

Stratton Upper School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109645
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337340
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1256
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	353
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Russell
Headteacher	Mr N Bramwell
Date of previous school inspection	6 April 2007
School address	Eagle Farm Road Biggleswade Bedfordshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and representatives from the local authority. They observed the school's work, looked at the school's priorities, analysed recent examination results, read 192 parental questionnaires and studied staff and student surveys.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress students make from Key Stage 2 to 4 in mathematics
- how successfully the school has improved provision in the sixth form
- the quality of provision and support for higher attaining students
- the effect of measures taken by the school to promote increased attendance
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels including middle leaders

Information about the school

Stratton Upper School is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It is situated close to the centre of Biggleswade. Most students in the school are of White British background. Very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average although the percentage with statements is higher than average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is very low. The school has specialist status as a mathematics and computing college and as a training school.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Stratton Upper is a good school which is improving rapidly. It has an increasing number of outstanding features. Under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, supported by a strong senior management team, the school has successfully addressed issues raised in the previous inspection to improve provision in the sixth form, marking of students' work and standards in English which demonstrates that it has good capacity for sustained improvement.

Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities do particularly well as a result of the excellent care, guidance and support they receive. Provision for higher attaining students has been enhanced. The quality of partnerships with other agencies is outstanding. The headteacher plays a leading role in working with other providers to extend provision in the school. The school is highly inclusive and can be rightly proud of the way it promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination by analysing provision and outcomes carefully and ensuring that individual needs are met. Its arrangements for ensuring the safety of students are very robust.

The school has undergone a period of staffing changes which has led to the appointment of a number of new senior managers in the school. Standards have risen at GCSE and in the sixth form. Examination results in English have improved following sustained efforts by the school to raise standards in the subject. Although students attain high results in mathematics at GCSE they do not make as much progress as they could because a minority indicate they do not enjoy the subject as much as others.

Overall standards are above average at the end of Year 11 and students make good progress having joined the school with broadly average levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science. In the sixth form the school admits students from a wide range of abilities. From a low starting point overall in the sixth form students make good progress and achieve broadly average standards.

One of the features that make teaching good is the way questioning is used by teachers to give them a clear indication of what students know and understand. A very large majority of students enjoy their learning but a minority do not enjoy mathematics where at times there is insufficient enjoyment and engagement in their learning.

Students benefit from a wide ranging curriculum and good use is made of a fully working farm which belongs to the school. Leaders and managers at all levels fully support the headteacher's vision for the school although the recent changes in staffing have led to some inconsistencies in how subject departments are led. The leadership and provision in the sixth form has been strengthened and its overall effectiveness is

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good.

Students get on well with each other and with staff and learn in an environment that is overwhelmingly free of intimidation.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress students make in mathematics by ensuring that lessons engage and motivate them consistently.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by sharing the best examples of teaching more widely through the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students join the school at the start of Year 9 having attained standards in English, mathematics, science that are broadly in line with the national average. By the time they reach the end of Year 11 their standards are above the nationally expected level of attainment for their age because of the good progress they make in their learning. There is a rising trend in the proportion of students who achieve five good grades at GCSE, including those who achieve at least a C grade in English and mathematics.

Students enjoy their learning and achieve well. Their learning in lessons seen is good. Students are well prepared for an understanding of healthy lifestyles through the provision of healthy food in the canteen and sports opportunities within and beyond the curriculum. However a minority of students disagree that the school helps them to be healthy.

The student leadership team represents the views of all students and has influence as its views are listened to. Students have a strong commitment to the community through its charity work and links through the farm. Overseas links with a school in South Africa are developing well but links with different communities within the UK are not as well established. The farm provides a good opportunity for students to develop their enterprise skills, which contributes to preparing them well for the future. Attendance is above average and the school has worked hard to achieve this.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. Learning support assistants are deployed very well to support learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Lessons are planned well with clear objectives for learning. Teachers provide appropriately levels of challenge for different groups of learners including high attaining students. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Marking is used well to inform students how well they are doing and how they can improve their work.

The curriculum is well organised and the school provides a good range of courses, both academic and vocational. Collaboration with other providers is developing well to extend the range of provision. Settings such as World War One trenches and the school farm bring learning to life. The farm also provides a source for additional accredited courses. There is a high take up of extra-curricular clubs and additional twilight courses.

