

Upper Shirley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116457
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	312322
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Feltham HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	525
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Green
Headteacher	Ms Cassie Ellins
Date of previous school inspection	28 March 2006
School address	Bellemoor Road Shirley Southampton SO15 7QU
Telephone number	023 8032 5333
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, accompanied by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Upper Shirley High School is a new school, previously known as Bellemoor School. It will become a mixed school from September 2008, when it will also have specialist status in mathematics and computing. The school population is diverse; students of White British, south Asian and African heritage have been joined by increasing numbers of students from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The school population includes higher than average student numbers who speak English as an additional language. It also has a higher than average proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Upper Shirley High School is a rapidly improving school which provides a satisfactory education overall and many good opportunities for its growing number of students. The school has been through a period of significant change in recent years and standards were at a very low point two years ago, showing some improvement last year. Recognising substantial areas of underachievement, a highly effective team of school leaders and managers has now succeeded in ensuring that students make at least satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress. They have intervened to make significant improvements to teaching and learning, which have had a clear impact. Standards are now rising at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4, although they still remain below average overall. Older students emphasise the improvement in the school in recent years, highlighting current high standards of discipline and behaviour. One parent represented the view of many when writing, 'Every single area has changed for the better - management, teaching, behaviour, participation and outings.'

The leadership and management of the school are consistently good at all levels. The headteacher and her senior leadership team are described by their colleagues, and by parents, as 'inspiring'. They have made a significant impact on the school in recent years. Middle leaders describe how they been 'empowered', and have succeeded in improving teaching in their subjects. Alongside a successful drive to retain the school's best teachers, good recruitment strategies have led to the appointment of new, dynamic teachers with strong subject expertise.

The school is, therefore, implementing increasingly effective measures to raise students' achievement, which are this year showing a clear impact. For example, a focus on improving attendance is beginning to work well. Attendance levels are at national averages although the school recognises this could be better. Senior leaders have a good knowledge of their school's strengths and weaknesses, and self-evaluation is honest and realistic. The headteacher has provided exceptionally strong and purposeful leadership, recognised by all parts of the school community. She has shared her vision and ambition for the school very effectively. Senior leaders have worked hard to improve the local perception of the school, working particularly with primary partner schools. As a result, for the first time in some years, the school will be over-subscribed in September.

Having identified underachievement in specific subject areas, such as English and science, the senior team galvanised colleagues, students and parents to make rapid and successful improvements in key areas of teaching and learning. Strong classroom practitioners have worked alongside those less successful in their teaching and, as a result, the quality of teaching and learning has improved rapidly. The creation of learning centres has enabled heads of successful subject areas to work closely with teams who have experienced difficulty in getting good results. For example, staffing difficulties in science had resulted in boys' underachievement in the subject. Following collaborative work with the mathematics department, students now enjoy their science lessons. One parent reflected this improvement by commenting, 'My son enjoys science and is sorry when the lesson ends.' Students are now generally enjoying their learning. One group of students described their experiences in school as 'five-star' and 'brilliant'.

The school takes its international work very seriously. It is a highly inclusive school, with students from a range of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. It builds well on this rich diversity, ensuring active opportunities for students to work together, to learn from each other's experiences and prepare for life in a global context. They learn important lessons about getting

on with each other and respecting each other's differences. The school sets high expectations and, as one student said, 'racism is just not tolerated here'.

The headteacher and her senior team monitor classroom work closely and current good teaching and learning reflects the successful impact of this strategy. Subject leaders mostly demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and they track students' progress in their subjects to set clear targets for improvement. Although this practice is not yet fully consistent across all subjects, clear procedures are in place. Governors have a good understanding of their role, and have both supported and challenged the school well through the perpetual change of recent years. They have supported the school through current changes in designation and in securing specialist status, involving good links with other organisations. The school demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to improve further, the school needs to:

- raise standards and students' achievement across the school
- increase the impact of subject leaders to ensure consistency of best practice in planning and assessment
- work with parents and carers to secure full attendance from all students.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When students enter the school, standards are just below average. During the last three years, standards in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have varied but overall they have been below average. During this period, students' progress has been too slow. However, the school's analysis of students' work shows that those in Year 9 have made better progress and their achievement is satisfactory from their starting points.

The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at higher grades in recent years has also been below average, although they improved in 2007. Results in English literature and statistics were well above the national average. Although standards remained below average overall, students who sat GCSE examinations in 2007 made broadly average progress during Key Stage 4, having achieved relatively less well in Key Stage 3. Increasingly good support is also enabling pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, to achieve as well as their peers.

Current Year 11 students already know their results in some certificated courses and in modules in mathematics and science. These indicate that standards have risen and that the school is on track to meet the challenging targets it has set. Students with English as an additional language make good, rapid progress in developing their communication skills in English. Many students achieve well on vocational courses with one being identified as 'Student of the Year' on his college course in 2007.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy their learning and are mostly very enthusiastic about coming to school. Attendance levels have improved although the school is rightly determined that they should rise further. Students behave very sensibly during break times and feel safe and well supported within the family-style tutor groups and house system. Attitudes are particularly good in lessons where students are encouraged to work independently and then share their work with others. They are often very effective in discussing how work could be improved, for example, in drama. This reflects the high level of cooperation between students, the racial harmony and the excellent relationships that are an impressive feature of the school. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.

