

Elms Bank Specialist Arts College

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 105378 |
| Local Authority | Bury |
| Inspection number | 287214 |
| Inspection date | 10 July 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Jeffery Plumb |

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

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 152 |
| 6th form | 42 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Joan Griffiths |
| Headteacher | Ms L Lines |
| Date of previous school inspection | 10 June 2002 |
| School address | Ripon Avenue Whitefield Bury Greater Manchester M45 8PJ |
| Telephone number | 0161 7661597 |
| Fax number | 0161 7664303 |

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Age group | 11-19 |
| Inspection date | 10 July 2007 |
| Inspection number | 287214 |

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school gained specialist status for the visual and performing arts in September 2004. It provides education for students with a wide range of special educational needs, including autism and profound and multiple learning difficulties. All students have a statement for their special educational needs and students in the sixth form have very severe and complex needs. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is average. Few students are at an early stage of learning to speak English. There are a few students from asylum seeking families. There are more students in public care than is typical nationally. The school has achieved the Sportsmark Gold Award, the Artsmark Gold Award and the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Achievement is excellent. The gains students made in their learning from entry in Year 7 through to when they took GCSEs in 2006 placed the school in the top 5% in the country. Since gaining specialist status standards have risen very significantly. All targets set have been exceeded. Students make striking progress in art and design, music and drama. Those students with very complex needs improve significantly in their development of communication and independent mobility skills. Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and senior managers have created a culture where new and innovative practice benefits students with a wide range of special educational needs. They have created confidence in staff to experiment and trial new methods, for example, the regular filming of achievement made by students with profound difficulties. This is scrutinised by the team of teachers who support these students and used to plan to raise achievement for every child. The special ingredient in the success of leadership and management is the meticulous attention to detail in every aspect of school life. The excellent computerised system for tracking progress is examined regularly to establish patterns of achievement. Once noticed, for example, that an autistic student excels in a certain aspect of mathematics, this information is used in other areas of learning to motivate that student to excel. Middle management is outstanding and subject leaders contribute to the outstanding curriculum. Parents and carers are thrilled with the school and say, 'Our children have achieved in ways we thought never possible since being in this school.'

Students' personal development and well-being is outstanding. The way they care for each other is moving. Students are equipped exceptionally well for independent living. There is a focus on developing students to keep safe when they travel by themselves. Promotion of physical fitness and students' emotional health is very good. Teachers' passion for the subjects they teach and attention to planning to meet the needs of every child in their classes results in outstanding practice throughout the school. Exciting and challenging activities make teaching sparkle. The curriculum is relevant and exceptionally well matched to students' needs and provides a wide range of accreditation opportunities. However, the good vocational options available at Key Stage 4 could be a little stronger. Care, guidance and support are excellent. It is summed up by parents who say, 'It could not be better'. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent. The school provides outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The provision for post-16 students with very severe and complex needs is outstanding. Excellent use is made of the school house to enable small groups of students to stay overnight and learn important life skills. Most students access this experience. The curriculum is excellent and accreditation opportunities are very good. Achievement and teaching are outstanding and students are equipped to become as independent as possible. Leadership and management are outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the number of accredited vocational subjects for Key Stage 4 students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students make excellent progress in English, mathematics and science. Achievement is outstanding, but attainment overall is below the national average because of students' special educational needs. The school's specialist status has made a very valuable contribution to credible GCSE passes in art and design and drama in 2006. One student achieved a grade B pass and five others a grade C pass in art and design. The pass rate at A* to G was 100% in both subjects. In addition passes at entry level and GCSE in mathematics and information and communication technology were very good. Results exceeded the challenging targets set and, measured against students' starting points on entry, students' achievement places the school in the top 5% of schools in the country. The few Year 11 students who followed a vocational course in painting and decorating achieved good accreditation. Standards are rising year on year as are the number of GCSE subjects on offer. Year 10 students are doing well on a GCSE science course and high achieving autistic students follow a GCSE course in English. Those students with the most complex difficulties also achieve very well in communicating their needs using pictures, switches and pointing with their eyes. Gains in independent mobility and travel are exceptionally good. Parents and carers of these students are understandably as delighted with this progress as they are with their children's academic achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students enjoy coming to school and have a positive attitude to learning. They say, 'We love school because our teachers do not pre-judge us: so we enjoy our lessons, especially mathematics.' Behaviour is excellent. Attendance is good: absences are due to hospital appointments. Students are well equipped to adopt a healthy and safe lifestyle. Through exciting enterprise projects they learn to handle money. The student voice is a significant strength. A vibrant school council helps with the running of the school. All students are invited to attend their annual reviews and have a say in setting their targets. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They respond very well to opportunities to take responsibility, such as the 'buddy system' which enables older students to care for younger students. Their awareness of cultural diversity is excellent. They say, 'We have a brilliant relationship with schools abroad: we have just raised funds for a school in Romania with poor resources.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers' passion for their subjects enthuse students in their learning. Excellent relationships between teachers and students give students the confidence to excel. Activities in lessons are interesting, challenging and fun. The use of social stories for students with the most complex needs enables all to be fully included in a meaningful

