

Sharnbrook Upper School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109706
Local Authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	325013
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1776
Sixth form	622
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	33
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Hugh Carr-Archer
Headteacher	Mr John Clemence
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Odell Road Sharnbrook Bedford Bedfordshire

Age group	13–19
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Inspection number	325013

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The school was invited to nominate a senior manager to join the inspection team in all aspects of their work and a deputy headteacher took on this responsibility.

Description of the school

Significantly larger than average, Sharnbrook is a mixed 13–19 comprehensive. The pupils' social and economic backgrounds vary but are above average overall. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The ratio of boys to girls in a year group varies annually. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is half the national figure and the proportion of those whose first language is not English is a third of the national average. The proportion of pupils registered by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is half the national figure and varies annually. However, the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is average. Attainment on entry is above average. There are a small number of looked after children in each year group.

The school is one of a limited number nationally that has been granted three specialist areas: Media Arts (1998), Training School (2000), and more recently in Applied Learning. The school has secured a number of national accolades: Artsmark Gold, the Sportsmark Award (twice), Healthy Schools Award, the Information and Communications Technology ICT Register, and Investors in People status. The school has been heavily involved in teacher training for many years.

The inspection was carried out as part of a coordinated inspection of the middle and upper school partners in the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust. Three of the four Trust members; Sharnbrook Upper, Lincroft Middle School and Harrold Priory Middle School are currently consulting parents and the local community on the formation of a federation which will provide a single governing body for all three establishments. Bedford Borough unitary authority takes up its responsibilities for Children's services locally on 1 April 2009.

The governing body manages the onsite Early Years Foundation Stage Nursery Centre that provides childcare facilities for up to 33 children aged 0–3 for five days a week, during the school terms.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school and perhaps more significantly this is the third occasion Ofsted has been able to affirm this publicly.

Although all aspects of provision have been judged outstanding, there are areas where exemplary practice was observed. Inspectors observed excellent teaching in a number of subject areas, the students' attitudes to learning and their relationship with staff were outstanding, and the focus of the senior staff on review, evaluation and further development is the obsession that drives the school forward. The quality of teaching is outstanding: inspectors observed fifty-six lessons, judging nine out of ten to be good or better, a remarkable level of professional consistency. Members of the senior management team were invited to accompany inspectors in the joint observation of teaching. The detailed analysis of learning highlighted areas where effective classroom practice might be further developed towards excellence. Thirty-three staff are currently studying part-time with Cambridge and London Universities for higher level qualifications within their professional area; this school truly is a learning community.

The curriculum provided is outstanding in both the range and the quality of the experiences available. Students can 'elect' to join additional courses during the lunch period and these have a positive outcome on the students' personal and academic progress. Standards and achievement are outstanding at every level. Specialist status in the media arts, as a training school, and in applied learning has had a positive impact on the breadth of provision, academic outcomes, individualisation of learning and in the school's contribution to its wider community. For example, the work of modern foreign language specialists in feeder schools, which is derived from the training school specialism, has increased the number of students who take a second foreign language when they join the school, enhancing their applied learning opportunities.

Subject level links on a cultural and faith basis have a strong European and global basis. However, the governing body's analysis of the pressures on the smaller schools in the local area has led to Sharnbrook becoming a founder member of the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust, an outstanding contribution to community cohesion.

Care, welfare and guidance are outstanding, highlighted in the exemplary way in which a vulnerable student who joined the school in Year 10 was carefully nurtured through a self-analysis of his own needs and attitudes. The pupils' personal development and their attitudes to learning are excellent. A mature collegiate atmosphere is evident throughout the school. One student encapsulated the views expressed by many when she said, 'A truly brilliant school, very positive feel - teachers are incredibly friendly and supportive.'

Leadership and management are outstanding. Staff in all areas of the school consistently use their professional initiative. Governance is outstanding, governors' knowledge and understanding of the school is strong and their focus on community cohesion within the trust is a particular strength.

