

Sharples School Science Specialist College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105259
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	336462
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Katrina Gueli HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	996
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	CLlr Christine Wild
Headteacher	Mrs Lynne Porter
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons, and held meetings with governors, school leaders and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents relating to the school's monitoring of its performance, student assessment data, minutes of meetings, improvement plans and also scrutinised students' work in lessons. The inspectors also analysed the 155 parental questionnaires that were returned as well as the student questionnaires.

- students' attainment, especially in English and mathematics
- how well all groups of learners make progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and from minority ethnic groups
- how effectively leaders and managers at all levels are monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's work on students' outcomes
- how effectively leaders and managers are planning and taking action to tackle identified underperformance, particularly in English and mathematics
- the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding procedures.

Information about the school

Sharples School is an average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of minority ethnic students is above average, with students of Indian heritage making up approximately 25% of the school's population. However, few minority ethnic students are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average but of those, the number with a statement of educational needs is high. The school has a specialist unit for approximately 20 hearing impaired students from Bolton and neighbouring authorities. Provision includes specialist teaching in the unit and in-class support for mainstream lessons. The school is a specialist science college and has gained the Investors in People award. Other awards received include Sportsmark, Healthy Schools and an International School foundation award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to attainment, particularly in English and mathematics and the speed at which leaders and managers address underperformance. Since the time of the last inspection, there has been significant improvement in the proportion of students gaining 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE. In science, the lead specialist subject, the percentage of students gaining two grades at C or above has also risen and this measure is now significantly above the national average. However, this convincing trend of improvement has not been achieved in relation to students' attainment in English and mathematics. In these two subjects attainment remains significantly below the national average and consequently, students' progress in these two subjects is inadequate. Similarly, trends over the last three years indicate that students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and of Indian heritage, make too little progress relative to their starting points.

Teaching and learning in lessons seen during the inspection ranged from good to inadequate, with too little that was good. Although the school has placed significant emphasis on developing teachers' practice this has yet to be fully embedded. In addition, lessons seen often did not make a good enough contribution to supporting the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. Marking of students' work does not always ensure that students know how well they are doing or clearly identify how they can improve. The curriculum has been well developed and offers a broad range of Key Stage 4 courses. For example, the specialism has supported wider access to accredited courses in information and communication technology (ICT) and options for science have been extended. The quality of care, guidance and support for students is good. Learning directors know their students well and partnerships are used effectively to address students' additional needs. The impressive rate of progression of students at the end of Year 11 into education, employment and training confirms the good guidance and support they receive.

The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further. The senior leadership team has been extended since the last inspection and there has been a strong commitment to developing the skills of many senior and middle leaders through accredited leadership programmes. A very large majority of leaders have a clear understanding of their role in contributing to the school's improvement and most have already demonstrated their ability to raise standards and ensure students make at least satisfactory progress.

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However, not all leadership at middle leader level is fully effective and improving outcomes in some areas has yet to be achieved. Monitoring and evaluation is broadly accurate and has recently identified more sharply, the specific aspects of provision and leadership that need to be addressed. Robust plans are now in place to tackle the remaining underperformance.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - increasing the proportion of consistently good or better teaching
 - ensuring students know how to improve their work by providing clear written feedback in marking
 - ensuring teachers in all subjects make a good contribution to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Increase the speed at which leaders and managers are addressing underperformance by:
 - ensuring consistently good leadership of all subjects and year groups
 - using data and targets more effectively to drive improvement in student outcomes.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Where learning is good, students participate well in the lesson and tackle interesting and challenging activities with enthusiasm. In technology, for example, Year 8 students worked carefully but at a good pace when making planters and explained clearly how they were trying to improve the quality of their product. However, this good learning is too infrequent in some subjects and students are often not challenged or engaged effectively. The majority of students say they feel safe in school and are confident that an adult will listen and address any concerns they may have. They confirm that when incidents do occur these are quickly and effectively dealt with using a range of sanctions. A minority of students and a few parents raised concerns about behaviour but the inspection team found that behaviour of the vast majority of students was good, both in lessons and around school. School information, for example, exclusion data, highlights however, that a small minority cause a concern despite the school's efforts and behaviour is therefore satisfactory overall. Students understand about how to keep healthy and some, although not the majority, choose to benefit from the good range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Students' good levels of involvement in activities linked to the specialism, fund raising, school council and events such as a recent community cohesion conference demonstrate their willingness to take on responsibility and make a difference to the school and wider community. Students develop a broad range of personal skills and qualities through curriculum enrichment, work-related learning and their ICT studies. However, their basic skills in literacy and numeracy are less well developed. Relationships between students from different backgrounds are

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positive and students gain a secure understanding of diversity and difference through visits, assemblies and the taught curriculum.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

There is significant inconsistency in the quality of teaching and this is supported by the wide variation in students' attainment and progress between subjects. Good teaching is characterised by detailed planning which clearly focuses on the intended learning, effective teacher modelling and explanation, interesting and relevant activities that engage students and the good use of assessment to check progress and move learning on. However, too often, lessons incorporate too much teacher talk, activities which lack sufficient challenge, missed opportunities to increase students' skills or knowledge and poor questioning. A common comment from students in Years 7 to 10 who met with inspectors was that they would like all their work to be marked regularly and for marking to tell them more consistently how to improve.

