

Sheffield Park Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131895
Local Authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	334534
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Susan Bowles HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1183
Sixth form	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gordon Bridge
Principal	Mrs Kath Turner
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	Beaumont Close Sheffield South Yorkshire S2 1RY
Telephone number	0114 2392661
Fax number	0114 2654616

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The academy opened in September 2006 in the buildings of the predecessor school, prior to moving into new buildings in February 2008. In September 2007, it opened a sixth form in collaboration with Sheffield Springs Academy. Both academies are sponsored by United Learning Trust (ULT) and they have many structures and systems in common. Since opening in 2006, the overall responsibility for strategic leadership of both the ULT Sheffield Academies has been through an Executive Director. He is now on long-term sick leave and the role is being fulfilled on an acting basis by the ULT Executive Director of School Improvement. The academies share the director of studies, who is responsible for the collaborative sixth form, and the data manager. There is a single governing body for both academies.

The academy serves a community that experiences severe social and economic disadvantage and has little tradition of further and higher education. A well-above average proportion of students, 39%, have free school meals and 82% of sixth-form students are eligible for the educational maintenance allowance. A high proportion of students are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities; at 42%, this is double the national average. The proportion of students who have statements of special educational need is below average. The proportion of students of minority ethnic heritage or who speak English as an additional language is above average at 37%. Of these, most have a Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage and there are smaller groups from a variety of backgrounds. Many students join the academy from primary schools that are predominantly either White British or Asian.

The academy's specialism is business and enterprise. It recently won an Excellence in Enterprise Award from Warwick University Centre for Economics and Industry. It is also designated as a school of religious character, with broadly Christian values but welcoming young people of all faiths and none. The academy received the Healthy Schools Award in 2007, and was awarded the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Certificate for School Improvement at GCSE in 2008. The academy receives support through the National Challenge programme for schools whose GCSE results are below the Government's 'floor target' of 30% A* to C grades including English and mathematics.

As part of the routine monitoring of all new academies, Sheffield Park was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors in June 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this academy requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the academy are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Although some improvements have been made over the past year, for example in students' attendance and attainment, the impetus for improvement has been hindered by significant weaknesses in strategic leadership. This includes the breakdown of relationships at a senior level. The academy's lines of accountability are insufficiently robust and this has resulted in a failure to tackle key problems effectively. The current leadership structure places too many demands on too few key leaders and they are unable to provide the necessary capacity to improve. As a consequence, plans to address priorities lack sharp focus and the outcomes of monitoring are not used strategically to drive progress on the academy's improvement. The academy's leaders have not sufficiently secured the commitment of students, or ensured that their personal development provides a secure basis for their academic achievement and progress. Governors are supportive of the academy, but they have only recently become aware of the extent and significance of some weaknesses. They have not held it to account well enough.

While standards have risen, they remain well below average. Too many students, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make insufficient progress given their starting points. A significant minority of those who experience difficulties with learning lost ground during the last year. Students do not all achieve as well as they should because the quality of teaching and learning is inadequate. Teaching does not take sufficient account of students' individual needs and capabilities, and expectations of what students can achieve are too low. Assessment information about students' performance lacks the necessary detail to help teachers tailor their lesson planning to cater for different groups of learners. For example, weaknesses in students' basic skills, especially their speaking, listening and writing, are not tackled consistently and act as an obstacle to their learning and progress. Low-level disruption in lessons is too frequent and, overall, behaviour is inadequate. Although the academy has reduced the rates of exclusion, a disproportionate number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are excluded. Attendance, although improved, is well below average. Poor behaviour and attendance and weaknesses in students' preparation for their future economic well-being are key reasons why students' personal development is inadequate.

The curriculum has benefited from the introduction of vocational courses. A concerted focus on improving older students' performance in English and mathematics, supported by the National Challenge initiative, has had a positive impact on the standards and achievement of targeted groups of students in Key Stage 4. The successful start made by the school's sixth form has done much to raise aspirations. Effective day-to-day management ensures that the academy operates smoothly and that students' welfare comes first. Nonetheless, students from different backgrounds do not mix well. Parents' views on the academy are mixed: many feel positive, but have justifiable concerns about behaviour. These are echoed by students, who generally feel safe and supported, but do not express high regard for the academy.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form's first ever modular results for Business and Technology Council (BTEC) diploma courses in 2009 demonstrate good achievement and improving standards. For example, all students passed the BTEC Business National course and will progress to university; two will read Law at Sheffield University. Results at GCE AS level are, however, more variable. Consequently, overall achievement and standards are satisfactory with positive elements. Courses are also offered at GCSE level and below with a growing number of students progressing to qualifications of increasing difficulty. The curriculum offers a broad range of courses at the customary level 3 for sixth forms with BTEC vocational provision in six curriculum areas and 19 courses at GCE AS and A level. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory with good teaching observed in French. Pastoral care, support and guidance are strengths of the sixth form, with particularly strong provision for mentoring students that includes good links with parents. Effective additional learning support enhances a culture based on improvement and success. Students feel confident in their teachers and relationships are good. There are effective links with local universities that support the strong focus on improving progression to higher education. The leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. However, opportunities to share good practice and further develop specific skills for teaching at level 3 are missed. Systems for monitoring and tracking students' progress are insufficiently robust to refine and further develop intervention strategies to aid improvement. There are limited opportunities for sixth formers to act as role models and mentors for students in Key Stages 3 and 4.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Increase students' rates of progress in order to raise standards overall and improve their basic skills.
- Enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make the progress of which they are capable both academically and in their personal development.
- Ensure lessons offer effective challenge and support for students' different needs by making rigorous use of assessment information.
- Improve behaviour, attendance and relationships through more effective support and guidance.
- Build the capacity of the academy to improve by:
 - putting in place an effective structure for leading and managing at all levels
 - sharpening the focus of monitoring and making better use of the information derived from it to secure a consistent drive for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students join the academy having attained results at primary school that were well below average. Many students have weak basic skills, particularly in literacy. Results in the 2008 national Key Stage 3 tests were low in English, mathematics and science. Teachers' most recent assessments for current Year 9 students show improvement in all three subjects but too many students, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, do not make the progress that they should.

