

Shaftesbury School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113889
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	311421
Inspection dates	12–13 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Nick Green HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1003
6th form	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Brickell
Headteacher	David Booth
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2003
School address	Salisbury Road Shaftesbury SP7 8ER
Telephone number	01747 854498
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is average in size. It is a specialist sports college and the only maintained school in Dorset offering boarding education. It operates a joint post-16 partnership with Sturminster Newton High School. Most students are of White British heritage from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Around 10% come from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the international composition of the boarders. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is around half the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. The school holds the International Schools award, Sportsmark gold and Healthy Schools status, as well as a Youth Sports Trust innovation award for internationalism.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school states that its mission is to empower every individual who participates in its community to realise his/her aspirations. In many respects, it is well on the way to achieving this. The quality of the education provided by the school and its sixth form is good, with outstanding features. Pervading its ethos are the values of its Christian Foundation, the ideals of the Olympic movement and the spirit of internationalism. All these features are evident in the way in which staff and students show respect and care for each other, in the significant impact of the school's specialist sports status and in the many links it has with international partners.

Standards at the end of Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 have been above average and rising for several years. In relation to students' starting points when they enter the school or the sixth form, their progress and achievement are good. No group of students underperforms. Boys make better progress than is found nationally and the progress and achievement of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. There is still room for girls and the most able students to perform even better, particularly in English in Year 9 and science in Year 11 and the school is introducing well-devised initiatives to help them to do this.

The school's success owes a lot to the good leadership and management of the headteacher and the senior leadership group whose clear vision and direction have set high expectations for staff and students. Underpinning this is the school's use of the University of Boston's Global Institute of Student Aspiration's conditions for raising students' aspirations. These include creating a sense of belonging, developing role models, promoting a sense of accomplishment, encouraging the spirit of adventure and promoting leadership and responsibility. All of these are reflected in the school's effective pastoral house system, which does much to contribute to students' good personal development and well-being and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's celebration of the cultural diversity of its students also contributes considerably to racial harmony. Teaching and learning, the curriculum, and care, guidance and support are good. For the most vulnerable and for those with learning difficulties, they are outstanding. Most lessons are planned carefully and taught effectively, using a range of methods, although the more able students are not always challenged sufficiently. The school's curriculum meets students' needs and capabilities well but is not always sufficiently demanding for gifted and talented students. Participation rates are high in the wide variety of sports and other activities the school provides which make a valuable contribution to students' enjoyment and achievement. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are secure. Academic progress is monitored well and challenging targets are regularly set and reviewed with students. However, the quality of marking and feedback on how to improve their work is not consistently good. The school works highly effectively with others to promote learners' well-being. Excellent features of this are the work with outside agencies and the sixth form partnership.

Key areas for improvement noted in the last inspection report have been tackled successfully. The school's accurate, high-quality self-evaluation effectively identifies the school's current strong performance and its priorities for development, which clearly shows that it has good capacity for further growth and improvement. The overwhelming majority of parents are supportive of the school and are complimentary about the way it is led and managed. As one parent wrote to inspectors, it is a school 'where children are allowed to flourish and be individuals'.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The success of the sixth form is reflected in the high number of Year 11 students who choose to stay at the school for their post-16 education. Standards are above average and students make good progress. Their personal development is good and they very much enjoy their education, identifying especially the quality of care and support they receive. Engagement in extra-curricular activities is high, notably in sport, and many qualify as community sports leaders. Other responsibilities are undertaken willingly, for example as house captains, as mentors to younger students and organising charity fundraising events.

Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. This contributes to the good quality of teaching and learning and reflects the emphasis placed by the school on developing students' independence and initiative. The strong and well-managed partnership with Sturminster Newton High School enables a wide range of curriculum choices that meet the aspirations and preferences of all students. However, while a suitable range of vocational options is offered, take-up is low and the profile of such courses is underdeveloped. The sixth form is led and managed well. Assessment data is carefully analysed; academic guidance for students is effective and ensures they are aware of how well they are doing and how to improve.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The last full inspection of boarding welfare and subsequent monitoring visits by the Commission for Social Care Inspection reported that the school had met the great majority of the national minimum standards. After the last visit, only a few minor issues raised still remained, relating to refurbishment of some facilities in the boarding house. Since then, one of these issues has been addressed and two remain.

