

Vandyke Upper School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109678
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337352
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Roger Whittaker

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	948
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs A Gomersall
Headteacher	Mr T Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	13 December 2006
School address	Vandyke Road Leighton Buzzard LU7 3DY
Telephone number	01525 636700
Fax number	01525 636701
Email address	office@vandyke.beds.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 35 lessons, observed 32 teachers and held meetings with governors, the school improvement partner, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school improvement plan, departmental reviews, minutes of governing body meetings and monitoring data in relation to students' progress and the quality of teaching. Inspectors also took account of 96 parental questionnaires received.

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

- the school's assessment and tracking data in order to see if the evidence supports the school's self-evaluation of good students' progress
- the quality of teaching and learning, to judge the impact of the school's initiatives to improve the consistency of good teaching
- the consistency of leadership and management, at all levels, in addressing the need to raise standards

Information about the school

Vandyke Upper School and Community College is an average size comprehensive school with specialist status for sports. Its number on roll has declined by 10% since the last inspection. Most students are of White British heritage, with only a few from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of educational needs, is above average. The school has been through a period of significant changes in staffing both in middle management and teacher levels since the last inspection.

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

Strong senior leadership is ensuring that well thought-out strategies for improvement are having a positive impact on provision and, in turn, on outcomes for students at Vandyke Upper School and Community College. The good curriculum and the outstanding care, guidance and support ensure that the needs of all students are very well met. Improvements in much of the teaching and the quality of the curriculum are engaging many students more effectively so that behaviour, attitudes to learning and progress are now good. As a result, attainment, which dipped below national averages in 2009, has improved for present Year 11 students. This is evident in the progress made in lessons and through the school's accurate tracking data. The attainment of students at the end of Year 13 is broadly in line with national averages. Given their attainment on entry to the sixth form this represents satisfactory progress, although teachers do not use assessment data rigorously enough so that they know how well different groups of students make progress in the sixth form. Other outcomes for students have benefited from the improved provision. For example, students' attendance is now well above the national average and students contribute extremely well to the school and wider community.

The school has good capacity not only to sustain current levels of performance, but also to improve even further because it has a good track record of improvements that school leaders at most levels have brought about. These include addressing those areas identified as causing the dip in attainment in 2009 and meeting and exceeding the challenging targets the school has set for itself. Most staff understand fully what the school is striving to achieve and are committed to these goals. The school has good self-evaluation and is increasingly improving monitoring and evaluation at departmental levels.

Despite the significant improvements that have been made, areas of inconsistency remain in a few areas. The school has accurately identified these and set them as priorities in its improvement plan. There are variations in attainment and progress across subjects. This is because, although teaching has improved, there remain some inconsistencies in the use of assessment to support learning and the extent to which learning activities are matched to students' capabilities. The school's monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning does not focus enough on the learning seen during lessons, which results in difficulties in identifying all training requirements for staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Remove remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching by ensuring that:

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- activities in lessons enable all students to achieve as well as they can, including the more able
- teachers understand and use strategies to ensure that students know what they can do and how to improve.
- Extend and refine existing systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching by focusing more on the learning and progress of students seen in lessons.
- Ensure that sixth form students make better progress by:
 - using data more rigorously so that the school knows more about the progress being made by different groups of students
 - improving the functional skills of students, especially literacy.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students join the school with below average attainment. By the time they leave, the majority have attainment which is in line with the national average. In 2009 the school suffered a sharp dip in results due, in the main, to a period of significant changes in staffing both in middle management and among teachers. However, the senior leadership was quick to deal with the situation and, consequently, improve the learning and progress of students. The present Year 11 students are on track to achieve beyond the school's challenging targets for five A* to C grades including English and Mathematics and so achieve in line with national averages.

Students' attitudes to learning and their ability to apply themselves in lessons are good. This is reflected in the good progress they make in lessons. The rate of progress students make over time has been improving. Even in lessons where teaching is satisfactory, students continue to make good progress because of their positive attitudes. The progress of individual students, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the small number of students from minority ethnic groups, is in line with the overall rates of progress.

Students demonstrate many positive attributes in their personal development. They show a good understanding of how to be safe. Bullying incidents are rare and students are confident that there is always a member of staff to talk to should the need arise. Students are particularly enthusiastic about the pastoral systems, which gives them opportunities to work with students from other years during tutor time. Behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school. The very few instances of poor behaviour are usually well managed by teachers. The number of exclusions has been reduced. The school's specialist sports status has a positive impact on students' extremely successful adoption of healthy lifestyles. Students talk very positively about how the new 'cafe' helps them to eat healthy food.

Students are extremely effective members of their school community and the wider community. For example, they play a prominent leadership role in working together with local schools and the community promoting collaboration in the interest of all the town's young people. For example, students lead Fair Trade activities in the town and manage a charity which adopted an orphanage in Malawi. The specialist sports college status has

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contributed to students working with feeder schools to help Year 8 pupils to prepare for their transition to Vandyke.

Students have a good awareness of the value of diverse cultures and of moral, spiritual and social issues as a result of their involvement in a range of activities, including international links with a school in South Africa where students lead sports sessions with groups of children from a local township.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Good relationships between students and teachers create a positive environment for learning which results in students making good progress over time. Many teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about their subjects and transmit their enthusiasm to the students. In the best lessons teachers use a wide range of activities, which engage students in their learning. For example, students were highly motivated in a physical education lesson where they worked in small groups developing different tactics to create space in a game situation. They took turns coaching and then used peer assessment to judge the quality of the coaching. Students have an understanding of

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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their targets and many teachers use assessment to plan lessons and to monitor students' progress closely.

