

Ryburn Valley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107565
Local authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	377604
Inspection dates	1–2 February 2012
Lead inspector	Joan Davis HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,441
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Melvyn Cross
Headteacher	Honor Byford
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2008
School address	St Peter's Avenue Sowerby Sowerby Bridge HX6 1DF
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Additional inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Additional inspector

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 44 lessons and the same number of teachers were seen. In addition, inspectors listened to students reading and observed the behaviour of students at break, lunchtime and at the end of the school day. Meetings were held with three groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school development plan, the school's own monitoring records regarding the quality of teaching and information on students' current attainment and progress. The inspection team also considered and analysed the responses from questionnaires returned by 161 parents and carers, and those completed by students and staff. There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).

Information about the school

Ryburn Valley High School is a larger than average secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below the national average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is above the national average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. The school has specialist status for media arts. The school has met the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. The school has won several awards, including Investors in People, Investors in Volunteers, Artsmark gold award and the International Intermediate Award.

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	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

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 school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement of students, particularly in English and mathematics.

- The school’s effectiveness is inadequate. Since the previous inspection students have underachieved. Over the last three years students’ attainment has been significantly below the national average for most key measures. Attainment has been rising slowly and the gap between the achievement of students in the school and that of their peers nationally has been narrowing. Nevertheless, students have, over time, made insufficient progress in relation to their starting points compared with students nationally. The teaching of English and mathematics has not been of consistently good quality to ensure that all students made expected progress. School leaders have recognised the weaknesses in provision in these key subjects and have taken appropriate action to address this issue. As a result, attainment is rising well and is now in line with the levels expected. During the inspection there were clear indications that steps taken to eradicate underperformance are now starting to lift students’ achievement. However, the actions taken are not yet embedded in all departments and in all lessons so that some weaknesses remain, particularly in the teaching of English and mathematics.
- The school provides an inclusive environment in which all students are valued as individuals. Behaviour is good and students say that they feel safe. The school is a harmonious community and students are welcoming and friendly. Attendance is above the national average and students are, for the most part, punctual to lessons. The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall throughout the school and is beginning to reverse the trend of underachievement and is raising students’ attainment. Opportunities are being missed, however, to share the good practice that exists both in teaching and in the leadership of departments.

- The leadership team has successfully addressed the area for improvement identified at the previous inspection relating to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is now good. Furthermore, as a result of actions taken by school leaders, attendance rates have improved year on year and the rate of exclusions has reduced. Attendance and retention rates in the sixth form have also improved. Senior leaders have provided extensive and effective opportunities for professional development which are strengthening and improving the quality of teaching. For example, 'learning walks' have been effective in disseminating good practice. However, initiatives have not always been monitored well enough at middle leadership level, leading to some inconsistencies across departments. Self-evaluation, although over-generous in some respects in the past, is becoming increasingly accurate and improvement planning correctly identifies areas for development. Rigorous systems to track the progress of students are now embedded and, along with other actions taken by senior leaders, these are effective in contributing to significant improvements in students' attainment and progress. Therefore, the school demonstrates the capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in English and mathematics, thereby enabling all students to make good progress, by ensuring that all teachers use assessment information to plan lessons that are sufficiently challenging and meet the needs, abilities and interests of students.
- Embed current leadership initiatives to sustain improvement to the quality of teaching by:
 - developing the skills of middle leaders and sharing existing good practice across departments at this level of leadership
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels monitor and evaluate more rigorously the impact of actions taken to raise attainment and improve the teaching across the school.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment has been rising slowly in the three years prior to this inspection. However, as this has been against a national picture of improvement, students' attainment has until recently remained significantly below the national average for most key indicators. Nevertheless, the impact of the school's actions to address underperformance is now starting to bear fruit and assessment data show that students' current attainment is improving.