Standards attained by students in GCSE examinations in 2008 remained far below average. While 41% of the students gained five or more A* to C grades, only 22% included English and

mathematics in their five good passes, which is well short of the Government's 'floor target' of 30%. Nearly a quarter failed to attain five GCSE passes at grades A* to G and 7% gained no qualifications at all. The additional support received through the National Challenge initiative has led to a rigorous focus on raising standards in English and mathematics in Year 11 during the past year. The academy's data indicate that in 2009, results will improve against key indicators including five good GCSE or equivalent qualifications with English and mathematics. Nonetheless, standards are currently too variable between subjects.

In 2008 too many students in Year 11, mainly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who receive additional support, made insufficient progress given their attainment at the end of primary school. The academy recognises that the achievement of this substantial group of students remains unsatisfactory in both key stages. Most of these students are boys and a disproportionate number are of White British heritage. Their progress is weak because information from assessments is not used rigorously to target planning of lessons so that progress accelerates over time. The progress of students was inadequate in approximately a fifth of the lessons seen during the inspection. Despite the academy's emphasis on developing literacy through all subjects, standards of speaking, listening and writing are low, and this remains a significant barrier to successful learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is inadequate. Although many students behave well and have positive attitudes, behaviour is inadequate overall. This is because too many lessons are disturbed by low-level disruption and in some lessons students refuse to do as they are told. Around the site students do not always show consideration for others. Students say that there is little bullying and any incidents which do occur are generally tackled promptly and to their satisfaction. Most students say that they feel safe in the academy and that they have satisfactory relationships with their peers and older students. However, although students from different social groups and ethnicities co-exist relatively amicably, student groupings are mainly based on ethnicity and there are very few mixed groups in lessons or at social times. The proportion of students excluded from the academy has declined significantly this year. However, although fewer students are excluded from lessons or from the academy, a very high proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities fall into this category.

Although attendance has improved it remains well below the national average. The proportion of students who are persistent non-attenders has declined significantly but remains well above average. Students learn to live healthy lifestyles and school meals are nutritious and appetising. Younger students appreciate the fruit they are given at break times. Students make an adequate contribution to school life but not enough have yet developed a loyalty to the academy or a sense of belonging. They reported that they do not always enjoy their education. Some of the most hard working and well behaved students do not feel that their achievements are appreciated. More students are choosing to join the sixth form, but in general, students are not well enough prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is too variable and does not meet the needs of all students. Although leaders have worked hard to secure improvement, teaching is not consistently good enough to raise standards and close the gaps in performance between different groups of learners.

Although planning follows a common format, assessment information is not used routinely as a starting point from which to tailor activities to meet the needs of different groups of students. Consequently, in the same lesson, some students may struggle with their work while others find it too easy. Lessons are too often dominated by teacher-talk and tasks lack variety. At times, opportunities are missed to adapt activities so that students are engaged more actively in their own learning. The use of modern technologies to engage students more actively is an improving feature of lessons. However, the impact on learning is sometimes limited because teachers do not use questioning to establish how students have reached an answer or to overcome common misconceptions.

The behaviour of a small but significant minority of students disrupts learning in lessons that fail to inspire, and at times goes unchallenged. Where poor behaviour is not managed effectively, students' progress is limited and their attitudes to learning deteriorate. Samples of work scrutinised during the inspection showed that expectations of what students can achieve are often too low and this hinders their progress. Work seen was frequently poorly presented or incomplete and, although there were some examples of good practice, marking was generally brief and did not provide suitable targets to help students improve.

Learning is most effective where teachers have high expectations and where a variety of activities challenge and motivate students to take responsibility for their learning. Good questioning helps to extend students' thinking and understanding of new ideas.