The school has a secure track record of innovation and expertise. Moreover, by using trust status to enhance the curricular experience of pupils in its major feeder school and by seeking to extend this concept via well considered plans for formal federation, the school's capacity to improve is outstanding and in the same context, so is the value for money it provides.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students have mature attitudes to learning and make an excellent contribution to the school and local communities. They make rapid progress to achieve consistently high standards on AS and A-level courses. The vast majority of students complete the courses they begin. Students learn and achieve very well because teaching is consistently of a high quality. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects is very strong, enabling them to make lessons enjoyable and challenging. Students respond positively and the significant majority have the skills to work independently: their personal development is outstanding. They appreciate, and are greatly helped by, the guidance and support given by tutors and the sixth form staff team. Students are involved in the challenging target setting process and in reviews of their progress. Most continue to higher education and significant numbers gain entry to highly respected universities. The range of learning opportunities is exceptional, although the requirement for all to take religious education is not met. In addition to the extensive range of advanced courses, intermediate opportunities are available and students actively take up the opportunity to follow 'elective' learning experiences that broaden their education. Although standards are high and the quality of education exceptional, leaders and managers are not complacent. Their accurate evaluation of achievement and of the quality of education by senior staff guides the development of the sixth form and leads to well-considered innovation.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Brook Nursery is good. Children achieve well in response to good teaching and a range of learning experiences that are generally well matched to their needs. Parents feel very confident to leave their children in the Nursery, knowing that the staff treat them 'as if they were their own'. As a result, the children are happy and confident. As one parent put it, 'The children almost run to get there'. They are well looked after and good procedures are in place to ensure their welfare and safety. Babies and toddlers up to the age of two thrive in the warm, supportive environment.

The older children aged three and four years old make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and outstanding progress in their knowledge and understanding of the world around them. The spacious new outdoor area and access to the upper school dance studio promote children's physical development well. Children of all ages benefit from the outstanding way in which staff promote communication and language skills. However, opportunities for the oldest children to develop their skills in literacy and in problem solving, reasoning and numeracy, are only satisfactory.

Staff regularly observe and assess the children, keeping satisfactory records of their development. They have made a good start in using information about the interests of individual children in planning activities. Parents receive regular informal feedback about how well their child's day has gone, and a daily diary is sent home for children from birth to two. Nevertheless, staff are not yet involving parents as partners in their children's learning and assessment as fully as they should, and have rightly identified the need to strengthen liaison where a child spends some time in another setting. When pupils leave the centre the children's records are passed to their parents. However, new legislation also requires the Nursery to pass on this data to the new receiving school. The Nursery is led and managed well. It has made good improvement since

its last inspection. Self-evaluation and the strength of teamwork amongst the well-qualified staff form a good basis for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

HMI asked the headteacher to consider what the two key priorities of the school should be after this inspection. He provided the following areas for development with which the inspection team were happy to concur.

- Develop the role of the school improvement team to further extend the quality of learning within the school and the partnerships being formed.
- Continue to develop joint working with the other schools in the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust with a view to further strengthening standards and achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The final year of the national Key Stage 3 results were well above average. In 2008, the proportion of students attaining five higher grade GCSEs that include English and mathematics was 82%. It has risen steadily for the last three years to a position of twenty-four points above the national average. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds achieve as well as their peers. The educational value added at age 16 is significantly above the national and county averages, student progress is outstanding. A measure of this is the above average number of GCSE or equivalent examination courses entered successfully by students. For example, in 2008 two thirds of the year group achieved 8 higher grade GCSE passes that included English and mathematics and a quarter of all GCSE entries secured A*/A grade passes. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively supported and achieve above the level of their peers nationally. Early results from the 2009 examinations are impressive; for example, a third of the Year 11 students studying physics secured full marks and all gained a higher level pass in their most recent modular examination.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The students' outstanding personal development is a major contributory factor in their academic success. They really enjoy coming to school and are very keen to learn; attendance is above average. Students feel safe in school and feel that they can go to any member of staff for support; instances of bullying are rare and there are no racial incidents. Students' behaviour is very good, and often exemplary in lessons. They build up very good relationships with their teachers and peers in the vertical tutor groups and these are part of a very effective range of strategies for dealing with vulnerable individuals. Students respond very positively to opportunities to contribute to their own community and within a wider charitable context. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding although opportunities for reflection and spiritual development are missed in some assemblies. Many students in each year take up responsibilities through the House and School Parliament as house leaders and mentors to younger peers. Students adopt healthy lifestyles through a range of sports and healthy lunches. They develop very good economic understanding and enterprise skills through the school's excellent careers guidance and work experience programme. The school coordinates the provision of a wide range of services for its local community through its extended schools service and outstanding student support services. Students say, 'The school is the hub of the