The school provides excellent support for vulnerable students and goes the extra mile to ensure that individual needs are met to access learning. Arrangements for monitoring attendance and punctuality are rigorous. The appointment of student support officers has contributed to securing improvements in attendance. Support plans for individual students are of a very high quality as is the guidance teachers receive on individual students' needs. The use of retreat and personalised timetables ensures that students are able to remain in school as an alternative to exclusion. Transition arrangements with middle schools are excellent.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	
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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher supported by his senior leadership team is driving improvements and realising his ambitions for the school. Senior leaders have responded well to addressing previously identified weaknesses. The vision for students to achieve their very best is shared by middle leaders. The promotion of equal opportunities is at the heart of the school's work and the school monitors rigorously the uptake and outcomes for different groups of learners.

Recent changes in staff have led to some variation in how effectively subjects are led and the extent to which its specialism in mathematics has impacted on the school.

The school uses its specialist status as a training school well to serve the wider community. The local authority recognises the key role the school has played within the fledgling local authority to develop outstanding partnerships across Central Bedfordshire. The school promotes community cohesion well. It has developed a good understanding of the characteristics of its local community and is developing its links with the wider world.

Parents are kept well informed about important decisions and their children's achievement. Governors take an effective role in shaping the direction of the school and work closely with the headteacher and senior leaders to seek improvements.

Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough. The school complies very well with all safeguarding legislation and guidance. It takes safeguarding very seriously and rigorous systems and procedures are in place.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1

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	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The leadership and management of the sixth form have been enhanced by the appointment of additional leaders. Leaders have clearly defined roles which have led to improved attendance and examination results for students. Rigorous monitoring of the quality of lessons has led to improvements in teaching since the last inspection which is now good.

Examination results are improving. The school has a fully inclusive approach to students entering the sixth form so that standards at the start of Year 12 are below the expected level for the start of AS courses but they leave with results that are broadly average compared to national expectations.

Improved results have also been achieved by broadening the range of courses available to students. The school regularly surveys sixth form students for their views. Senior leaders work closely with student support officers to provide outstanding academic and pastoral guidance. Students contribute positively to the community through voluntary work in prisons and mentoring of younger students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Only a very small minority of parents responded to the parental questionnaire but of those who did most agreed that they were happy with their children's experience at school. In particular a very large majority of these said that their children enjoyed school, were kept safe and that the school was well led and managed. A small minority of parents who responded did not agree that the school helped them to support their children's learning and a very small minority disagreed that the school took account of their suggestions or helped their children to have a healthy lifestyle. Most comments

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from parents about aspects of the school were positive but a few had concerns about inconsistencies in the provision of mathematics which were observed during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Stratton Upper School and Community 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 192 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1256 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	56	29	124	65	9	5	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	53	28	129	67	8	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	42	22	123	64	21	11	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	49	25	113	59	20	10	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	30	16	138	72	18	9	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	19	113	59	35	18	4	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	13	133	69	29	15	1	1
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)	36	19	125	65	16	8	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	19	126	66	23	12	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	29	15	121	63	21	11	8	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	11	122	64	35	18	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	40	21	133	69	11	6	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	47	24	134	70	9	5	2	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.



20 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Stratton Upper School and Community College, Biggleswade SG18 8JB

You will know that we recently came to inspect your school and I thought you would like to know what we have said in our report. Thank you to those of you who took time to speak or write to us to tell us your views.

Stratton Upper is a good school and is improving rapidly. It has a number of outstanding features. The quality of care, guidance and support is exceptional, especially for those of you who find learning difficult. Your headteacher provides exceptional leadership, working in partnership with others to ensure all of you do as well you can, whatever your individual needs may be. The school does a very good job to ensure that you are kept safe in school.

You make good progress in school and go on to reach standards at GCSE that are above the national average. Examination results in the sixth form are improving. The curriculum ensures you all have a wide range of courses to choose from. The school farm is used well to help you in your learning. Your behaviour in and around school is good and your level of attendance is above average and improving.

There are a few things that we have suggested that I hope will help the school improve further. Not all of you enjoy mathematics as much as other subjects and although most of you do well in the subject we think you could make even better progress and enjoy the subject more if you were engaged more in your learning. Overall teaching is good. We think that by drawing from the very best lessons the school can make sure more of your teaching matches this standard.

Can I take this opportunity to wish you every success for your future and thank you again for making us feel so welcome in your school.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims

Her Majesty's Inspector

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