

Manshead CofE VA Upper School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109705
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	325012
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Rhona Seviour HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1090
Sixth form	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Hughes
Headteacher	Mr Jim Parker
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
School address	Dunstable Road Caddington Luton Bedfordshire LU1 4BB
Telephone number	01582 608641
Fax number	01582 679411

Age group	13–19
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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

Manshead Upper is an average size Church of England secondary school that takes its pupils from three local 9–13 middle schools. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds and others from a broad range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Relatively few pupils are at an early stage of learning the English language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with a statement of special educational need is below the national average, as is the percentage eligible for free school meals. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

The school has had specialist status in science and mathematics since 2004 and has recently opened a specialist unit for pupils with autism. It provides teacher training through the Graduate Training Programme in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire. A new headteacher took up post in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Manshead Upper provides a satisfactory education, and some aspects of its work, including the care, guidance and support provided for the pupils and their personal development, are good. The school is a calm and happy place. Pupils feel safe and secure and get on well with each other and with their teachers. Around the school site, they act responsibly and their behaviour in lessons is generally good.

Since its last inspection, the school has experienced considerable turbulence in its staffing and has often found it extremely difficult to recruit suitably qualified teachers. This has been a barrier to its improvement. The new headteacher, aided by other leaders and managers, has tackled these difficulties with determination and the staffing is becoming more stable. Since his arrival, the headteacher has initiated many changes, including a new college structure with mixed age tutor groups, improved systems for tracking pupils' progress and more rigorous monitoring of teaching. Liaison with local middle and upper schools is increasing, partly stimulated by the school's specialist status in science and mathematics. The impact of these changes is beginning to show. Behaviour and attendance are improving and, in 2008, pupils made more progress in the core subjects than in 2007. It is too early, however, for many of the changes to make a full impact and, in some areas, the effect of the historic staffing difficulties persists. Consequently, as at the time of the last inspection, both achievement and standards and the quality of teaching are satisfactory.

The quality of teaching varies widely. In the best lessons, pupils play an active part and are keen to learn. Teachers' talking dominates too many lessons and this restricts the opportunities for pupils to develop the skills of independent learning they need for the future. The satisfactory curriculum provides pupils with academic and vocational options, including a good range of science courses. The school's evaluation of its work is broadly accurate; it knows, for example, that the system for tracking pupils' progress is not yet operating consistently. However, the school does not always monitor or evaluate all aspects of its work with sufficient rigour and thus, in some areas, has a more positive view than the inspectors of how well it is doing. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Most leaders and managers are new to the role and some relatively inexperienced. Nonetheless, their ambition and commitment to the school, the more settled staffing arrangements and good governance provide it with ample capacity to sustain its improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education. Pupils make satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment on entry and standards are broadly in line with national averages. Year 11 pupils are able to opt for a good range of A-level courses, some offered in conjunction with a neighbouring school, and there is a strong emphasis upon promoting pupils' personal development and well-being. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers know their subjects well, and establish very good working relationships with their pupils. Although still at an early stage, recent changes in the leadership and management of the sixth form are improving the support and guidance offered to pupils. Pupils now have a better understanding of the progress they are making and the steps they need to take to improve their performance. Systems for monitoring teaching and learning and the progress of individual pupils are also improving.

What the school should do to improve further

- To raise achievement and standards, ensure that systems for tracking and analysing pupils' progress and setting targets operate consistently well across the school.
- Ensure that all teaching enables pupils to play an active part in lessons and develop the skills of independent learning they need for the future.
- Increase the rigour with which the impact of initiatives is monitored and evaluated.

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

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. In 2008, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades increased, as did the percentage gaining A* to C grades in English, mathematics and science. Nonetheless, standards at the end of Year 9 and 11 remain in line with the national average. Results in the sixth form are also broadly in line with expectations and national averages.

Between Year 9 and Year 11, the vast majority of pupils make satisfactory progress. In some areas, including information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology and modern foreign languages, progress is good. Pupils with a statement of special educational need progress well but others with less severe learning or behavioural difficulties, while making good personal progress, do not make sufficient academic progress.

The school is monitoring pupils' progress more closely and becoming better at targeting action to prevent underachievement. Although the system is not yet operating consistently, it is beginning to make a positive impact on pupils' attainment and progress. Recent action is also targeted well at improving the quality of teaching and reducing the level of supply teaching experienced by some classes, particularly in English. In 2008, the school met the targets it set for pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations but did not meet the more exacting targets relating to its specialist status in science and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Relationships between staff and pupils are good. Pupils cooperate very well with each other, including those from different year groups, and act responsibly and safely around the school site. They feel the school is a safe and secure place and that they can turn to the staff for support when they need it. Both behaviour and attendance are good. Pupils enjoy school life and most are keen to learn and want to achieve. They look forward to lessons that are engaging and well suited to their needs but do not feel that such experiences are common or consistent enough. Pupils have a good awareness of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Many cycle or walk to school and there is a good level of participation in extra-curricular sporting events. The student council is effective and has a positive impact on the school. Pupils of all ages and abilities are articulate and self-confident. They are clear about what is right and wrong and have the ability to reflect maturely on spiritual matters. Not all have benefited from the opportunity to participate in activities in the wider community or to develop a secure understanding of the diversity of British society. Similarly, not all feel confident that the school

