

Redborne Upper School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109643
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324993
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Paula Heaney HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1382
Sixth form	422
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Prof Joe Morris
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Croft
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2005
School address	Flitwick Road Amphill Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 2NU
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Redborne Upper School and Community College is a popular comprehensive school with a large sixth form. Standards on entry to the school are just above average. Students are predominantly from White British backgrounds, but around six percent come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school has a low ranking in Bedfordshire's deprivation indices. There are two looked after children.

Redborne Upper School specialises in sport and science, and as a training school for graduates and others entering teaching. The school has been awarded High Performing Specialist School status and the Arts Mark Gold and Sportsmark awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Redborne Upper is an outstanding school with a good sixth form. Students' achievements in Years 9 to 11 are outstanding. Standards, which were above average the time of the last inspection, have risen further and are now exceptionally high. The standards attained in the sixth form compare well with results nationally, but are not yet as high as those in the main school because of variation between subjects. Students in the main school make excellent progress. The school's specialist areas make a significant contribution to the high standards. The headteacher, senior leaders and managers have an exceptionally sharp focus on raising standards. The school's outstanding leadership is very effective at encouraging and supporting students to aspire to have high expectations. The academic guidance and support systems for students in the sixth form are not as well developed, or as effective, as those used in the main school.

Teaching and learning are good across the school, with most lessons being well paced and well planned to incorporate a range of activities to meet all students' needs. Many lessons now include a better use of information and communication technology (ICT), another improvement since the last inspection. More improvements to the quality of the teaching are already being implemented. During discussions, students told inspectors their teachers are supportive, approachable and prepared to go the extra mile to help them achieve well. They also told inspectors they thoroughly enjoy coming to school and appreciate that the work in their lessons leads to their excellent progress. Consequently, students hold their school in high regard and have exceptionally positive attitudes to their learning. The excellent and broad-ranging curriculum includes vocational options, some of which take place on the school's own working farm. The very wide range of extra-curricular activities is valued highly by the students.

The highly effective and supportive ethos of the school fosters the students' outstanding levels of personal development. The school's influence on the students has a positive impact on their lives in the immediate community, but also extends well beyond it. For instance, students have raised a significant sum to enable students and teachers from a school in South Africa to visit Redborne as part of an educational exchange. Consequently, this school instils in its students an excellent set of skills and values as a preparation for their adult life.

Redborne Upper School has made significant progress since the last inspection. The headteacher, managers and staff know the school and their students very well, and have an excellent understanding of what needs to be done to improve further. As a result, the school's capacity to improve further is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good overall, although there are variations in outcomes for different subjects. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects and an increasing range of vocational opportunities, complemented by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. The high level of student retention from Years 11 to 13 reflects the students' highly positive view of the school. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. The sixth form is managed well. Data are used effectively to measure students' progress and identify any underachievement that occurs. Even though the mentoring system is in its developmental stages, students feel they are guided well in moving on to further study or employment. However, the academic guidance

and support they receive is not as effective as that provided in the main school. Students' personal development is good as sixth formers are encouraged strongly to participate fully in the life of the school and they perform very valuable roles as student mentors to younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the quality of guidance and support in the sixth form so that it is as good as the best practice that already exists in the main school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

By the end of Year 9, the results in national tests are significantly above the national average. This is the result of students making excellent progress which continues into Years 10 and 11. The school's data indicate that the proportion of students in Year 11 achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is much higher than the national average. Students' performance in most subjects is above average and the proportion of students achieving top grades is higher than average. Results in English, which were identified as in the early stages of improvement at the last inspection, have continued to rise. This is because the strategies to improve progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11, have been successful. In the sixth form, the progress students make relative to their starting points is good overall. A small proportion of sixth form students whose starting points are around the minimum entry criteria of five grade C GCSEs make less progress than their peers. Throughout the school, students with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress due to close monitoring and support. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve equally as well as their peers. Most students achieve their targets, which are appropriately challenging and encourage the students to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This arises from innovative provision in religious studies' classes and assemblies, as well as through extra-curricular activities and educational visits. The house system underpins students' personal development and well-being strongly. Strategies used in form periods develop personal relationships, self-worth and trust in staff very positively. Celebrations of achievement and the use of student role models raise self-esteem and assure students that goals are achievable through self-discipline. Excellent student behaviour is an outstanding feature of the school and contributes to excellent progress in lessons. Students take pride in their appearance and respond to staff and fellow students with respect and consideration.

