

Elms Bank Specialist Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105378
Local Authority	Bury
Inspection number	336487
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Pauline Hilling-Smith

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	153
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joan Griffiths
Headteacher	Mrs Elaine Parkinson
Date of previous school inspection	0 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons, observed 22 teachers and spent the majority of available inspection time directly observing students' learning. They held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and the school's partners. They observed the school's work, looked at students' books, headteacher's reports to the governors, school development plans, policies and evaluation documents as well as 94 parental questionnaires and questionnaires from students and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of the use of assessment information in promoting progress
- how well students are supported, cared for and guided
- how well the leaders of the school have driven improvement since the last inspection.

Information about the school

Elms Bank Specialist Arts College is a special, coeducational, day school for 153 students with special educational needs and/or disabilities aged from 11-19 years. All students have varying degrees of learning difficulty and a small minority have autism. A small minority of students have visual or physical difficulties. A small proportion come from minority ethnic backgrounds and the number eligible for a free school meal is well above average.

The school became a Specialist Arts College in 2004 and gained High Performing Specialist School status in 2007. As a result of these awards, the school has a second specialism of Applied Learning. It also holds the Healthy Schools Award, Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Elms Bank is an outstanding school. The visionary and very effective headteacher and highly committed governing body have worked together to establish a school where all students can achieve their best and enjoy every minute. The variety of choices available to the students, widened by exemplary partnerships, means that students are fully engaged in appropriate activities. The school's specialisms in art, music, drama and applied learning, have an outstanding effect on students' learning and personal development, because the curriculum in these areas is very rich and there is a wide variety of accredited courses available. Students make outstanding progress overall, but especially in their understanding of the world of work and the options available to them when they leave school. They create pieces of art in glass to sell to the community, and produce music and drama for many audiences. Progress in learning and participation in lessons, is the same for all age groups and regardless of the learning difficulty faced by the student. In lessons, students read thermometers to understand why penguins huddle together, feel the force of magnets repelling each other, or cook different flavour soups to order and count the profit they have made. Occasionally, students use computers too infrequently in lessons, which restricts their ability to learn independently. Outstanding self-evaluation, based on detailed monitoring, constantly reviews whether actions that have been taken are making improvements. Leadership is being increasingly distributed to all staff to good effect. Good progress has been made in widening accreditation at Key Stage 4; an area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. Together with other rapid improvements in planning and assessment this indicates an outstanding capacity for the school to maintain its high quality.

Relationships are excellent and behaviour is always managed effectively which means that students' outstanding behaviour and attitudes have a positive impact on learning. Staff know students as individuals and are highly committed to providing sensitive and well-focused pastoral support to ensure that students keep healthy and feel safe, happy and secure.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of computers in classrooms to promote independent learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students achieve extremely well in all aspects of their work and development, particularly in developing skills which are highly relevant to their future success in the

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workplace, such as teamwork and how to be successful in interviews. It is inappropriate to judge attainment in comparison with students in mainstream schools due to the nature and complexity of the needs of the students who attend the school. A small minority of students achieve well at GCSE, especially in art, food technology and science. A large majority of students achieve a wide range of nationally accredited qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4, including English and in mathematics. The progress of those students with the most profound and multiple learning difficulties is measured against personal, challenging targets that fall outside the bounds of formal assessment procedures or levels of attainment. These challenging targets are fully met or exceeded. Targets set for all students are equally challenging and evaluation shows that most of these targets are met. This confirms the view of inspectors, formed from observation of lessons and scrutiny of individual portfolios, that the vast majority of students make outstanding progress. Students with additional specialist needs make equally outstanding progress. This is because their individual learning needs are carefully attended to, for example, through using a communication system based on pictures and photographs or taking part in mobility training using a long cane. In many ways, students are encouraged to be as independent as possible and they achieve particularly well travelling on their own. Students respond very well to the school's encouragement to eat healthily and join in physical activity. Students' behaviour is outstanding and contributes well to learning in lessons. They are polite to each other and to adults and work well together in groups, sharing resources. Students say they feel safe in school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹ The quality of pupils' learning and their progress The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
	*
	1
	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate	
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is outstanding because there is enthusiastic participation in all learning activities by both students and staff. All lessons are planned in detail and take careful account of what each student has learned in the previous lesson. Support assistants use their considerable expertise to extend students' learning very well. Planning is available to all staff and in advance of each lesson on the school's information and communication technology (ICT) network. This means that time is used very effectively because staff know in advance what they will be doing in a lesson. Activities are appropriately challenging and exciting. As a result, all students work hard and very much enjoy learning. Specialist teachers ensure that learning in specialist lessons is outstanding because of their excellent subject knowledge.

