provides challenge to the school to help it improve. The school recognises that there are inconsistencies in how well assessment information is used to plan learning and improve student performance. Resources have improved significantly in recent years and the school environment is undergoing major renovation. Staff professional development has had a significant impact on improving teaching and learning. Value for money is good. Specialist Sports College status is raising the profile of the school, improving attainment and boosting personal development and well-being. The capacity of the school to improve is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's view that the provision for post-16 students is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress and achieve standards that are similar to the national averages. There is, however, some notable variation in the progress made and standards achieved in different subjects. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good, but although progress is monitored regularly, individual action-planning is underdeveloped and this limits students' achievement. Many students play an active role in the school and local community. The school provides a good range of advanced courses and is increasing the relatively small number of intermediate courses. Students receive good guidance on entry to the sixth form and benefit from useful advice and support through the pastoral programme. They would, however, appreciate more detailed guidance on careers and higher education. The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to focus on strategies to improve standards and ensure that improvements are evident in all subjects.
- Review the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs and interests of students of all abilities.
- Ensure that in all lessons, teachers consistently encourage students to maintain high levels of concentration in order to maximise progress.
- Make better use of assessment information for planning learning and improving student performance, particularly in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that achievement and standards are good. The overall test results in 2005 for Year 9 students were similar to the national averages. The standards achieved at the end of Year 9 in 2006 were similar to those of the previous year, although there was a slight decline in the proportion of students achieving Level 5 or above in English. The proportion of students in Year 11 achieving the equivalent of at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2005 was similar to the national average. This proportion increased in 2006, reflecting significant improvements in achievement and standards at the school in recent years. Subjects with particularly good GCSE results include French, geography and history. Results were not as good in media studies and product design. The attainment of students on entry to the school is slightly below average. The overall progress made by students in 2005/06 was good and evidence indicates that the rate of progress has improved further in the current year. The progress made in mathematics is generally better than that in English and science. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress and achieve examination results

that are generally similar to those seen nationally, although the variation between results in different subjects is wider than in the main school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic about recent improvements, such as the on-going alterations to the school buildings. Attendance is satisfactory and monitoring procedures have recently improved. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are mature, confident, responsible young people and make an outstanding contribution to the local and wider community. Many take part in the plethora of extra-curricular opportunities, such as sport, mentoring and peer support within the school, and many are involved in fundraising activities for charities. The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles is exceptional. Students feel safe and behave well during lessons and at other times. They get on well with each other and are polite and respectful towards the adults around them. Although a small number of parents and a few of the older students expressed concerns about bullying, most students agree that any such incidents are few and far between and are managed well. Good personal qualities, sound basic skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), and the effective work-related learning programme ensure that students are well placed to take their place within the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good and enable most students to make good progress. There is some outstanding teaching and inspectors observed no examples of inadequate practice. The overall quality is good because teachers plan well, create good relationships and make appropriate demands of students. The support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and there is effective liaison between support assistants and subject teachers. However, in some lessons, there is insufficient emphasis on providing work to stretch the most able. Teachers use learning objectives regularly and help students consolidate their knowledge effectively in plenary sessions. In the best lessons, extensive use is also made of assessment information to define high quality work and help students to improve their performance. Students generally enjoy their lessons and this is most evident when they can participate actively. This was well illustrated in a geography lesson about world trade patterns, where participation and enjoyment were exceptional for an extended period, leading to impressive progress during that phase of the lesson. In a small minority of lessons

teachers do not deal effectively with low level inattention or disruption. This limits progress even when many other features of the lesson are good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. It meets most students' needs well, although the school is rightly seeking to improve the curriculum so that it provides an even better match to individual students' needs. The school provides a good range of GCSE courses, and vocational courses are adequately represented. Gifted and able students can take additional courses before and after school and enter AS courses early. Two programmes involving a reduced number of GCSE courses and additional literacy and numeracy work are effective in supporting vulnerable students. In the sixth form there is a good mix of courses with a significant vocational component. The range of AS and A2 options is very wide but there is currently only a small number of intermediate courses. Additional activities greatly enhance the curriculum. Sport is impressively represented, reflecting the school's specialist status, music activities flourish and there are excellent links with schools overseas. Together with numerous clubs, societies and residential visits, these activities promote students' personal development very effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good in all years. Child protection and health and safety procedures are robust. Staff provide good personal advice and guidance to students regarding course options, further education choices and employment opportunities. Induction procedures are good and this helps to ensure that students settle in quickly when they join at the start of Year 9. Informative individual education plans are provided for all students with additional needs, although some of the key documents are not regularly updated. Individuals at risk of underachieving receive individual or group mentoring and evidence indicates that this is effective in raising their grades. Academic guidance is generally good, although students in the sixth form are not always familiar with what they need to do to improve the standard of their work, and this limits their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The inspirational leadership of the headteacher and leadership group has created a dynamic sense of purpose across all staff teams. The implementation of an effective

three-year strategic development plan in 2004 set the school on course to meet five key targets for improvement. These were further enhanced by the significant impact of Sports College status achieved in 2005. The governors are very effective in their challenge to the school and ensure they are always well informed about its effectiveness. The main strength of the different levels of management is vibrant team work and shared vision. Regular reflection and evaluation has chronicled the effective progress the school has made since the previous inspection. In the sixth form, leadership and management are satisfactory and, as a result, standards have risen more slowly than they have in the main school. Assessment for Learning (AfL) has been introduced to track progress but managers have identified inconsistencies in the development of this initiative across the school which reduce opportunities for students' purposeful involvement in their learning and assessment. Vandyke is an inclusive school with well managed and extended provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. One student quoted the school motto 'Everyone Matters' as he explained, 'These two words are what Vandyke is all about.' The school is a well run and harmonious community. It adheres well to statutory requirements for safeguarding students. The efficient school focus on issues such as anti-bullying has been recognised by the county as exemplary practice, although a very small minority of parents and students still have some concerns. This is an ambitious school with many positive features that are enhancing its reputation within the local 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>	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?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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 standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	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	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
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?	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?	2	2

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?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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 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

14 December 2006

Dear Students

Vandyke Upper School and Community College, Vandyke Road, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, LU7 3DY

On behalf of the inspectors who visited Vandyke Upper School on the 13th and 14th December, I would like to thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you. Many of you helped us find our way around and let us know your views. We think that you might like to know our conclusions.

What we liked about your school.

- There have been significant improvements in the progress you make and the standards you achieve in recent years.
- Many of you make an outstanding contribution to the school and the local community.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- You have access to a good curriculum and take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- You receive good care, guidance and support within the school.
- The leadership of the school is very good.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Continue to focus on ways to improve standards in the school.
- Review the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs and interests of all of you.
- Ensure that you consistently focus on your work in lessons in order to maximise the progress that you make.
- Make better use of assessments for planning learning and improving your performance.

Vandyke Upper School is a good and improving school. The school has high hopes for the future and it will need you to play your part, particularly in terms of the effort you make in lessons and in your own time. We wish you every success.

Best wishes, on behalf of the inspection team.

Alan Clamp

Her Majesty's Inspector