Teachers are committed to improving their practice and value the wide range of professional development opportunities available to them. The learning and teaching group provides a popular forum for sharing good practice. The coaching programme is appreciated by individual staff seeking improvement in specific aspects of their practice. The academy's plans include many suitable initiatives to improve teaching and learning, some of which have been introduced although not embedded. The academy recognises that as the impact of training and support has not been fully evaluated, it has been difficult for staff to prioritise the next best steps to improve their practice and thus to accelerate students' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of students overall. The extension of BTEC courses in Year 9 and, in particular, the opportunity for all students to take the BTEC Business First course, are beginning to have a positive impact on achievement and students' engagement in learning. Students currently in Year 11 have the opportunity to develop work-related skills through placement with training providers and time in a local college to study construction, engineering and motor vehicle maintenance. The academy recognises the need to improve provision in Years 7 and 8 with the development of a curriculum focused more sharply on improving pupils' basic

skills. Students' skills in literacy and in talking about their learning are underdeveloped and insufficient progress is made across both key stages. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities including excursions, foreign trips and sports activities.

The specialism in business and enterprise is increasingly promoted through the development of external links, and a growing portfolio of events and curriculum initiatives such as the introduction of BTEC First at Key Stage 3. However, its impact on promoting better teaching and learning and an energetic culture of enterprise within the rest of the curriculum and across the academy remains at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Staff are committed to students' well-being. Safeguarding procedures are thorough. The care provided for the most vulnerable students is satisfactory and the academy has effective partnerships with other agencies. However, strategies to promote students' social and economic well-being and equality are inadequate. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not always achieve as well as their peers and they are excluded from or persistently absent from school more frequently than other groups. The support provided for this group of students and others at risk of disaffection is not effective enough and, as a result, too many students do not make the most of their education. Across the age range, academic guidance is not well enough informed by the assessment data held by the academy. Students do not progress well enough because teachers do not expect enough of them and do not give them well-targeted feedback which would help them improve their work and eradicate weaknesses. They do not develop effective working habits or build upon previous knowledge and skills.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Overall, leadership and management are inadequate. Standards are beginning to rise, but the academy recognises that they are not as high as they need to be and accepts that the rate of improvement has been hampered by significant failings in leadership at the most senior level. Priorities identified during the monitoring visit in June 2008 have not been addressed adequately, and this can be traced to a structure for leadership and management which has not effectively enabled improvement. Governance is inadequate. The governing body has recognised its failure to ensure that the academy implemented all its statutory duties, such as the performance management of senior staff. Governors have only recently become aware of important weaknesses, and how to use key information about the academy's performance to hold leaders to account. Important steps have now been taken to strengthen the effectiveness of governance. Recently, the sponsors have taken appropriate measures to support the academy, although it is too soon for the impact of these to be evident.

The headteacher and senior staff demonstrate tireless commitment to the academy and its community. They have ensured that students are kept safe in a supervised environment through a difficult period of tension between neighbourhoods. The steps being taken to build cohesion in the local community exemplify the academy's effective work with external partners. The intention to promote equalities and eliminate discrimination is given a suitably high profile in the academy, but steps to develop understanding of other cultures have had a patchy effect to date.

Senior leaders understand what needs to improve in the academy but plans have not always been effectively prioritised and a whole-school strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning has not been clearly established. Plans drawn up with the National Challenge Adviser to raise standards in English and mathematics have been clearly focused and carefully monitored, resulting in a positive impact on a targeted group of students in Key Stage 4. While the academy's specialism is being promoted, it presently does not have a sufficient impact across the curriculum. Although senior subject leaders monitor provision, provide feedback to colleagues, and identify areas for improvement in subject development plans, their capacity is stretched and they do not routinely evaluate the impact of provision on the quality of learning. Feedback to teachers does not capture well enough the characteristics of teaching that enable students to make good progress or identify the steps required to improve practice. There is more to do to secure the capacity to analyse the impact of strategies rigorously against clear criteria, and to draw together what is learned from evaluation in order better to focus the drive for improvement.

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Annex A

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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	4	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	4	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I am writing to tell you about the findings of our inspection. First, I would like to thank you for your contribution. We enjoyed visiting your lessons, seeing your work and listening to your experiences of the academy, particularly your examples of how you have been helped to learn.

These are some of the things we liked about your academy.

- The sixth form has got off to a promising start. It offers a range of courses so there is something for everybody. This year sees the first group of students who have gained places at university.
- You like the choice of courses you are offered from Year 9 upwards. The staff told us about how well many of you have done in the assessments you have taken this year, and how they are expecting you to achieve better results by the time you complete Year 11.
- The staff take care of you, help you feel safe in the academy, and provide support for many of you when you need it. Many of you behave considerately, though this isn't true for all.
- Your attendance has improved, although for some of you it needs to be better.
- For quite a few of you, the range of extra activities in performing arts, sports and other areas is something which you like about the academy.

A number of important things about the academy are not good enough, and we think it needs 'special measures' to help it improve. This means that inspectors will visit the academy regularly to monitor its progress. We have asked staff and governors to do the following things, in particular:

- help you make better progress and strengthen the basic skills you need to get more out of your studies, so that you reach higher standards
- make sure lessons are better at helping each individual learn, because each of you is different
- improve attendance, behaviour and relationships
- help the academy to improve by finding out what is working well and making sure everybody does it.