The school council is effective and students are very eager to participate in all aspects of school life and in fund raising for charities. Community participation is outstanding, and the boys make a real and valued contribution to their school and to the wider community. Year 7 students are full of praise for the support they receive from prefects and house and sports captains. Students have a good grasp of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and are particularly proud of their own, and others' success in various sports: one younger student described the school as 'sport-tastic'. They have increasingly high aspirations, make informed choices in continuing to study after Year 11 and are well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In recent years, the school has placed great emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, students' progress in lessons is accelerating. A parent wrote: 'I have found the staff to be professional, responsive and effective.' Teachers manage students well and relationships in classrooms are very positive. In most cases teachers identify clearly what students are intended to learn, as well as do, during lessons. However, learning objectives are not always expressed clearly enough to help students evaluate their own progress. Teachers often use a good range of strategies, such as questioning, discussion and group work. As a result students are attentive and engage well with their learning. They collaborate well to discuss their work and become effective independent learners. They enjoy the challenge of extended homework projects. In many cases, teachers' marking is helpful in identifying what students need to do to improve the quality of their work. Sometimes, however, it is not sufficiently focused on identifying next steps in learning. Teachers and support staff collaborate well to support students. Inspectors saw some outstanding examples of support for lower attaining students provided by associate professionals working as a team with teachers in the classroom.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The improving curriculum has areas of real strength in its enrichment programme and in the quality and variety of its clubs and out of school activities. It is particularly strong in sports and the performing arts.

There is a now a clearer focus on raising attainment in English, mathematics and science. All students take the new information and communication technology diploma and the school is

well placed to develop other vocational and diploma qualifications. There is also a new but valuable focus on helping students to use their communication skills in other subjects. This is being successfully led by the English department.

The curriculum provides well for work-related learning. In a citizenship lesson, students were left in no doubt about the dangers of smoking and were visibly shocked by the evidence that it causes lung damage. Younger students talked of the strong impact made on them by a recent session on knife crime. Access to college courses and work placements enables students to gain valuable vocational skills and qualifications. Skilful planning ensures that the curriculum matches the needs of students of differing ability well. Higher-attaining students benefit from accelerated progress in Years 7 and 8, which enables them to take GCSE in Year 10, and extension courses in Year 11.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Health and safety procedures are fully in place and all aspects of pastoral care and student welfare are well managed and effective. Students are given lots of opportunities to find out about healthy and safe lifestyles and guidance here is good. Monitoring of behaviour and attendance is thorough. Vulnerable students, and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are monitored and supported carefully. Parents say their sons settle happily into school life and really enjoy school. Students feel that they are very well cared for.

Heads of House and class tutors support students well and the quality of care for individuals is exceptionally good. High quality support is given to students with refugee status and those who are using English as an additional, and sometimes very new, language. Consequently, they are keen to learn and make rapid progress. Academic guidance is good. The school seeks to ensure that students know how to progress and understand their targets and the Heads of House are playing a valuable role in this. Occasionally, however, the guidance given to individual students is not sufficiently precise. Careers education and guidance is effective and ensures that students are confident about moving on to college or into employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Subject and pastoral leaders are encouraged to develop their thinking and become involved in continuing professional development, including higher education opportunities: this brings fresh ideas to the team and offers good development opportunities to staff who have shown senior management potential.

The school is implementing increasingly effective measures to raise students' achievement, which are this year showing a clear impact. Senior leaders, middle leaders and governors have successfully engaged parents and the local community in school improvement. Parents and carers are currently increasingly supportive of the school and are confident in its ability to prepare their children for success in life. Effective approaches to the recruitment and retention of teachers have resulted in an increasingly skilled and dynamic staff.

Monitoring the work of the school has been effective and current good teaching and learning reflects the successful impact of this strategy. Leaders and managers at all levels mostly demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and they track students' progress effectively

to set clear targets for improvement. This practice is not yet fully consistent across all subjects, but clear procedures are in place. Senior leadership intervention, where weaker teaching has been identified, ensures that no pupil misses out. Associate professionals - the school's designation for colleagues involved in learning and behaviour support - are well deployed, and are often attached to specialist subject teams. Good line management arrangements have already had a positive effect in raising the quality of subject leadership, and indicate a clear capacity for further improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ 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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

25 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Upper Shirley High School, Southampton, SO15 7QU

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made. First, I should like to thank you for your warm welcome. We enjoyed meeting many of you, listening to your views and watching you at work. Here are our most important findings. I hope you will discuss them with your parents and carers.

- Your satisfactory school is now improving rapidly, after a period when students' results and progress were not good enough. Your headteacher and her team are concentrating well on improving your learning, to make sure you all achieve as fully as possible.
- School staff are working hard to help you understand how you can do even better in each of your subjects. This regular assessment is working well and we have asked your school to ensure that it is good across all classes.
- Everyone says your behaviour has improved, and we were impressed by this, and by the respect which you show for each other and for adults in the school. You rightly take pride in your multi-ethnic, diverse and inclusive school.
- The school has improved its curriculum and we were particularly impressed by all the sporting and performing arts opportunities, which you relish.
- Your teachers teach you well. They know their subjects and try to find topics and activities that interest you and prompt you to work independently.

We have asked your school to help you make as much progress, and as rapidly as possible, to raise standards and improve results. You and your parents can help by ensuring that you attend school regularly, and avoid taking time off during the school term.

We wish you all well as you continue your learning, working hard and aiming high!

Yours sincerely,

Anne Feltham

Her Majesty's Inspector