

Sharples School Science Specialist College

Hill Cot Road, Sharples, Bolton, Lancashire, BL1 8SN

Inspection dates 10–11 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students continue to achieve well. All groups of students make good progress and standards in English and mathematics are above average by the end of Year 11. The gap between the attainment of students with learning difficulties and others is closing rapidly and more than halved in 2013. In addition, students supported by the pupil premium exceed the progress expected of them. Progress in science is particularly impressive and standards are high in this subject-area.
- Teaching is good and, on occasions, outstanding. Teachers have secure knowledge of their subjects, treat their students with dignity and respect and are always willing to share good and exemplary classroom practice with their colleagues across the school. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are a major strength.
- Students show immense pride in their school and comment, 'Everyone is equal here and we all look after each other.' They behave well in lessons and around the school site and show the utmost courtesy to visitors. Relationships between students and between students and their teachers are strong and based on mutual respect. The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development outstandingly well: students' display an exceptional generosity of spirit.
- Leadership and management at all levels are good and the school continues to improve as a result. Senior staff lead by example and academic and pastoral leaders are proactive in improving the areas for which they responsible. The governing body has an accurate understanding of performance in all areas of the school's life and holds senior leaders and heads of departments to account with rigour.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Challenge in lessons is sometimes inconsistent and students, in particular the most able, are not always required to find things out for themselves. Some marking does not give students enough advice on how to improve.
- Although improving, attendance is only average. Attendance targets have not been high enough. It is also too early to see the full impact of the newly established monitoring systems designed to raise attendance at a more rapid rate.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 37 lessons or part-lessons taught by 36 teachers. Four lesson observations were undertaken jointly with senior members of staff. Inspectors also visited a whole-school assembly and heard the school's senior vocal quartet sing.
- They met with four groups of students, including members of the school council. They also had meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. They had discussions with heads of academic departments, pastoral leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the school site manager, leaders with responsibility for developing the impact of specialist status and the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors met with the School Improvement Partner and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 20 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of internal school questionnaires designed to elicit the views of parents. They also spoke to two groups of parents on the second day of the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the school at work and looked at students' files and exercise books during lessons, internal and external student attainment and progress data, school development planning and the school's procedures to help it gain an accurate view of its performance. They also considered case studies of students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable and documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

James Kidd, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Osama Abdul Rahim	Additional Inspector
Kathleen Yates	Additional Inspector
Mary Liptrot	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. There are more boys than girls.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above that usually found.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (additional funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals, those from service families and those looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- Nearly half the student population are from minority ethnic heritages, with the largest proportion from the Indian sub-continent. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is three times the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Sharples School has been a specialist science college since 2004 and holds the Cultural Diversity Gold Quality Standard and the Leading Parent Partnership Award. It is a nationally accredited Healthy School and has the Football Association Charter Standard.
- A unit for the hearing impaired and a very small unit for visually impaired students are integrated within the school and many of these students attend mainstream classes. These units are not administered by the school's governing body. The school does not use any alternative provision.
- There have been several staff changes since the previous inspection, including the appointment of a new headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to accelerate students' progress and raise their attainment by:
 - ensuring the challenge in lessons, particularly for the most able, is consistently high enough and gives them more opportunities to find things out for themselves
 - ensuring that marking within and across subject departments always informs students of what they need to do to improve and thus to reach at least their minimum target grades.
- Improve the attendance of those students who do not always come to school as often as they should by:
 - increasing the attendance targets for all students
 - making the most effective use of the newly-established systems to monitor and improve attendance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Although there are variations from year to year, students generally enter the school with broadly average levels of prior attainment. All groups of students, including those from minority ethnic heritages, make good progress in their studies and reach above-average standards in English and mathematics by the time they leave. The proportion of students making and exceeding the progress expected of them compares favourably with the national picture. Achievement is, therefore, good. Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire are entirely satisfied with the progress their sons and daughters are making.
- The impact of the science specialism has a strong impact on attainment and progress in individual science subjects, in general science schemes and in vocational science programmes. Attainment is high overall and many students make outstanding progress in this area.
- The school enters students early for GCSE examinations, but only when teachers believe they are ready to reach their target grades. Students are re-entered for the examinations if they do not do as well as they should and if their progress is not as expected.
- Although some of the most-able students do not reach the standards of which they are capable, this is not the case in all subjects of the curriculum. In mathematics, for example, in the 2013 GCSE examinations, an above-average percentage of students reached grades A or A* and this was a marked increase on the 2012 figures. Similarly, nearly half of the students attain at the highest grades in religious studies and nearly a third in technology.
- As a result of the effective use of a wide range of strategies resourced by pupil-premium funding, one-to-one teaching and small group tuition for example, students known to be eligible for free school meals achieve well and at higher levels than seen both locally and nationally. The gap between the attainment of these students and the attainment of their peers has reduced by 12% in a one-year period. In the vast majority of lessons observed during the inspection, students supported by the pupil premium progressed every bit as well as other students and, on occasions, made even more progress than their classmates.
- There is a similar picture in relation to disabled students and those with special educational needs, including the hearing and visually impaired. The progress of these students has accelerated since 2011 and the gap between their attainment and the attainment of others in the school has closed considerably. In the 2013 GCSE examinations, for example, the gap closed to 25.1%, with the gap nationally at 47%. In other words, a much greater proportion of students with learning difficulties reach five grades A* to C including English and mathematics than that seen both locally and nationally.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching of all groups of students, including the hearing and visually impaired, is good and there are examples of outstanding teaching in both key stages. No inadequate teaching was seen during the inspection and in almost three-quarters of lessons, teaching was judged to be good or better.
- Teaching assistants support disabled students and those with special educational needs well and these students are fully integrated into all activities and make the same good progress as their peers as a result. All parents who completed the online questionnaire believe that their children are taught well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and they also use humour and praise well in class to ensure that students are engaged in their studies. As a result relationships in the classroom are harmonious and students are enthused and display positive attitudes to learning.
- In the best lessons, a Year 11 religious studies lesson in which teaching was graded outstanding for example, students were challenged from the moment they entered the classroom. In this lesson, students were immediately exposed to a menacing poster on the evils of racism and

worked in groups to answer the question, 'Why is racism sometimes difficult to identify?' By the end of the lesson, students' evaluations of a range of moral opinions would not have gone amiss in a sixth-form session.