Students enter the school with prior attainment that is broadly in line with the national average. Over the last three years students' learning and progress overall have been consistently below that of all students nationally given their starting points. Securing improvements in English and mathematics has proved a challenge to the school, and the proportion of students making expected progress in these subjects has been below the national average. Effective partnerships have been forged with two local schools to improve

provision and students now have more curriculum time devoted to English and mathematics. Extra resources have been allocated to these subjects and these initiatives are starting to have an impact, as learning and progress in English and mathematics are now improving. However, as weaknesses remain in the teaching of these subjects, improvement has been slow and remains tenuous. Students feel confident in reading a wide range of material provided by their teachers in lessons. Most parents and carers feel that their children are making good progress in Ryburn Valley High. However, in the majority of lessons observed during the inspection, inspectors found that students made only satisfactory progress, which for some will not be enough for them to catch up on previously lost ground so that students' achievement over time is inadequate.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs make similar progress compared to other students in the school. Again, students known to be eligible for free school meals make similar progress in comparison to other students. Nevertheless, the gap between the progress of these students in the school and this group of students nationally is narrowing. Girls make better progress than boys, but the school has been effective in narrowing the gaps between these groups of students. Students who speak English as an additional language make better progress than other groups of students in the school.

The sixth form is highly inclusive. Students enter the sixth form with prior attainment that is, for the most part, below the national average. They make satisfactory progress overall given their starting points. Attainment at the end of Year 12 has been low in the past because some students were enrolled on courses that were not appropriate to their ability. The school has addressed this effectively by improving the quality of guidance students receive and adapting the curriculum to introduce more courses that meet their needs, interests and aspirations. As a result, students' motivation and attendance have improved. Retention rates, while below the national average, are also improving. On occasion, targets are insufficiently challenging and, therefore, opportunities are missed to encourage students to be ambitious to make good, or better, progress. Students in the sixth form feel well supported by staff and make a good contribution to the life of the school, for example by acting as mentors for younger students.

Quality of teaching

Although most parents and carers feel that their child is taught well at the school, inspectors found that the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. There is much good practice in evidence, but opportunities have been missed to disseminate this and thereby improve the quality of teaching across all subjects.

The best lessons are characterised by a brisk pace and clear sense of purpose, with engaging activities that help students to learn. For example, in one outstanding Year 8 French lesson observed during the inspection, students had to work out the answers to a challenging puzzle set by the teacher by finding answers to clues around the classroom. There was a tangible sense of excitement as they were learning vocabulary for clothing in preparation for a fashion show. Students worked productively, showing great enjoyment in, and enthusiasm for, their work. In the best lessons students develop social skills and their capacity to learn independently through the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers on a range of intriguing tasks that stimulate their imagination.

However, this good practice is not consistent across the school and inspectors found that teaching in English and mathematics, while satisfactory overall, was weaker than in other

subjects. Practice in using assessment information to inform planning is inconsistent across departments. As a result, some lessons are insufficiently challenging. Expectations are sometimes not high enough to ensure that all learners, particularly more-able students, make good progress. As a result, the gap between the achievement of students in the school and that of their peers nationally has not, in the past, been closing at a sufficiently swift pace. The leadership team is addressing this through more robust monitoring, resulting in discernible improvements to the quality of teaching, and the school has suitable policies to sustain this by focusing on improving students' literacy and numeracy skills. The debating society provides students with the opportunity to develop their oral skills and express their ideas. However, inconsistencies remain in some students' books; for example, when examining a book during the inspection of a Year 11 English lesson it was noted that spelling errors remained uncorrected and the student had clearly not been expected to redraft work of a poor quality.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The vast majority of parents and carers feel that there is a good standard of behaviour in Ryburn Valley. Inspectors indeed found behaviour to be good, with students listening respectfully to others' contributions in lessons and attentively to teachers' instructions and advice. Inspectors encountered negligible low-level disruption in classes; however, when this occurred, such activity was dealt with rapidly and effectively by class teachers. Racist incidents are rare and dealt with appropriately.