Provision for boarders clearly enhances their personal development. Students report they are cared for well, both in the boarding house and in the main school and sixth form. Good attention is paid to meeting their individual needs and they integrate well with other students. Care staff and teachers work collaboratively to foster pupils' enjoyment and achievement. There is a good range of out-of-school hours activities, including involvement in the local community. Child protection arrangements meet requirements and boarders say they feel safe and that no bullying occurs. They speak positively about the supportive 'family' atmosphere in the boarding house, which, as one boarder said, creates a 'home from home'.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that the quality of marking and the effectiveness of advice given to students on how to improve are raised to that of the best
- provide more challenge in teaching and learning and through the curriculum for the most able and gifted students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards in Year 9 at the end of the last academic year were above average and particularly high in science. There has been a steady upward trend in results over the last five years. Given the starting points of the students when they joined the school, their progress and achievement were good. The school's monitoring data indicate that students' current standards are similarly above average and have improved in English. This is due to the effective teaching and academic guidance they receive. Boys and girls perform similarly, although boys make better progress. No group of students in Years 7 to 9 underperforms.

Whilst the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades in their GCSE last year was a little below the national figure, the standards attained by students in their best eight GCSE and equivalent examinations were above average. Students' attainment in art and design, English, geography and modern foreign languages was well above average. From their starting points when they entered the school, students' progress and achievement were good, particularly in mathematics, and particularly for boys. The progress and achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were outstanding, reflecting the highly effective support and guidance they receive. The current progress of all groups of students in Year 11 is good, indicating they are on track to achieve at least as well as students last year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are proud of their school. Behaviour is good, attitudes to learning are positive and students listen carefully and sustain concentration in lessons. The house system and mixed-age tutor groups engender a strong school community spirit. As one parent wrote, 'there is an excellent ethos - all students seem happy, and want very much to succeed'. Students feel safe and have a good understanding of the importance of keeping themselves safe. Incidents of bullying are rare though some low-level disruption is reported in a minority of lessons.

Relationships, including racial harmony, are a strength of the school. Students say that the school is a friendly place and they value the cultural diversity that the boarding provision brings to the school. Many make a strong contribution to the wider community, for example through becoming sports leaders and organising trips for students from a local special school. Although members of the Student Aspirations Team are working hard to improve school life, the group is not yet a fully effective voice for the whole school community.

The sports college status has a significant positive impact on students' knowledge of keeping healthy. Their level of participation in physical activity is very high and they have a clear understanding of issues such as smoking, alcohol and sexual health. Students take advantage of the healthy options in the canteen and the availability of water throughout the day. All students develop secure skills for their future economic well-being, through their acquisition of good basic skills and engagement in work-related learning and enterprise activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers plan lessons well, set high expectations of students, use a variety of effective teaching and learning methods, and provide good individual coaching and encouragement. Students are given opportunities to work independently and to think for themselves, stimulated by lively questioning, which helps them to consolidate and extend their knowledge. In numerous notes written to inspectors, parents commented favourably on teachers, with one, for example, praising 'the dedicated, enthusiastic and professional staff'. Sometimes, in the minority of less effective lessons, the pace of work is too undemanding, or activities are not adjusted to provide suitable challenge for more able students, or low-level disruptive behaviour is not managed effectively.

A very thorough system to track and give feedback on students' individual progress helps to set them ambitious targets. This is supplemented by recent developments to help them understand their own learning by assessing each other. However, the quality of marking and the effectiveness of the advice they are given on how to improve is not consistent across the staff team. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from a rigorous assessment of their needs, excellent teaching and outstanding support and intervention from a skilful team of additional staff in classrooms.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's broad and balanced curriculum meets the needs of learners well and underpins their good progress. The school's specialist status in sport has not only improved the quality of physical education provision but is initiating beneficial links across subjects. For example, a Year 9 mathematics project on planning sports facilities and measuring performance is extending students' interest in solving mathematical problems and interpreting data. The curriculum for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. It is not as effective for gifted and talented students as it does not always make enough demands on them.