helps them to develop the skills, for example in independent learning, which they will need in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. Lesson objectives are clear and often related to pupils' differing abilities and target grades. Teachers maintain good relationships with the pupils. In the best lessons, they use engaging and varied teaching strategies to ensure that pupils are actively involved in their own learning. They manage pupils' behaviour skilfully and use a range of approaches to assess their progress. In these lessons, pupils rise to the challenges they are set, share their ideas in a mature way and make good progress. Although teaching is often good and sometimes outstanding, the quality is too variable across the school. In too many lessons, teachers' talk dominates and pupils are too passive. In such lessons, there are insufficient opportunities for discussion or group work. On occasions, when the pace of the lesson is too slow, pupils become distracted and engage in low-level disruption. Teachers' skill in questioning is very variable. Too often, they do not encourage pupils to extend their answers or think for themselves. Although, technology is used effectively for presentational purposes, its potential for promoting interactive learning is not exploited. Marking practices are also very variable; some classes have not had their books marked at all and others contain little evidence of written feedback indicating what pupils need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is organised flexibly, with a good emphasis on providing pupils with choice and meeting their individual needs. In Year 9, there are options within design and technology and modern languages and, in Years 10 and 11, there is a good range of vocational and academic courses, some of which take place at the local college of further education. Reflecting its specialist status, the school provides well for pupils' different interests in science and mathematics. All pupils study ICT as a subject in Years 9 to 11 and have good access to ICT resources to support their learning. There is also a wide range of enrichment activities including innovation days and enterprise activities. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils' personal development but the school does not assess their attainment in citizenship. Furthermore, there is inconsistency in the extent to which the curriculum of all pupils builds upon their prior attainment and experiences. Limited opportunities for work experience prevent some pupils from gaining an insight into the world of work to aid their choice of education, employment or training at the end of Year 11.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a caring and supportive environment for the pupils and they appreciate the staff's strong commitment to their safety and well-being. Risk assessments are undertaken as required and policies and procedures for safeguarding the pupils and for child protection are robust and secure. Pupils are confident that any incidents of bullying will be dealt with swiftly and effectively. In this regard, the relatively new college structure has been central to

improvements. Provision for pupils who find learning difficult is satisfactory and the school has good links with external agencies to provide support for individual pupils and for pupils' personal, social and careers education. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and recent action is raising levels still further. Action to improve behaviour, including the formation of a new behaviour unit, is having a positive impact and the number of fixed term exclusions has fallen. Provision to help sixth form pupils plan for their future is good. The school has recently strengthened its systems for tracking pupils' progress and setting targets but these are not yet operating consistently well. Although pupils are aware of their target grades or levels, they do not always understand precisely what they need to do to achieve these.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides good leadership and a clear sense of direction. He recognises the actions necessary to improve achievement and has fostered closer links with other schools and agencies in the local community. The school's improvement plan accurately targets specific areas of weakness and is beginning to contribute to necessary improvements. Since the last inspection, the school has strengthened the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the work of subject departments and is targeting action to raise the overall quality. In some other areas, for example, the impact of specialist status and some recent initiatives, monitoring and evaluation are not sufficiently rigorous. As a result, although broadly accurate, some of the school's judgements of aspects of its work are more positive than those of the inspectors. The school is beginning to make effective use of challenging targets to raise achievement and standards. The school has worked hard to overcome difficulties in recruiting staff which have put huge pressures on the school's budget. In the circumstances the school has used its finances and resources wisely and prudently. In addition, good attention is paid to the training and development of staff. Nonetheless, it has not always been possible for leaders and managers, many of whom are relatively new to their roles or the school, to mitigate the impact of staffing difficulties on standards and the quality of teaching. In half the responses to the inspection questionnaire, from the 80 received, parents expressed some concerns about three main areas which were teaching in English and science and the lack of communication by the school. The governors fulfill their responsibilities very well. They hold the school to account, have an accurate understanding of the main strengths and weaknesses and ensure that the deployment of the budget reflects priorities.

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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?	3	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

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/or disabilities make progress	3	

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?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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 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?	2	3

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	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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	

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

10 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Manshead CofE VA Upper School, Dunstable, LU1 4BB

As you know, we recently visited your school and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. I would like to thank you for the help you gave us during our visit and for your openness. We all enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

We think that Manshead is providing a satisfactory education. Most of you achieve the nationally expected standards and develop well personally. In lessons, we were impressed by your willingness to contribute your ideas and by the very mature way in which you work together. The relationships between you and your teachers are good and, for most of the time, you act considerately and courteously to each other. There is a wide range of subject options, including a good choice of vocational and academic courses. The school is a caring place and the staff support you well. However, we do not feel that the school ensures that all of you know precisely what you need to do to improve. One reason for this is that your work is not marked well enough. We know that Mr Parker and the staff have made changes over the last two years. We agree that many of these are the right things to do to raise standards. Some of these are already beginning to make a positive impact. For instance, you told us that behaviour is improving and, in the sixth form, that you are better informed about the progress you are making.

We think that you should make faster progress and achieve more. To help you do this, we want the school to make sure it monitors your progress thoroughly in all subjects. The school knows that the quality of teaching varies too much and that this affects your learning. We have asked Mr Parker and the staff to make sure that all teaching is as good as the best we saw. We also think the school should check aspects of its work more thoroughly to reduce some of the inconsistencies we found, for example in marking. You can help your school by ensuring that you work hard to achieve your targets. We wish you well with your future studies.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour

Her Majesty's Inspector