

Sandy Upper School and Community Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109669
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337349
Inspection dates	8–9 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	832
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Gurney
Headteacher	Mr David Stevinson
Date of previous school inspection	17 October 2006
School address	Engayne Avenue Sandy SG19 1BL
Telephone number	01767 680598
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time observing lessons. The inspectors visited 40 lessons, observed 39 teachers and held meetings with governors, a local authority adviser, 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 received 116 parental questionnaires, 112 student questionnaires and 31 staff questionnaires.

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 satisfactory students' progress
- the quality of teaching and learning, to judge the impact of the school's initiatives to achieve overall good teaching
- the consistency of leadership and management, at all levels, in addressing the need to continue to raise attainment.

Information about the school

Sandy Upper School is a smaller than average comprehensive school with specialist status for sports. Its number on roll declined from 2007 to 2009 but has returned closely to its previous level with the present number of 832. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below national average. 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 special educational needs, is broadly in line with what is found nationally. There have been changes in the school's management structures 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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Sandy Upper is a satisfactory school that has improved in several key areas since the last inspection. The effectiveness of the school's revised management structure has ensured secure improvement. Improvements in the quality of teaching and monitoring of students' progress have led to improved achievement, which is now satisfactory. While standards of attainment at the end of Year 11 were below national averages in 2007, there has been an upward trend from 2007 to the present day. Results are particularly improving at five A* to C GCSE grades and are now broadly average. Students now leave the school much better prepared for the transition to college and other training than previously. The students' performance in mathematics went down slightly in 2008, but swift action taken by senior leaders to rectify weaknesses has put the school back on a firm footing.

Students feel safe and confident as a result of the good levels of care, guidance and support they receive. Arrangements for safeguarding students are comprehensive and rigorously applied. The school treats all students as individuals and makes sure that they are able to make the best of opportunities offered. Extensive partnership arrangements, such as links with feeder schools and local colleges, enhance the achievement and well-being of students.

Despite the significant improvements that have been made, some areas of inconsistency remain. The school has accurately identified these in its self-evaluation and set them as priorities in its improvement plans. There are still some variations in attainment and progress across subjects. This is because, although teaching is satisfactory overall, there remain some inconsistencies in the effectiveness of challenge to ensure that students at all levels achieve as well as they can. In addition, there is a general lack of opportunity for students to develop their independent learning skills through paired and group work. Monitoring and tracking of students' performance are rigorous and involve staff at all levels. The school uses the outcomes appropriately to identify strengths and areas for development. As a result, improvements since the last inspection have been satisfactory, demonstrating satisfactory capacity to improve

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards, so that students achieve at and above national averages for five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics, by increasing the rigour of senior leaders lesson observations and feedback to staff, especially of

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the weaker departments, and holding them to account.

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and better through:
 - using appropriate pace and challenge
 - consistent use of assessment in lessons, including marking, to guide students so that they know what they can do and how to improve
 - increasing the opportunities for students to take responsibility through paired and group work
 - ensuring that the school's behaviour procedures are consistently applied in lessons

About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students join the school with attainment which is broadly in line with national averages. By the time they leave, the majority attain average standards at GCSE. This is because there has been a trend of continuous improvement over the past three years. Secure data for the present Year 11 students suggests that they are on track to achieve above national average for five A* to C grades in all subjects at GCSE. While the 46% of students gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics has also improved, results are still below the national average. However, the tracking data for the present Year 11 students show that they are expected to achieve in line with the national average. Students achieve well in design and technology, physical education, history and business studies.

Students' attitudes to learning and their ability to apply themselves in lessons are satisfactory and in some lessons good. This is reflected in the satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress students make which over time has improved and is now satisfactory. The progress of individual groups of 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 attitudes in their personal development. They show a good understanding of how to be safe, for example, in practical lessons such as design technology, they adopt safe practice in their use of equipment and machinery. 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 opportunities they have to contribute to both the school community and that in which they live. They are effective members of the school and are involved in the wider community, for example, working with local groups in planning activities. Behaviour is satisfactory, both in lessons and around school, and

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the number of exclusions has reduced. The school’s specialist sports status has a positive impact on students’ adoption of the physical activities aspect of healthy lifestyles. However, students do not take enough responsibility for their adoption of a healthy diet.

The attendance figure for the last three years is in line with national average. Students have a satisfactory 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 the Indian and Polish communities. The number of students who progress to employment, further education or training on leaving school at 16 has been increasing steadily.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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 some good teaching in the school which enables students to make good progress in lessons, but this is inconsistent across the school. Where teaching is good, positive relationships between students and teachers are evident, creating a purposeful learning environment. Teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about their subject and transmit their enthusiasm to the students. They use a wide and interesting range of activities, which engage students in their learning. For example, students were highly motivated by a practical activity for developing peer assessment skills through observation of performances in a drama lesson. Students judged the performance against grade boundaries and fed back to the performers. Despite the many strengths in teaching observed during the inspection, there are some features

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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which constrain the progress students make. Opportunities are sometimes missed to promote independent learning. The use of assessment, including marking, is too variable to enable students to know what they can do and how to improve. In a few lessons students’ poor behaviour is not managed well enough by the teacher, and so learning is disrupted. In some lessons there is often too much talking by the teacher and as a result students’ learning is slowed.