The significant number of sporting activities and the provision of good, well-balanced meals produce highly positive attitudes to healthy lifestyles. Students engage in numerous initiatives within their communities and take responsibility for a range of charitable work. Students feel well cared for and safe. Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with immediately and effectively when they occur. Students make much-valued contributions to the work of the school, such as the content of the personal, social and health education programme for Year 11. Thorough financial awareness training is provided for students before they embark on work placements. Attendance is good, as it is above the national level, and the number of persistent absentees has been reduced significantly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall, and there is a significant proportion of outstanding teaching. The inspection supports the school's own view of the quality of teaching gathered through formal and informal lesson observations. These observations are used very effectively to identify and share good practice as well as to determine appropriate professional development opportunities. The school's training school status ensures that teaching and learning have a high priority. The recently established 'Transforming Learning Group' offers a forum for sharing and developing teaching and learning strategies and staff are focussed on transforming more good lessons into outstanding lessons.

Some of the strengths in the teaching include teachers' good subject knowledge and the thoughtful planning of lessons to include learning activities that meet the needs of students. Good use of ICT occurs in a number of lessons. Relationships are positive and productive, ensuring students enjoy their lessons. In the small number of satisfactory lessons, teaching is not as well matched to the abilities of the students so that some do not make sufficient progress. Marking of students' work is regular and supportive. The teachers make careful use of assessment data to set student targets; helping students know how well they are doing and leading them to aspire to even higher goals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum offers a very wide range of courses designed and tailored specifically to meet the needs, aspirations and interests of the students. The carefully planned schedule fulfils statutory requirements, while catering for the interests and needs of the local community. Courses in livestock management and other aspects of agriculture reflect the nature of the school's catchment and the specific aspirations of some students very effectively. Staff provide an excellent balance between academic and vocational courses, ensuring that when students make the transition from Year 9 to their GCSE selections they can choose from have an extensive range of optional items. A constructive and highly effective partnership with the local college ensures that students can also select from an extensive range of work-related qualifications. These are supported imaginatively by a well-organised programme of careers education and work experience. These factors, alongside the extensive range of enrichment activities, such as foreign exchanges, drama festivals, art exhibitions and mathematics competitions provided through school, enrich students' experiences significantly. The overall impact of the curriculum makes a powerful contribution to the students' enjoyment of learning and to their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

All students have an excellent sense of self-worth. They are confident and articulate as they know all staff greatly value their opinions. The high quality of the relationships throughout the school means students appreciate the very effective support and advice they receive from staff. Teachers monitor students' academic progress rigorously, a key factor in improving their achievement. Safeguarding procedures are thorough, sensible and coherent. This means students

know how to stay safe, follow a healthy lifestyle and deal effectively with all forms of bullying. The school counsellor is an excellent source of support and guidance. All students, including vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, receive high quality personalised advice about future careers and financial awareness. Each department offers a 'master class' to gifted and talented students to encourage them to strive for excellence.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The quality of the leadership provided by the headteacher, senior staff and middle leaders is a particular strength of the school. The headteacher and governors provide a very clear strategic direction and set appropriately challenging targets, which have resulted in a sustained improvement in standards. A very effective senior leadership team supports the headteacher ably. Together they foster a culture of innovation in which all school leaders feel empowered, able to innovate and take risks in the pursuit of raising standards. The headteacher and senior leaders have an outstanding knowledge of the school and, due to their highly perceptive and accurate self-evaluation. They recognise there is still more work to be done to raise the quality of the sixth form. They have a clear focus upon promoting the personal development and well-being of all learners and perceptive insights into those issues that will lead to further improvement. There is a strong sense of teamwork and common purpose among governors and school leaders.

An area of significant improvement since the last inspection has been the innovative use of training school status to both support trainee teachers and to develop teaching strategies and learning styles among the permanent staff. It has been a significant aid to the recruitment of high quality teachers. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored very effectively. Very good links exist with parents and a wide range of outside agencies which support and extend the school's work in preparing students for life outside their local area and promote a strong sense of community between children from all backgrounds. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and it has a very good reputation locally. The school gives good value for money.

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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	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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

26 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Redborne Upper School and Community College, Ampthill, MK45 2NU

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. Firstly, I would like to thank you for your openness and cooperation during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that yours is an outstanding school with a good sixth form. It is very well managed. Standards have improved year on year. The results in national assessments at the end of Year 9 and those in Year 11 are now much higher than the national average. You make outstanding progress throughout your time in the main school. In the sixth form, standards are good overall. This area is not yet outstanding, because there is some variation between subjects. The leadership of the school is aware of this.

Most lessons we saw were good, with a good range of activities, which you clearly enjoyed. Your teachers and other staff support you very well to get you to achieve to such high levels, particularly in Years 9 to 11. Your behaviour is excellent and your attendance is good. We recognise your strong appreciation of the approachability of staff and the support they give you which helps you achieve so well. We were particularly impressed with the support you give one another in helping to settle into the school and in helping to overcome any problems you may have.

We have asked your headteacher to develop the guidance and support you receive in the sixth form so that it is as good as the best practice that already exists in the main school and so helps you to improve your achievement across all subjects.

We wish you well with your future studies. Keep up the good work!

Best wishes

Paula Heaney HMI

Lead inspector