

# Sheffield Springs Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131896
<b>Local Authority</b>	Sheffield
<b>Inspection number</b>	334535
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 May 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jane Jones HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1003
Sixth form	98
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Gordon Bridge
<b>Principal</b>	Mr David Lewis
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Academy address</b>	East Bank Road Sheffield South Yorkshire S2 2AL
<b>Telephone number</b>	0114 2392631
<b>Fax number</b>	0114 2399666

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<b>Age group</b>	11–19
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 May 2009
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The academy opened in September 2006, housed in the buildings of the predecessor school, and moved into new buildings in February 2008. In September 2007, it opened a sixth form in collaboration with Sheffield Park Academy. Although below national averages, increasing proportions of students are of minority ethnic heritage or speak English as an additional language. 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, 32%, have free school meals and 80% of sixth-form students are eligible for the educational maintenance allowance. Students join the academy having attained results at primary school that were well below average. Many students also have weak basic skills, particularly in literacy. Double the national average of students, 42%, are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, of these, nine students have statements of special educational need.

Sheffield Springs and Sheffield Park Academies opened in tandem. They share the same sponsor, United Learning Trust, and have many structures and systems in common. In the early days, both experienced turbulence in senior leadership. The executive director took up post in November 2006. He fulfils the roles of head of school at Sheffield Springs and executive director for both academies. Other areas of common leadership include the director of studies, who is responsible for the collaborative sixth form, the data manager, and the single governing body. Neither the executive director nor the chair of governors was present during the inspection.

The academy has a decreasing reliance on temporary teachers. Currently there are six, most of whom are providing specialist long-term cover in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

The academy's specialisms are the performing arts and business and enterprise. The academy holds the Artsmark and Sportsmark awards.

As part of the academies initiative, Sheffield Springs was monitored 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 school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The academy is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to achievement in Key Stage 3, the development of students' basic skills, the quality of teaching and strategic leadership.

The academy faced profound challenges when it first opened, but subsequently transformed the climate for learning, resulting in significant improvements in provision and outcomes, particularly with regard to students' personal development and well-being. Attendance has risen substantially. There is an improving picture at Key Stage 4 where students are now making satisfactory progress. The introduction of vocational courses two years ago is bearing fruit. These courses, coupled with a strong drive to improve students' performance in English and mathematics, are having a significant impact on standards and achievement at Key Stage 4. Effective day-to-day management and the tireless work of the deputy headteachers ensure that the academy operates smoothly and that students' welfare is paramount. Central to raising students' aspirations has been the successful introduction of the academy's sixth form. All of this demonstrates the academy's satisfactory capacity for further improvement despite some significant failings at a strategic level.

Over the last year, however, there has been a loss of impetus stemming from a lack of strategic leadership and the failure to focus on tackling key weaknesses. This has led to a breakdown in relationships at a senior level. Lines of accountability are insufficiently robust. Governors, although supportive of the academy, have not held it to account well enough and, until recently, were unaware of the scale and gravity of some weaknesses.

Overall teaching and learning are inadequate, with notable weaknesses at Key Stage 3, predominantly because teachers do not take sufficient account of students' individual needs and capabilities. Information provided on students' learning needs is inadequate in helping teachers to tailor their lesson planning. Weaknesses in students' basic skills, especially literacy, speaking, listening and the ability to work independently, are a particular barrier at this key stage. Achievement is inadequate in Key Stage 3. Standards are low and rising too slowly so that too many students, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make insufficient progress given their starting points.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Students are proud of the academy: most say that they enjoy it and talk enthusiastically about the well-equipped building and exciting opportunities, particularly in the performing arts. Older students talk very positively about the way the academy has developed. Marked improvements in behaviour are reflected in much lower rates of exclusion. Relationships between staff and students are positive: staff know and care for students well. Safeguarding procedures are robust.

### Effectiveness of the sixth form

#### Grade: 3

This year sees the completion of the first level 3 Business and Technology Education (BTEC) and AS courses. Students' achievement is satisfactory, standards are below average overall. Students enjoy the sixth form and are committed to their studies: they show maturity and are

good ambassadors for the academy. While they contribute to extra-curricular activities, opportunities to act as role models and mentors for younger students are limited.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall with examples of good teaching, for instance, in the performing arts. The curriculum is designed to meet students' varied starting points and interests by offering a range of courses at levels 1 to 3. These include vocational BTEC courses in six curricular areas as well as AS and A levels, introduced in September 2008. Positive signs are emerging of students progressing from one level of study to the next.

Students speak highly of the pastoral support provided and they regard their positive relationships with staff as a key strength. They receive good advice and guidance on future employment, further and higher education, and increasing numbers are continuing their education post-16. Progression to university is being promoted successfully against a background of very low local participation in higher education. Of the first cohort of 21 students completing level 3 study this year, 17 have conditional offers of university places.

Leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory. Self-evaluation is accurate: the need to raise standards through robust monitoring, tracking and intervention strategies is correctly identified.