Since the last inspection the school has continued to develop the curriculum to ensure it more effectively meets the needs and aspirations of all groups of students. Vocational choices at level 1 and 2 offer students a range of courses to enable them to move on to appropriate pathways post 16. The school enhances its vocational options through close work with partners including a number of local colleges and employers. Specialist sports status is used well to enhance the curriculum, and reinforces the school’s focus on raising standards in teaching and learning. The sports status has had a significant impact on the number of students choosing physical education in Years 10 and 11. Results are above national averages in both GCSE and BTEC. The participation levels in extra-curricular physical activities are high.

Students and their parents are enthusiastic in praise of the good care and support provided by the school, and they are confident that the school is preparing students well for their future. Students are known as individuals, and a very strong pastoral structure supports intervention where necessary. Evidence was seen in the good provision made for students who had diverse and challenging needs. The school has made significant effort to reduce the number of absences and of persistent absentees. Very effective transition arrangements ensure that students who join in Year 9 settle into their new school quickly and smoothly.

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?

The drive and enthusiasm of the very positive headteacher and 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. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities throughout the school and heads of department are held accountable for the performance of their subjects. However, there is still some variation in the performance of departments and the understanding of effective

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teaching and learning is not yet entirely consistent across the school. Self-evaluation has identified appropriate areas for improvement and suitable plans put in place to tackle these inconsistencies. The school’s sports specialism is well managed and used to enhance effective partnerships with local schools and the wider community.

Satisfactory engagement of parents is seen in the attendance at school functions, such as parents’ evenings and consultation with them on major issues regarding changes within the school. Extensive and effective partnerships enhance provision to contribute to the achievement and well-being of students. The specialist sports college status has contributed well to links with feeder schools

The school’s promotion of equal opportunities is good and, for example, all groups of students achieve at a similar rate. The school’s approach to community cohesion is satisfactory because, as it recognises it is at an early stage in forming links with schools, and communities across the United Kingdom and abroad. A knowledgeable and committed chair of governors along with the governors’ school improvement group, is having a significant impact on supporting the school in raising attainment. There is, however, some inconsistency across the governing body in challenging the school to explain outcomes and actions. Safeguarding procedures are robust and involve effective record keeping, which is consistently reviewed and monitored.

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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Sixth form

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is in line with what would be expected for the various courses available to students. Value added has improved and no group of students is underachieving. The progress of students taking GCE AS and A level, applied and BTEC courses is satisfactory. Learning and progress seen in lessons was at least satisfactory and in a few lessons good. This is a clear indication of the improvements taking place in teaching and learning across the school. Students' personal development is satisfactory. Students take responsibility through an effective school council. They are included in decision making and through this influence the direction taken by the school. Students had a significant role in initiating and planning the new all day cafe, which replaced the dining hall. They act as good role models for younger students and support their development as mentors.

The quality of teaching observed was overall satisfactory. There were examples of good teaching where students were developing independent learning skills to take responsibility for their learning. Where teaching is satisfactory students were not encouraged to think for themselves. The curriculum offers a range of courses that meet the needs of students through good links with others schools and colleges. The curriculum offers students some enrichment opportunities such as enterprise and sports leadership courses. The care, guidance and support for students is enhanced by strong links to outside agencies, which help to prepare them for their future after school. 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 learning.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	3
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

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Views of parents and carers

A few parents responded to the questionnaire. Most of those who did were highly positive about the education their children receive at Sandy Upper School. However, a few said that the progress made by students is not good enough and were concerned about disruptive behaviour, by a few students, in some lessons. Their views support the judgements made by inspectors, particularly in relation to how well the school keeps students safe.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sandy Upper School and Community Sports 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 116 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 832 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	37	31	67	57	9	8	4	3
The school keeps my child safe	31	26	78	66	2	2	3	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	37	31	66	56	13	11	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	23	65	55	21	18	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	19	16	77	65	14	12	6	5
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	14	72	61	18	15	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	17	74	63	15	13	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	31	62	53	14	12	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	20	72	61	14	12	5	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	20	65	55	17	14	7	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	14	68	58	14	12	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	32	27	70	59	8	7	3	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	31	63	53	12	10	5	4

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 all 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 pupils' 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.



Wednesday 10 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Sandy Upper School and Community Sports College, Sandy, SG19 1BL

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 satisfactory and improving school.

These are the main findings of the inspection:

- The standards you reach at the end of Year 11 have improved and are now average. This means you are better prepared to move on to further education or training.
- You contribute to the school and wider community well
- The teaching is satisfactory and you are given opportunities to be involved in interesting activities.
- Staff take good care to ensure you are looked after well and supported through the school. As a result you are and feel safe.
- Your headteacher and senior staff are enthusiastic and committed to improving the work of the school so that most of you are progressing to achieve as well as you can.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements:

- Raise standards so you achieve at and above national averages through improving the quality of learning in lessons.
- Make sure that your teachers enable you all to learn as well as you can and to know what you can do and how to improve. We would also like to see you working more often on activities, which help you to develop independent learning skills.

We wish you every success in the future and hope you fulfil your ambitions.

Yours sincerely
Roger Whittaker
Lead inspector

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