Bullying is rare, and pupils commented that they know that they can talk to staff if problems of this nature arise. The school responds effectively and proportionately to bullying incidents and follows up immediate actions with the monitoring of behaviour over the longer term. The school takes steps to inform students of the consequences of different forms of bullying, including a recent assembly on cyber-bullying. Students say they feel safe, and movement around the school is orderly. Students mix well socially at break times and during lunchtime. They understand the risks to which they may be exposed, both within the school and outside it. The curriculum supports this well. For example, in one good Year 9 French lesson observed, students were learning about the dangers of smoking through the medium of the foreign language.

The majority of pupils arrive on time to lessons. Attendance is above the national average. Some groups of students had rates of absence and exclusion higher than others and these groups have been the subject of effective intervention by the school. This has resulted in higher attendance levels and lower exclusion rates among those groups.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, ably supported by her senior leadership team, has been successful in securing and sustaining improvement in many aspects of the school's work. There is a strong sense of pride in the school and staff speak highly of the support and well-devised guidance they receive from senior colleagues. Although achievement has been inadequate, improvements in this respect are now discernible as a result of effective action on the part of school leaders to challenge underperformance and improve teaching. Therefore, the school demonstrates capacity to improve.

The school has established robust systems for monitoring students' progress. Such procedures have been highly effective in identifying underperformance and putting in place

intervention to reduce underachievement. As a result, students' attainment and progress are now improving. The school works effectively with a range of partners in order to drive improvement in provision.

The school's self-evaluation of the quality of teaching has been over-generous in the past but is now becoming more accurate. The introduction of 'learning walks' has helped all staff to focus on the right priorities for development. However, actions to improve the quality of teaching have sometimes focused too much on provision rather than the impact of teaching on students' learning. This has led to inconsistencies in the pace of learning across departments as initiatives have not always become embedded in classroom practice.

Middle leaders demonstrate enthusiasm and a commitment to securing improvements in outcomes for students. However, good practice in the leadership of departments, such as that found in modern languages and the creative arts, is not effectively disseminated across the school. Therefore, the quality of leadership at this level is inconsistent.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is broad and balanced, meets all statutory requirements and developments in the post-16 curriculum are now ensuring that all students can choose courses to suit their needs, aspirations and abilities. The school works effectively with parents and carers and the 'My child at school' website has contributed to improvements in attendance in the sixth form.

The governing body is supportive and is becoming increasingly confident and effective in holding the school to account. Procedures for safeguarding are effective and meet all statutory requirements. School leaders, in conjunction with the governing body, promote equality satisfactorily and tackle discrimination well.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Performing arts groups have participated in community activities, providing students with opportunities for social and cultural development through engagement with other groups in the area. Students welcome the opportunity to reflect upon other faiths, cultures and social issues through the curriculum. For example, in one history lesson, students were able to reflect critically on the barriers to female emancipation in the past in the United Kingdom, and the concept of past perceptions of the roles of men and women were explored in an English lesson on Keats's verse.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



3 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Ryburn Valley High School, Sowerby Bridge, HX6 1DF

We would like to thank you all for the warm welcome we received during the inspection of your school. You behave well in lessons and we were impressed by the consideration you show towards each other. Most of you say that you enjoy coming to school, your attendance is above the national average and you are punctual to lessons. You trust your teachers and know who to turn to if you have a problem.

We know that there are many reasons for you to be proud to be a student at Ryburn Valley. However, we found that your school has not been providing you with a consistently satisfactory quality of education, although the sixth form is satisfactory. Consequently, the school has been given a notice to improve. This means that inspectors will revisit the school to check how well it has improved. This is because results in examinations, at the end of Year 11, have been consistently below the national average and your progress has not been as good as it should be, particularly in English and mathematics.

Your headteacher, senior leaders and staff have already started to make improvements. Nevertheless, inspectors identified a number of ways in which your school should be improved further. We have asked the headteacher to focus on improving teaching so that you all make good progress. We have also asked the headteacher to make sure that, where there is good teaching, this expertise is shared across the school so that all lessons meet your needs and abilities and provide a range of exciting activities that help you to learn. In our judgement, if the school takes these actions then your examination results should improve.

All of you can help in the further improvement of your school by continuing to attend school regularly, working hard and respecting each other, your teachers and your lovely school environment. We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Joan Davis
Her Majesty's Inspector

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