The curriculum is well matched to the needs and aspirations of all students. Careful review of the requirements of different groups has ensured effective provision for all,

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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including those most at risk of underachievement at both key stages. Developments since the last inspection have helped to address the underachievement of boys and personalised pathways are helping to improve the attitudes, behaviour and attendance of targeted individuals. Year 7 students enjoy the cross-curricular skills-based approach to humanities and the nurture group helps them to settle into school quickly and build their confidence in the new environment. At Key Stage 4, links with other providers and work placements are used well to meet the needs of students who would not be well served by a traditional curriculum. Intervention to help students who are identified as underachieving are also well planned. The school is leading on the ICT diploma for a local cluster of schools and progression routes for students taking the diploma or science BTEC course have been secured through effective use of external partnerships.

Systems to track students' progress, attendance and behaviour are well embedded. Students who are vulnerable to underachievement, with poor attendance or behaviour, or with more complex needs are quickly identified and well supported using a wide range of carefully chosen strategies. For example, a recent increase in the proportion of students with persistent absence has been quickly addressed through good partnerships with parents and close working with the school's education social worker. Both internal resources and external agencies are used effectively and student case studies clearly illustrate the positive impact of the school's work in helping individuals overcome their personal barriers to learning. Transitions into the school, between key stages and progression post-16 are well managed and most parents and students feel this good support and guidance ensures they are well prepared for the next steps in their education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders are strongly committed to improving provision and outcomes for learners. Systems to monitor the school's work have been improved and the senior team along with governors have a broadly accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, evaluation has been insufficiently sharp in pinpointing all weaknesses swiftly and this has slowed overall improvement in some key areas. Targets set are sufficiently challenging but until very recently there has been limited use of these targets to hold most subject leaders and class teachers to account for student progress. High staff expectations of what students can achieve, evident in subjects such as science and

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technology, are not shared by all. Similarly, the good practice seen in the use of data to identify and address underperformance in Year 11 has not been consistently reflected in other year groups. However, the school does check the progress of different groups of learners. Targeted actions such as intervention and curriculum development have resulted in some success, for example in improving boys' achievement. The governing body has provided the school with a satisfactory degree of support and challenge, for example supporting key leadership appointments to secure much needed improvements. Their skills and expertise are well used and they have ensured that statutory duties in relation to safeguarding have been met. The school engages with parents well through a wide variety of means including regular newsletters, the school website and face-to-face meetings. Questionnaire returns confirm that parents feel well informed about their child's progress. Similarly, parent workshops, including 'How can I help?' related to GCSE preparation and 'How to cope with teenagers', are well attended on an annual basis. Wide ranging partnerships make a good contribution to promoting learning, supporting students' well-being and the school's good promotion of community cohesion. Following a good analysis of its context, the school has been active in community cohesion developments in the locality, including helping to secure funding to support the neighbourhood in raising aspirations and achievement of young people. International links have also been established with schools in France and India contributing to students' wider cultural development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

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The very large majority of parents and carers have a strongly positive view of the school and are happy with their child's overall experience. They feel well informed about their child's progress and that the needs of their children are well met. Parents are confident that the school is well led and that their child is kept safe. A very small minority would like the school to take more account of their suggestions and concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sharples School Science Specialist College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 155 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 996 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	63	37	95	56	6	4	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	46	27	107	63	11	6	3	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	85	50	77	45	7	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	74	43	78	46	13	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	56	33	98	57	9	5	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	50	29	101	59	11	6	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	22	110	64	17	10	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	61	36	97	57	2	1	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	53	31	103	60	7	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	54	32	79	46	25	15	7	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	25	102	60	16	9	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	51	30	103	60	10	6	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	72	42	82	48	12	7	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



7th December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sharples School Science Specialist College, Bolton, BL1 8SN

A team of inspectors and I recently visited your school. We would like to thank you for the time you took to talk to us and share your work, with special thanks to those who completed questionnaires. Your views were a very important part of the inspection.

We found that although aspects of the school's work and your attainment have improved in some respects, this improvement has not been achieved in all areas. We have therefore given the school a notice to improve.

We have asked leaders and managers to ensure that you make better progress, particularly in English and mathematics, so that more of you gain 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE including these two subjects. We have also asked them to increase the speed with which they address this and other remaining areas for improvement.

You receive good care and support and consequently the large majority of you feel safe in school. You are also well guided about choices at 14 and post-16 and this helps to ensure that most of you progress into education, employment or training at the end of Year 11. Many of you make a good contribution to the school and wider community, get on well with each other and show good attitudes to your learning. However, despite the school's high expectations, a very small minority of you choose on occasion not to respond positively to your peers and staff.

I hope you will all support the school as it continues its improvement and strive to be active learners in all lessons.

Yours sincerely

Katrina Gueli

Her Majesty's Inspector

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