### **What the academy should do to improve further**

- Raise achievement, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Improve students' basic skills, particularly in literacy, speaking and listening, to enable them to flourish as independent learners.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - tackling weaknesses and inconsistencies systematically
  - capitalising on the best practice that exists in the academy
  - ensuring useful information about students' individual learning needs is provided for teachers to aid lesson planning and to enable better assessment of the steps in students' progress.
- Develop the quality of strategic leadership so that leaders at all levels, including governance, have greater influence in driving and securing rapid improvement.

### **Achievement and standards**

#### **Grade: 4**

Results in the 2008 national Key Stage 3 tests were low in English, mathematics and science. Compared with 2007, more students reached the level above that expected of 14 year olds in mathematics and science, but fewer in English. Low attaining students and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities made least progress in English. In both 2007 and 2008, too many students made insufficient progress given their attainment at the end of primary school. Teachers' most recent assessments for current Year 9 students show improvement in all three subjects but too many students are not making the progress that they should.

The picture of improvement shows more promise at Key Stage 4, although standards at GCSE in 2008 remained well below average. While 34% of the students gained five or more A\* to C grades, only 22% included English and mathematics, which is well short of the government's 'floor target' of 30%. The academy is consequently in receipt of additional support through the National Challenge initiative. This has led to an intensive focus on raising standards in English and mathematics. The academy anticipates that over 60% of the students will pass at least five GCSE or equivalent qualifications at grades A\* to C in 2009. Rises are also predicted in the proportion gaining five A\* to G grades and few students are expected to leave without

any qualification. In 2008, over a quarter attained fewer than five A\* to G grades and 8% gained no qualifications, which was unsatisfactory.

Standards in literacy, speaking and listening are very low and remain significant barriers to successful learning, despite the academy's emphasis on the development of students' literacy skills through all subjects. Less attention has been given to developing students' skills of numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. Students are generally considerate of others and have positive attitudes towards their work. Most behave well in lessons and, although there is some low-level disruption when lessons do not meet students' needs and interests, students usually respond to gentle reminders about their behaviour. Students say that they get on well together and that there is almost no bullying, but if it does happen, it is dealt with promptly. There are very few fixed-term exclusions: students who are excluded are rarely excluded for a second time.

Students are developing a good understanding of the diversity of society. They say they understand and respect the differences between people because they are respected and valued themselves. Although attendance has improved, a significant number of students of all ages attend irregularly or are persistent non-attenders.

Students understand how to live healthy lifestyles. They select from a good choice of healthy options at lunchtimes and enjoy participating in sports and activities outside the academy day. Older students act as academy ambassadors or as prefects and take these responsibilities seriously. Student councillors are elected democratically and students say their views are taken into account. Students support charities in England and overseas but their contribution to the local or wider community is limited. Weaknesses in basic skills and lack of experience in working independently mean students are not well prepared for their future lives.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 4**

Teaching and learning are inadequate, although there is some good practice. Teaching is more effective at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. The best teaching is enthusiastic: it captures students' attention, sequences their learning through a variety of activities, often of a practical nature, and provides opportunities for students to work together and discuss their ideas. Teachers have high expectations of students' participation and achievement. They listen carefully to what students say, building on responses to probe students' understanding and develop their thinking further. In these better lessons, students' learning is at least satisfactory.

A principal weakness in the teaching is the lack of attention to meeting students' individual needs with the whole class often tackling the same work. Teaching assistants are not deployed well enough to support those with most need in specific ways. Teachers receive outline guidance on students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but not in the detail needed to plan well-targeted support. Similarly, teachers receive only general advice, not subject-specific guidance, on supporting students who are learning to speak English as an additional language.

When teachers talk for too long, students are passive, become bored and have too little time for independent work. Although interactive whiteboards add interest, students rarely use ICT themselves as a tool for learning.

While assessment criteria provide the basis of helpful feedback to older students, other marking varies in its usefulness. Too often, teachers accept incomplete or poorly presented work, and ignore misspelling of subject vocabulary and errors in punctuation. Classroom displays often include 'key words' and student-friendly assessment information, but this is not linked to examples of students' work that illustrate particular standards.

Staff have received training on aspects such as 'assessment for learning', supplemented by good guidance on characteristics of effective teaching. Teachers are encouraged to implement strategies to improve literacy and speaking skills in all subjects, but the impact of training and guidance on this varies. While students discuss their ideas in many lessons, some do not contribute effectively, a minority sometimes dominate question-and-answer sessions, and many struggle to translate their thinking into writing. The academy rightly concluded recently that this major priority requires a more systematic and structured approach.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

At Key Stage 4, the curriculum offers a good balance of traditional and vocational courses. The introduction of BTEC options in Year 9 is having a positive impact on students' motivation and performance. Flexible collaborative arrangements with other institutions enable the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 to be tailored more closely to individual requirements: for example, the progress of the minority of students at risk of disaffection is enhanced through work-related learning and work experience.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is underdeveloped in ensuring students' basic skills are improved. This means many students are ill equipped to make the most of what the curriculum offers. Strategies to help those who experience difficulty with literacy are yet to be fully and successfully implemented. One-to-one interventions, designed to improve reading and spelling, do not build sufficiently well on students' prior knowledge and skills. Many of the reading books are not appropriate for secondary-aged students. Interactive programmes are not used frequently enough to promote improvement.