Students are well prepared for their future life through work experience and access to a wide range of vocational courses that reflect employment opportunities in the changing local economy. They receive suitable guidance on personal, social and health issues within a well-developed programme, which is also informed by valuable contributions from specialist agencies such as the police and health services. The school provides students with a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, with numerous opportunities to play team sports, or follow individualised fitness programmes, for example in the school's extremely popular 'Technogym'. There is also a high participation rate in other activities, including the school's major musical productions, its homework club, writers' workshop and computer club.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Staff show high levels of care and concern for all students and each is valued and respected. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive excellent support, both in the classroom and through intervention programmes. The targets in their individual education plans are closely monitored and reviewed, and in lessons, teaching assistants are particularly skilled at adapting tasks to provide the right level of challenge for each student. This is exemplified by one parent's praise for the 'care and attention shown by staff to each individual student and willingness to address their individual needs'. As a result, these students make outstanding progress. Suitably challenging targets and guidance are provided in some instances for gifted and talented students, although this good practice is not consistently employed throughout the school. Staff have a very good understanding of the needs of vulnerable students and have established excellent links with external agencies.

Very good procedures help new students settle into the school, both those who transfer from primary school and those who join from overseas. Effective links exist between care staff and teachers to foster boarders' personal development and well-being. Procedures to safeguard students meet requirements and the school pays good attention to students' health and safety. Behaviour management is effective; rewards and sanctions are used consistently. Robust systems promote good attendance and the school swiftly follows up absences causing concern. The academic guidance students receive is generally good; most students are aware of their current and target grades but their understanding of what they need to do to improve is more variable. The school provides good advice and guidance in relation to curriculum choices and progression to further education or employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher provides very clear vision and strong direction for the school. He clearly analyses the school's performance and successfully implements strategies that have successfully promoted good quality care and education over recent years. In conjunction with the highly effective senior leadership group and a strong team of middle managers, he has created a common sense of purpose among staff, which underpins the school's drive to improve. This has been effective in raising students' achievement and strengthening the care, guidance and the support provided for all students.

Thorough procedures, including systematic observation of all teachers' lessons, are used to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and learning, and have enabled the school to meet many of the challenging targets it sets itself. Performance data are used very well to track the progress of students, to identify those who are underachieving and to prompt intervention to improve their performance. The school's self-evaluation takes very good account of a wide range of views and makes accurate judgements on its performance. These are used well to inform the strategic direction of the school and to develop suitable action to bring about improvements.

The school's leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity and tackle any discrimination well. They have created an ethos of inclusion that has enabled all students to flourish, particularly those with learning difficulties and those from abroad. The school's resources are deployed well. Accommodation and facilities have improved significantly since the last inspection and the challenges of a restricted budget are managed very effectively. Governors discharge their responsibilities proficiently and hold the school's leaders and managers suitably to account for the school's performance while providing valuable support.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Shaftesbury School, Shaftesbury, SP7 8ER

Thank you for the help you provided the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting members of year groups and boarders and we learned a great deal from our discussions with many of you in lessons and around the school.

Your school is well on the way to achieving its mission to help you to realise your aspirations. The quality of education and boarding provided by the school and its sixth form are good, with outstanding features. The standards attained in national test and examinations last year were above average and students made good progress from the time they entered the school. At the end of Year 11, students who had learning difficulties made outstanding progress. Your current progress is good and you are on track to attain similar standards and achieve well. There is still room for girls and the most able students to perform better and the school is introducing well-devised initiatives to help them to do this. Your teachers plan well and use effective strategies to help you learn, although the quality of marking and the feedback you receive is not consistently good and the most able students are not always challenged sufficiently.

Your personal development and well-being are good; you say you enjoy school and feel safe in the calm, orderly atmosphere that exists around the school. We clearly saw the pride you show in your roles as members of the Student Aspirations Team, as sports leaders and as sixth form mentors to younger students. The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive is good, and is outstanding for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The curriculum you receive meets your needs and capabilities well, but could be more demanding for the most gifted and talented students. The variety of activities arising from the school's sports specialist status and other extra-curricular activities have a significant beneficial impact on many aspects of your school life.

The clear vision, strong direction, and effective leadership and management of the headteacher and senior teachers underpin the school's success. In order to improve further, we have asked the school to ensure that the quality of marking and the effectiveness of advice given to you on how to improve are raised to that of the best. In addition, we have asked staff to provide more challenge in teaching and learning and in the curriculum for the most able and gifted students. You can really help by striving to do your very best in tests and examinations.

Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green Her Majesty's Inspector

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