way. The 'icing on the cake' is that in each session there is a specific expectation in learning for each student to reach, based on what is most important for them. Careful consideration is taken of students' preferred learning styles in teachers' planning. Physical barriers to learning are removed through skilful adaptation of resources and provision of furniture that moves up and down: so every student is positioned comfortably for 'hands on' learning in practical activities. Above all students are clear about what is expected of them and they rise to teachers' high expectations. In a drama class students were clear about exactly when to come in with what they had to say during a high quality performance of Macbeth.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Flexibly planned, the curriculum is tailored to meet the needs of each student. Students with the most complex needs have individual learning programmes which contribute to their outstanding achievement. Higher achieving students have specific subject targets. The requirements of the National Curriculum and religious education are met. The provision for visual and performing arts is first class. It develops students' creativity and promotes enjoyment in learning, as evidenced in the recent production of 'Shrektacular'. In addition, the school's expertise and resources in this area of the curriculum benefit partnership schools in the community extremely well. The independent travel programme and the provision for sport are excellent. All students have an effective work-related programme, but the accredited vocational options available at Key Stage 4, whilst good, are not as strong as they could be. However, the curriculum provides a wide range of accreditation opportunities in academic subjects. The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme is excellent. A rich range of visits, including to Turkey, enhances students' learning. The extra-curricular clubs are greatly appreciated by students and their parents. Parents and carers speak very highly of the whole-school drama productions and are particularly delighted that they include all children. It is a joy to see photographs of very happy and excited children dancing and singing in wheelchairs alongside their able bodied peers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Education and health professionals work in an extremely effective partnership to benefit students. They ensure physical barriers are removed by positioning students correctly for feeding and accessing computers for learning. Innovative and creative modifications of switches promote improved mobility and communication. Electronic communication aids help students to talk with increased confidence. Child protection procedures are robust. Risk assessments, including those for lifting students, are thorough and detailed. Students' dignity is foremost. Students say that they feel safe and very well cared for. Induction and transition arrangements are excellent. Parents and carers are thrilled with the care, guidance and support their children receive. The tracking of students' progress is exceptional and it is effectively used to raise students' achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has successfully created a culture whereby all teachers are committed to: 'taking every child up a mountain so achievement for all from their starting point is at the highest level'. An extremely effective senior leadership team, clear about their roles and responsibilities, has placed this school at the leading edge when it comes to national and local initiatives which benefit all students. They are crystal clear about the school's strengths and how they want to move on further. Subject leadership is a very strong feature and contributes to students' sense of fun in learning and outstanding achievement. All targets as a specialist school have been met. Self-evaluation is excellent. Data gathered from checking how well the school is performing is used effectively to plan to raise achievement. The priorities for improvement focus on raised achievement and further curriculum development. Governors have considerable knowledge and experience of students' needs. Thus governance is very effective.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

| | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | School Overall | 16-19 |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 1 | 1 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 1 | 1 |
| 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? | 1 | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 | |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 | |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 | |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 1 | 1 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 | 1 |

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? | 1 | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1 | |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 1 | |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 1 | |
| 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

Inspection of Elms Bank Specialist Arts College, Bury, M45 8PJ.

Thank you for welcoming me as a visitor in your school. I enjoyed meeting with you and having the opportunity to talk with a group of you. I am pleased that you enjoy school, find it fun and challenging and that you achieve so well. Indeed, as some of you told me, 'You have done much better than you expected.'

I think your school is excellent. Your achievements in art and design, drama and music are excellent. You also do really well in all of your other subjects. Teaching, in your school, sparkles and the activities you are given to do in lessons help you learn really well. You have such positive attitudes to learning and your behaviour is outstanding. The care you show each other and the ways in which you help children in schools in other parts of the world than yours is great. The opportunities you have to obtain a wide range of GCSEs and other examinations suitable to your needs are excellent. You are very well cared for and enabled to develop important life skills. Your headteacher and teachers lead and manage your school exceptionally well. They make your school a place where you have the opportunity to excel at whatever you are good at. Your school drama productions and your creativity and confidence in performing are amazing. In this school you gain in confidence and self-esteem. Your work-related learning opportunities are good, but I have asked the school to increase the vocational courses on offer for those of you in Years 10 and 11.

I wish you and all of your teachers all the best for the future.