Despite many strengths in teaching observed during the inspection, there remain some inconsistencies. Opportunities are sometimes missed to use assessment information to enable students to know what they can do and how to improve. In a few lessons teachers did not plan activities to meet the needs of all students and so learning for a few was restricted.

Since the last inspection, the school has continued to develop the curriculum to ensure it more effectively meets differing needs and aspirations of all groups of students. Students comment very positively about the range of opportunities available to them, both within the curriculum and as extra-curricular activities. There is a good choice of options available, with strengths in physical education and dance through the specialist sports status and in performing arts. Increasing use of cross-curricular topics helps students to link ideas and so extend their learning. Flexibility of the curriculum has increased through early morning sessions in modern foreign languages, information and communication technology (ICT), history and geography.

Students and parents are enthusiastic in their praise of the outstanding care and support provided by the school. Students are known as individuals, and a very strong pastoral structure supports intervention, where necessary, through excellent links with outside agencies. Evidence was seen of the excellent provision made for students who had diverse and challenging needs. Very effective transition arrangements ensure that students who join Year 9 settle into their new school quickly and smoothly. Very strong systems are in place to promote attendance and have resulted in high attendance figures and also drastically reduced the number of persistent absentees.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The drive and enthusiasm of the inspirational headteacher, supported by a very effective senior leadership team, have focused the school on raising standards through creating a culture of high expectations that most staff and students support. The success of this is reflected in the willingness of most staff to improve their practice. The school was quick to identify the reasons for the dip in attainment in 2009 and successfully addressed areas of concern. This has resulted in improved assessment procedures, which are now being used effectively to monitor students' progress and to target students at risk of

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underachieving. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities throughout the school and heads of department are now more accountable for the performance of their subjects. However, there is still some variation in the quality of teaching. Monitoring and evaluation has identified appropriate areas for improvement and suitable training has been put in place to tackle these inconsistencies. However, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching does not always focus on learning and so a few training needs are not identified. The school's sports specialism is well managed and has improved the profile of physical activity, which in turn has significantly raised participation levels both within local schools and the local community

Good engagement of parents is seen in the attendance at school functions, such as parents' evenings, which is improving and now good, and consultation with them on major issues regarding changes to the school. However, the school has recognised that there are a few parents who are more difficult to engage with and is making renewed efforts to reach them. Extensive and highly effective partnerships enhance the school's provision to contribute to the achievement and well-being of students.

The school's promotion of equal opportunities is good, for example, the percentage of students gaining five A* to G grades at GCSE is consistently above national average. The school has embedded strong systems to ensure a good approach to community cohesion. These build on strong links with communities both locally and world-wide, enabling most students to experience communities, which are different from their own. Governors know the school well and provide good support. They are increasingly challenging the school to explain its actions. Safeguarding procedures involve clear record keeping, which is constantly reviewed and closely monitored.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Sixth form

The progress made by students is satisfactory. The school has an open entry policy to the sixth form, which results in broadly average attainment on entry. The students make satisfactory progress so that at the end of Year 13 their A level and BTEC results are in line with national averages. Students demonstrate good teamwork skills and willingly take responsibility for themselves and other students in the school, as when supporting the reading of younger students.

The quality of teaching observed was satisfactory. There were examples of good teaching where students were developing independent learning skills to take responsibility for their learning. Where teaching was satisfactory, students were not encouraged to think for themselves and teachers did not use assessment data to identify the progress being made by different groups of students. The curriculum offers a broad range of courses that meet the needs of students through improving links with other schools and colleges. The curriculum offers students a wide range of enrichment programmes and take-up by students is good. The care, guidance and support of students is a strength. Students said that they feel cared for as individuals and are given good advice in their choices for further and higher education. Satisfactory leadership of the sixth form is providing a focus on improving students' outcomes with the development of clear plans to tackle remaining areas for improvement in teaching and the curriculum.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Few parents responded to the questionnaire, but those who did were highly positive about the education their children received at Vandyke Upper School and Community College. Their views are in line with the judgements made by inspectors, particularly in relation to how well the school keeps students safe and how well the school is led and managed. A minority said that the school does not help them enough to support their children's learning. The inspectors found that the school were aware of this and were making more effort to enable all parents and carers to support their children's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Vandyke 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 96 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 948 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	39	41	52	54	3	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	40	42	55	57	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	44	46	49	51	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	34	55	57	7	7	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	24	25	63	66	7	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	31	54	56	10	10	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	31	53	55	10	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)	35	36	47	49	8	8	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	40	48	50	6	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	33	46	48	10	10	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	30	46	48	13	14	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	48	50	43	45	3	3	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	51	53	42	44	2	2	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.



26 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Vandyke Upper School and Community College, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 3DY

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and talking to you, and were impressed with the maturity with which you answered our questions. Yours is a good school.

These are the main findings of the inspection.

You make good progress so that the standards you reach at the end of Year 11 are in line with the national average. Coupled with your excellent attendance, this means that you are well prepared to move on to further education or training.

You contribute really well to the school and wider community.

The teaching is satisfactory but in many lessons you are well taught and are given opportunities to be involved in interesting activities.

Staff take excellent care to ensure you are looked after well and supported through the school. As a result, you are and feel very safe.

Your headteacher and senior staff are enthusiastic and committed to improving the work of the school so that you are progressing and achieve as well as you can.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements.

Remove remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching by ensuring activities in lessons enable you all to achieve as well as you can.

Refine systems for monitoring the quality of lessons by checking how well you learn in lessons.

Ensure that all sixth form students make better progress. You might help if you tried even harder to develop your literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Whittaker

Lead inspector

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