- Similarly, in a Year 9 physical education lesson, students took increasing responsibility for their own learning and devised a range of activities to sharpen their skills in netball. Students led individual sessions and were able to evaluate their performance and progress with accuracy.
- Students are given many opportunities to work in pairs and in groups and to act as extra learning resources for each other. They therefore develop independent learning skills and do not rely purely on the teacher to ensure they make progress.
- The school recognises, however, that this challenge for students, particularly the most able, to find things out for themselves is not consistent across all subjects and, on occasions, students would benefit from being given more opportunity to research and work independently.
- The on-going assessment of students' progress in the classroom is good and teachers are never afraid to modify their methods and approach if they believe that progress is not rapid enough. However, the quality of marking within departments and across the school, although good overall, does not always provide students with sufficient advice on how they can improve and at least reach their minimum target grades.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- There are several outstanding aspects of students' personal development, but because attendance is only average, behaviour and safety are judged to be good overall.
- Students are very proud of their school and feel safe within its walls. In their words, 'The staff are supportive and there is a real sense of community in our school.' Mutual respect between students and between students and staff is there for all to see. Students say that the school is racially harmonious, that racism does not exist and that bullying, including physical bullying and homophobia is extremely rare.
- Students value the school code of conduct 'Courtesy, Cooperation, Consideration and Common Sense' and enter the school in the morning with smiles on their faces, looking forward to the day ahead. Older students support younger ones as 'reading buddies' and 'language ambassadors' and they often visit Year 7 classes to help students with their French and Spanish.
- Students behave well and, on occasions outstandingly well, in lessons and at breaks and lunchtimes. They are courteous to visitors and are delighted to show them around their school. They have a high regard for their teachers who, they say, 'Are always there for us and try to raise our aspirations about what we can achieve.'
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. Students have a keen sense of right and wrong, take the lead in supporting a wide range of charities, take part in a variety of cultural and multicultural activities in school and in the local community and get on very well with each other. Drama and music productions are a strength and the singing of the senior vocal quartet is a joy to hear.
- Parents have the highest regard for how the school supports disabled students and those with special educational needs. They say that staff are more than willing to modify the curriculum, for students with dyslexia for example, to make sure that their children can continue to make progress. In addition, they are grateful for the work the school does to ensure that students with physical disabilities, sometimes wheelchair-bound, hearing or visually impaired, can take advantage of everything on offer. As one parent commented, 'This school does everything it can to make sure that our children are happy and that they enjoy school life to the full.'
- Although the proportion of students who are persistently absent has reduced, there are still too many who do not come to school as often as they should and targets for attendance are still not high enough. The recently introduced strategies for monitoring attendance are beginning to provide positive outcomes, but it is too early to see their full impact.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and the talented and well-informed senior team lead by example and are regarded highly by middle leaders and other staff, who comment, 'We are both challenged and supported in everything we do.'
- The school's view of its own performance is both accurate and honest and leaders recognise that leadership and management are not outstanding because, on occasions, the most able are not always challenged well enough to reach the standards of which they are capable and that attendance, although average, is not yet improving as fast as it should.
- The leadership and management of teaching is a strength of the school and have ensured that classroom practice has improved markedly since the previous inspection. Heads of academic departments receive training in lesson observation and there is a comprehensive staff development programme, including the sharing of good practice, in which sessions are often delivered internally and which has the well-being, both academic and social, of each individual student at its core.
- The leadership and management of the science specialism are also strong. The impact of specialist status can be seen, for example, in the variety of community events in which parents and other members of the public monitor scientific experiments.
- The curriculum provides a good balance between academic and vocational programmes and has been enhanced by the introduction of astronomy. Physical education and sport loom large and the school has a well-deserved reputation in the community for its involvement and success in team games. Students' physical well-being is good.
- Performance appraisal is, in the words of teachers, 'Fair and honest, based on all the evidence available and gives us so many opportunities to reflect on our responsibilities and on how we can improve our practice as teachers and as leaders.'
- The school promotes equality of opportunity well and this is reflected in the good progress of all groups of students. Discrimination in all its forms is rejected. In addition, students receive good support and guidance about the next steps open to them after they leave school. Safeguarding and child-protection procedures fully meet current requirements and students with physical difficulties receive excellent support.
- The local authority supports the school well and the School Improvement Partner is a regular visitor to the school and offers advice on leadership and management and how the school can judge its performance accurately.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body are actively involved in ensuring that the school continues to improve. They have a secure understanding of how well the school is doing and ask challenging questions of the senior leadership about performance in all aspects of the school's life. Heads of academic departments value the links they have with governors and feel that they are held to account in relation to the progress of students in their charge.
 - Governors have a keen understanding of how the leadership tries to improve the quality of teaching and learning and they monitor the impact of the pupil-premium funding closely. They oversee performance-appraisal arrangements and sanction salary progression only when teachers meet their classroom targets for students' progress.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105259
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	426328

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	850
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Wild
Headteacher	Rachel Quesnel
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2011
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