The outstanding curriculum meets students' needs exceptionally well. Programmes of work are modified carefully to meet the needs of each student in the classroom. Opportunities to learn about the world of work are many and varied and prepare students well for the future. The curriculum encourages students to be ambitious and enterprising. There are many memorable experiences. These include taking part in musical and drama productions, extensive visits, including residential opportunities, and many visitors coming into school. The fire engine that came to the school during the inspection delighted many students who were able to feel what it would be like to be a fireman travelling to emergencies. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is further enriched by a wide range of clubs and after-school activities.

There are many outstanding ways in which the school cares, guides and supports the students. Breakfast is available at the start of each day and after-school clubs provide a secure, happy environment for those students who are collected later in the day. Secure, high quality record-keeping reflects the close monitoring of students who may be vulnerable. School works effectively with a wide range of support agencies and families to support students and ensures that any obstacles to them achieving the best outcomes are quickly resolved. Students gain from a wide range of experiences, including work experience, that prepare them exceptionally well for their future well-being. All students with medical and physical conditions are supported by well trained staff, which allows them to take a full and happy part in school. Very close attention is paid to keeping students safe, healthy and protected from risk. Students respond by expecting to be as independent as possible and managing risk very well, for

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example, when they travel independently to local destinations.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. She has been the pivotal point, alongside a forward-thinking and involved governing body, in creating a vision and driving the development of the school since the last inspection. Her clarity of vision and understanding of the practicalities of what this means in practise, has been shared with the deputy headteacher to outstanding effect. This partnership has put in place robust procedures which employ ICT to great effect to manage information. Together they have shared expectations with all the staff and leadership has been extended and shared. All leaders, including assistant headteachers have been very effective in implementing actions which have brought about considerable improvements and high quality in many aspects of the school's work. Safeguarding procedures to ensure students' health and security are very robust.

The information provided for parents and carers is of high quality and parents feel very involved in their child's learning and progress. The school has established exemplary practice with a range of partners. For example, partnership with Bury Childcare and Extended Services Team means that the school takes considered action to promote community cohesion. This is based on a detailed knowledge of the needs of the community it serves. The 'gallery' experience promotes involvement with a variety of local and global community groups both in making items for sale as well as selling to boost funds. The school gives excellent value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form harnesses the applied learning specialism in an exemplary way. With its emphasis on further extending work-related learning to include work experience and college placement on vocational courses, it stands apart from the main school yet offers a seamless transition. Most students progress into the sixth form.

Staff ensure that students' prior learning is very well built upon so that their subsequent excellent achievements lead to them exceeding expectations, including gaining employment. There are good links with the careers service. Outstanding teaching and learning in the sixth form, places a high priority on achievement in functional skills in literacy and numeracy. Students understand clearly the need for punctuality and good attendance in the workplace. High quality work placements are sourced and supported alongside exemplary partnership work with Bury Employment Support and Training. Residential experiences have high take-up, and 'buddying' with younger students develops students' responsibility and self-reliance well.

Through individual person-centered planning, students are able to make their own choices for the future. Students develop valuable skills in cooking and food preparation, useful for when they leave school. Senior leaders have a very clear understanding of students' needs and very high expectations of them. These leaders constantly and very effectively review and evaluate the work of the sixth form, for example, in seeking out the appropriate work experience placements and accreditations to meet all students' needs. They are also very effective in supporting and planning students' transition to the next stage in their lives.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspectors considered 94 parents' and carers' questionnaire responses. This represents 62% of parents and carers. The responses are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Typical comments are:

- our daughter has done really well at Elms Bank and thoroughly enjoys going to school
- I have the very highest praise for the staff at Elms Bank, their commitment and dedication to the well-being of the students is outstanding. The home –school diary is an excellent means of communication
- within a day of speaking to the school I was called by three different professionals who were able to share their specialist expertise and signpost us to further support.

Most parents and carers felt that the school worked together with them extremely well to meet the needs of the students.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Elms Bank Specialist Arts College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 94 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 153 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	62	66	30	32	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	70	74	24	26	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	60	64	30	32	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	46	49	41	44	3	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	57	61	35	37	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	52	55	35	37	5	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	50	53	40	43	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	52	55	30	32	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	57	61	34	36	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	54	37	39	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	51	54	38	40	3	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	57	61	33	35	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	70	27	29	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



8 February 2010

Dear Students

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

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school and for completing the questionnaires which many of you did. I was pleased to hear that you felt you were kept safe and how confident you were in all the staff to help you. I could see how much you enjoyed school and how proud everyone was of their achievements in art, music, drama, cooking and in their work experience.

Elms Bank provides you with an outstanding education and does a fantastic job in caring and supporting you, so that you can be successful and independent when you leave. As Elms Bank is such a brilliant school I have only asked the school to do one thing to make it better which is:

- to let you use the computers more in lessons to help you to be more independent in your learning.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Pauline Hilling-Smith

Lead Inspector

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