There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. Students speak of their enjoyment of and enthusiastic participation in the performing arts and sport. The academy has rightly identified that the next steps are to promote both its specialisms so that they have a positive impact across the academy.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

Staff know students well and provide effective social, moral and emotional support. Positive relationships give students confidence that there are people they can talk to if they have a problem. Students receive effective support and guidance on joining the academy and when choosing options at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. The 'Early Risers' initiative enables pupils from one primary school to transfer to the academy in the last half term of Year 6. Senior leaders recognise this has a positive effect on students' confidence and sense of security but have not evaluated its impact on academic achievement. The academy's procedures for setting targets and monitoring students' progress on a regular basis have been further developed this year.

This is helping the academy to target support for students. Academic advice is more effective in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 where teachers' assessments of the work of lower-attaining students are not consistently accurate. Many students do not know their targets although most have some idea of their current levels of attainment.

Short- and longer-term academic support, the 'virtual academy', and flexible timetabling arrangements help vulnerable or disaffected students to continue with their education. The academy admits some 'hard-to-place' students and, although not all outcomes are successful, some return to full-time education. The academy works effectively with other agencies in promoting students' well-being.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 4

The academy sets suitably ambitious targets. Standards have risen, but the academy recognises that they are not as high as they need to be and that the initial rate of improvement has faltered because of failings in senior leadership. The executive director has not ensured the senior leadership team works with a unified sense of purpose. This has impeded progress: priorities identified during the monitoring visit in June 2008 have not been addressed adequately. Despite a breakdown in relationships, senior staff have given relentless commitment to the academy, ensuring that students continue to be able to work in a safe and settled environment with many opportunities for enrichment and personal development.

Governance is inadequate. The governing body has failed 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, which had not previously been clearly and accurately communicated to them. Important steps have now been taken to redefine the role of the governing body in order to strengthen its effectiveness. Very recently the sponsors have taken appropriate measures to support the academy.

Self-evaluation is based on appropriate levels of monitoring and accurately identifies the academy's strengths and weaknesses so that senior leaders understand what needs to improve. However, the effectiveness of evaluation is diluted by weaknesses in development planning and accountability. Although suitable steps have been taken, for example, to strengthen teaching, improve progress and raise attendance, the impact is not analysed rigorously against robust success criteria at key times. One notable exception is the clear and well-executed plan drawn up in consultation with the National Challenge Adviser, which focuses sharply on raising standards in English and mathematics. The role of middle managers continues to develop, with emerging strengths in some areas. These managers monitor provision and provide feedback to colleagues but, as at senior levels, there is more to do to join up and follow through the cycle of monitoring, evaluation and review to drive improvement.

Although not sharply focused or strategically developed, the academy has taken a number of actions to advance community cohesion. The promotion of equalities and the elimination of discrimination have a suitably high profile in the academy's everyday work, and much is effective in fostering a strong sense of community within and beyond the academy.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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	3	3

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	4	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
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	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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?	3	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

**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 but, first of all, I would like to thank you for your friendly welcome. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to you about your experiences of the academy, particularly what you like about it and what has improved since it opened.

Here are some of the things we liked best about your academy:

- The sixth form has got off to a promising start. It provides a range of courses for students of different interests and abilities. This year sees the first group of students who have offers of places at university. Perhaps they will come back and talk to you about university life at some stage?
- You like the course options you have at Key Stage 4. The staff told us how well you have done in the assessments you have taken already. They are expecting Year 11 to achieve good results this summer.
- You are enthusiastic about the opportunities you have at the academy, such as the performing arts, sports, and other activities, and the modern equipment you can use.
- You are generally considerate of each other and often behave well in lessons, especially when they are practical or creative.
- You get on well with each other and with the staff who take good care of you and help you to feel safe in the academy.
- Your attendance has improved a lot but needs to be still better for some of you. Remember 90% attendance means you miss half a day every week on average!

You are right that the academy has improved since it opened but some important things are not yet good enough. Therefore, we have given the academy a 'notice to improve'. We have asked the staff and governors to do several things, in particular:

- Help you make better progress especially in Key Stage 3.
- Ensure you develop good basic skills. Many of you are better at thinking things out than you are at reading and writing. To get the best out of your studies, you need to have good basic skills, and the academy needs to help you to acquire them.
- Improve lessons so that more of them are good or outstanding. In particular, because every student in a class is different, lessons need to be better at helping each individual learn.
- For further improvements to be made quickly, leaders must be sharper at finding out what is working well, what needs to be better and then planning accordingly.

Another inspector will visit in a few months to see how the academy has improved.