local community in the way it draws people in. You gain independence because they help you with your decisions and everybody is on the same side'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning has been maintained since the last inspection, and is outstanding. This is reflected in the excellent progress students make and the consistently high standards they achieve. Teachers demonstrate a very high level of subject knowledge which enables them to engage students and motivate them effectively in their learning. They establish very good relations with students where mutual respect is evident. This is founded on the teachers' willingness to enter into a partnership for learning that supports and helps students in and outside the classroom. The staff's high expectations and the students' eagerness to learn are a consistent feature. Planning was good in nearly every lesson seen and staff make effective use of learning objectives to organise class activities that are varied and enjoyable. Teachers clearly know their students very well and use questioning at different levels to test students' understanding. Good resources are well used, especially when they ensure that learning proceeds at a brisk pace. Students take responsibility for their own learning by enthusiastically entering into the assessment process and many are quick to seek guidance on how to achieve the highest standards. The learning environments created in excellent textiles, English, physics and history lessons were vibrant and dynamic, which all concerned plainly enjoyed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The time available for lessons is considerably more than that in most schools. Effective curricular continuity is being developed through the trust arrangements. For example, advanced skills teachers support students' learning in mathematics across the feeder schools in the trust. The range of learning opportunities is extensive and this enables students to pursue their interests and meet their learning needs. The curriculum in Year 9 is changing and three-year GCSE courses have been introduced in some subjects. Those who find mainstream education in Years 10 and 11 challenging follow individual programmes. All students in Years 9, 10 and 11 take ethics, theology and citizenship although the lack of progression of these courses into the sixth form needs to be addressed. Students learn the essentials about responsibility and relationships in a context of moral and Christian values. Students take up the excellent range of 'electives' and extra-curricular opportunities to extend their learning. Outdoor learning is a very strong feature.

The school has three specialisms, which collectively contribute greatly to students' achievement and standards, and to the quality of education that they receive. Specialist subject academic targets and those aimed at ensuring student participation in the specialisms are all consistently achieved or exceeded. Media-arts provides highly successful courses in which students reach very high standards in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The specialism in applied learning contributes strongly to making the curriculum outstanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support provided is outstanding because it is focussed on the individual. Processes to ease the transition from middle schools and between key stages

are excellent, involving parents on a significant level. Safeguarding arrangements meet current government requirements and suitable risk assessments are undertaken: students feel safe and secure.

The assessment and monitoring of students' progress and the regular academic review days are very effective. Teachers give students accurate long-term targets and help them understand both the levels achieved and how to improve. Short-term targets are not always consistently given in lessons and marked work, which the school is addressing. The involvement of teachers, support staff and mentors in all areas of the students' life integrates school, home and community. Excellent learning support is provided in lessons for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Outstanding intervention strategies to deal with disaffected and vulnerable students have led to a very low exclusion rate. There are excellent procedures to support students in school, such as the Learning Support Unit and the Refocusing Centre, in which the one to one support helps students re-integrate. Coordination of provision for special needs is outstanding, leading to high achievement. Careers staff give students very good advice on academic progression routes. The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school and confirm that their children are outstandingly well cared for, guided and supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and his senior staff set a very clear direction that consistently seeks to improve learning opportunities for all and the provision of high quality care. The school's budget has been effectively managed to facilitate the expansion of the school and resources have been used very efficiently. Senior staff use a wide range of challenging targets that relate to students' academic and personal outcomes. The individualised monitoring of professional development is effective but more guidance could be provided for staff who wish to make the transition from effective to outstanding practice. The school's self-evaluation is accurate but not complacent and the headteacher is calmly in pursuit of excellence.

The school is an unruffled and orderly community. The management of student behaviour is effective and relationships are very good. Curriculum development has been impressive since the last inspection and the range of post 16 opportunities created is outstanding.

Governance is outstanding, not just because of the way it has supported the development of the school since the last inspection but also because of the manner in which it has been happy to support the whole learning community of the 19 schools within the trust. The public consultation on a further development of trust status towards formal federations is a logical and well-considered move. Community cohesion is outstanding because the school's effective analysis of the local context has produced a significant impact on its own community. Charitable work has a global dimension and many curriculum areas offer a faith, social or cultural insight.

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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	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
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	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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**

20 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sharnbrook Upper School, Sharnbrook, MK44 1JL

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for the courtesy you extended to every member of the inspection team that visited your school earlier this month. You consistently gave of your time to speak to us and to guide us when we found ourselves lost, thank you. You are well aware that you attend an excellent school, where you make outstanding progress. It was a pleasure to see the contributions you make on so many levels to the school community and the way schools in the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust are working together to promote community cohesion. You told us how much you value the support and guidance provided by all of the staff involved. A Year 12 student summarised the comments we heard from so many of you when he noted: 'We are brilliantly prepared for the next stage of our education but more importantly for the rest of our life'.

I would encourage you to read the overall effectiveness section of the report where I have tried to capture the essence of the school. Perhaps it can be summarised by noting that your very positive attitudes to learning, the dedication and professionalism of the staff and the wonderful range of opportunities the school makes available combine to provide you with an outstanding education.

I shall look forward to hearing about your further success.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector