

Lathom High School: A Technology College

Glenburn Road, Skelmersdale, Lancashire, WN8 6JN

Inspection dates

25–26 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Since the previous inspection, students' achievement has not improved at a fast enough rate, particularly in English.
- Students are making slower progress in English across the school, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Over time, teaching has not been good enough. It requires improvement because it is not yet having sufficient impact on students' learning over a sustained period.
- The ability of students to write at length in other subjects, including science, is not well developed.
- The quality of the marking of students' work varies across the school and does not always make it clear to students how they can improve their work.
- Not all teachers plan lessons well enough and do not make the best use of the information available on students' prior attainment. As a result, learning lacks interest and sufficient challenge.
- Additional art, music and drama activities beyond the school day are not provided for students to the same extent as sporting activities.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have acted swiftly and effectively to bring about improvements since the last inspection, particularly in English.
- Leaders have ensured that students' progress is accelerating, particularly in mathematics and increasingly in English in Key Stage 4. They have improved the quality of teaching so that students' attitudes to learning are now better.
- The gap in the performance of students known to be eligible for free school meals and other students is closing at a good rate.
- The curriculum is mostly good and increasingly provides opportunities for students of all abilities and captures their interests.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 lessons, nine of which were jointly observed with senior staff.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and managers, members of the governing body, groups of students and a representative from the local authority.
- A range of school documents was scrutinised, including those relating to attendance and behaviour, the summary of the school’s view of its performance, improvement plans, information on students’ progress and information about the quality of teaching and the setting of targets for teachers.
- A summary of Year 11 and Year 8 parents' views given at parents’ evenings was analysed. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to consider.

Inspection team

Peter Cox, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Patrick Feerick	Additional Inspector
Barbara O'Brien	Additional Inspector
Eric Craven	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than the average sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is above average at around 40% of the population. The pupil premium funding is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, students who are looked after by the local authority and those whose parents are serving in the armed forces.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average.
- A small proportion of students speak English as an additional language.
- A lower than average proportion of students is supported through school action as is the proportion of those supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school receives support from a senior leader of a local school to help improve students' achievement in English.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards that are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The substantive headteacher is currently away from school. The school is being led by an acting headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, so that more students make at least good progress, particularly in English by:
 - ensuring teachers make better use of information about students' prior attainment and particular needs in order to plan lessons with sufficient challenge and interest
 - ensuring activities in lessons enable all students, including the most and least able, to reach the standards of which they are capable
 - making sure there is greater consistency in teachers' marking following the best examples in some subjects, so students know more clearly how to improve their work
 - ensuring students achieve success in writing at length in different subjects.
- Provide more opportunities for students to be involved in art, music and drama beyond the school day.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' achievement requires improvement because not enough of them make good gains in their learning during their time at the school, given their ability on arrival.
- In English and mathematics, improvements have been secured on previous years, but students are still making slower progress in English. Achievement in English in Year 9 and Year 11 is variable.
- The school acknowledges there has been a focus on securing the highest number of grade Cs and above at GCSE. This has meant that some groups of students, including the most and least able, did not make sufficient gains in their learning in 2013.
- More students, including those from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language, are now progressing as expected and more are making good progress, particularly in mathematics.
- Much has been done by governors and leaders, and with the assistance of a senior leader from a local school, to raise students' achievement in English. Well-targeted actions are beginning to bear fruit. Inspection evidence, for example, work in students' English books, shows an improving picture, particularly in Year 10.
- Progress in mathematics is stronger. Improvements have been secured since the previous inspection, although a higher proportion of students need to be making good or better progress.
- Students arrive in Year 7 with attainment that is broadly average. Those leaving in Year 11 in 2013 attained above average results in five or more subjects, including English and mathematics. This is a marked improvement on the previous two years when it was well below average. Attainment in many other subjects was higher in 2013 than in previous years and in some, such as history, attainment in GCSE was significantly above the national average at grades A* and A as well as in grades A* to C.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make progress in line with expectations due to the effective support they receive.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively to support those students at risk of not doing as well as their peers.
- In 2013, in Year 11, students eligible for support through the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, reached a standard in English that almost matched that of their peers. In mathematics, the difference was slightly wider and eligible students were about one third of a GCSE grade behind others. However, the achievement gap between eligible students and their peers in English and mathematics is closing at a good rate year on year.
- The previous policy of entering students early for GCSE examinations in mathematics did not hamper the most able students from achieving their predicted grades. This early entry policy prepared them well for studying a further mathematics course.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is not good enough to enable most students to make at least good progress over time. Progress, while improving, is not yet strong enough, particularly in English.
- The work set for the most able students is not challenging enough so they make less progress. However, more challenging tasks are now being introduced to stretch and extend their learning.
- Teachers are more confident in planning lessons that better meet the needs of the students. They are increasingly aware of the importance of using data showing students' attainment and progress in their planning.
- There is an increased focus on developing students' reading, writing, speaking and mathematical skills in most subjects. Students often respond well to targeted questioning by the teachers that

allows them time to think so they can give well-considered responses. Students have been taught how to develop their writing so that they can produce more detailed written responses to questions. This is increasingly evident, for example in science, which suffered in the 2013 examinations because of students' underdeveloped skills in writing at length.

- All the students spoken with during the inspection said they felt challenged in lessons. Year 10 students recognise the difference in the quality of teaching in English since leaders took decisive action to secure improvements. They speak of higher expectations and an increase in the amount of work set in the subject. This is evident in students' books. Younger students respond well to carefully targeted learning activities, particularly the less able students.
- The quality of marking and methods to assess students' knowledge and skills across the school are variable. Good practice is not evident in all subjects. Not all students know how to improve their work or reach their individual targets.
- Almost all parents of Year 11 students who responded to the school's questionnaire agree that their children are taught well. However, parents of Year 8 students were less positive.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They contribute well to a clean, orderly and safe environment. Students take seriously the high standard of dress expected.
- Attitudes to learning in lessons are good. Students often show an enthusiasm and willingness to participate fully in lessons. They are well equipped and arrive on time, keen to begin learning and they often demonstrate good humour and manners towards each other and their teachers.
- Behaviour and safety are not outstanding because, when teaching is less effective, the interest and involvement of some students suffer.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The school takes safeguarding very seriously and has very strong systems in place to check its effectiveness. Vetting procedures for staff appointments, including those of temporary staff, governors and volunteers are particularly good, with the records of all necessary checks meticulously maintained.
- Students spoken with feel safe and are taught about the different forms that bullying can take. They know where to seek advice and help should they feel uncomfortable. Bullying incidents in all forms, including racist behaviour, are rare. There have been no fixed-term exclusions in the last three years.
- The large majority of parents questioned recently by the school say their children are safe at school.
- An improving trend in attendance continues and it is now average. Students appreciate the rewards system in place for high attendance and good effort in lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the previous inspection, leadership and management have improved and are now good.
- There is a comprehensive and rigorous system of checks on the quality of teaching and learning. This includes lesson observations by senior leaders and subject leaders, who also look regularly at the extent of learning students make in their books. The views of students are gathered periodically to gain their views about teaching quality.
- Leaders understand the school's strengths and the areas where it needs to improve. The school has undertaken several subject reviews and built the findings into their planning so that improvement plans are well focused and the outcomes of intended actions are measurable.
- Leaders acted swiftly and decisively to bring about improvements in English. Actions taken were well targeted and have begun to be effective in raising achievement. Provision in English has been strengthened and early indications are that levels of attainment for the current Year 11 are on track to be closer to those in mathematics this year.
- Secure links between the senior and middle leaders exist. Middle leaders have clear roles and

feel supported as well as challenged. Staff consider the performance appraisal arrangements to be robust and understand the importance of students' progress being linked to pay awards. Middle leaders and subject teachers are increasingly aware of the need to provide high quality teaching for students to achieve well.

- The curriculum is sound and meets the interests, needs and aspirations of the students. Leaders recognise the need to include more artistic and cultural activities outside formal lessons to match those of a sporting nature.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through subjects and additional activities beyond the school day.
- Safeguarding and child protection practices are exemplary and fully meet current requirements. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated and equal opportunities for all are strongly promoted throughout the school, but the school recognises that not all pupils are doing equally as well as they should.
- The local authority provides a good level of challenge and support to this improving school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has responded well to the outcomes of the review requested at the previous inspection. Governors are active in the life of the school and are linked to departments. They have a clear understanding of the challenges that certain subjects face.
 - The governing body monitors the spending of the pupil premium and other funding closely and reviews in detail policies and practice that have an impact on students' achievement. For example, the staff appraisal policy was held up to the light and very carefully considered before being approved.
 - Governors understand the importance of linking the teachers' pay progression to appropriate performance targets and the quality of teaching and do not wince at taking some unpopular decisions. Through well-targeted training, governors understand the school's performance data and ask searching questions of school leaders. They challenge with appropriate rigour, ensuring that what is done brings about improved achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	119774
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	434100

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	608
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	T Moorcroft
Headteacher	T Farr
Date of previous school inspection	24 October 2012
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