Lathom High School

Glenburn Road, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 6JN

Inspection dates	8–9 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	**Requires improvement**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils start school with attainment which is broadly average. They do not make consistently good progress across year groups or in some subjects, including mathematics, science and humanities.
- Disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs or disability and the most able pupils do not make good enough progress.
- Teaching is not good because it does not enable pupils to make good progress across subjects. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils should achieve. They do not set work which is challenging enough and makes pupils think.
- Teachers do not always follow the school's marking policy, so pupils do not know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

- Behaviour is not good enough. A small minority of pupils, mainly in key stage 3, are not always respectful. When teaching does not interest them, some pupils do not show positive attitudes to their learning or try their best. Presentation of work is not always good.
- Attendance is too low and is not improving rapidly enough. Too many pupils are persistently absent.
- Leaders and governors do not check closely enough on whether actions to bring about improvements in the school are working well. As a result, they have not brought about rapid improvement in teaching and achievement since the previous inspection.

The school has the following strengths

- The proportion of pupils leaving school with five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, increased in 2015. Achievement in English has also improved since the previous inspection.
- The new headteacher has an accurate view of how well the school is doing, and knows what needs to be done to bring about improvements.

- Pupils feel safe in school and say that they are well looked after and supported by their teachers.
- Leaders have successfully managed the sudden increase in the number of pupils on roll caused by the closure of a local school. Those pupils have been enabled to settle into the school well, and their progress is beginning to accelerate.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is consistently good and enables all pupils to make good progress, by:
  - ensuring that teachers use information about how well pupils are learning to set work which meets their needs
  - raising teachers' expectations of what all pupils, regardless of their starting points, can achieve and ensuring that they provide high levels of challenge, particularly for the most able
  - checking that all teachers follow the school's marking policy, so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
  - providing pupils with good models and examples, so that they know what success in their work should look like.
- Accelerate the achievement of all pupils, particularly those at key stage 3 and the most able.
- Improve attendance and reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent by checking that the strategies to improve attendance are working.
- Improve attitudes to learning, so that pupils always aspire to achieve their best.
- Improve the behaviour of a small number of pupils, most of whom are in key stage 3, so that they show respect for each other and for the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels, by:
  - ensuring that they rigorously check the impact of actions to bring about improvement
  - identifying and sharing good practice, so that it becomes embedded across the school
  - ensuring that leaders have high-quality systems and processes in place, and that they follow them consistently.

A review of governance should be undertaken to assess how governors may improve their work.

A review of the use of pupil premium funding should take place to check how this aspect of the school's work could be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management   requires improvement

- Improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement since the previous inspection have not been rapid enough. Leaders have introduced a range of systems and processes for checking how well the school is doing. They regularly look at the work in pupils' books, collect assessment information to see how well pupils are learning in different subjects, and observe learning and behaviour in the classroom. However, they do not analyse the evidence collected carefully enough to be certain that the work the school is doing to bring about improvement is having a rapid impact.

- Teachers and middle leaders regularly assess pupils' work and hold detailed records of how well individual pupils are achieving. Senior leaders hold frequent conversations with middle leaders to review this information and to check whether pupils are making progress. However, not all teachers are able to assess pupils' work accurately. Some are too generous. This means that the evidence on which leaders are making judgements is not as accurate as it should be.

- Middle leaders say that performance management systems are much more robust than they used to be. Teachers are now set clear targets for improvement, based on how well pupils in their classes are achieving, and receive training to help them to achieve these targets. The middle leaders value this because they say that it enables them to hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes. They are also more accountable to senior leaders for the overall improvements in their areas of responsibility. However, some middle leaders do not make clear enough links between the quality of teaching and the impact of the teaching on pupils' learning. This means that they have an over-generous view of the quality of teaching in their areas.

- There is good provision in the school for developing pupils' literacy skills and for promoting reading. Leaders use catch-up funding (additional money provided by the government to support pupils who start school with attainment in English or mathematics below Level 4) to provide additional support for those pupils. Reading has an increasingly high profile across the school. All lower ability pupils in Year 7 take part in a specific reading programme, and other groups across the school take part in other reading challenges, such as the Lancashire Book of the Year award. However, although a range of data is collected about how well pupils are doing in literacy and reading, this data is not analysed fully to check whether the provision is being equally effective for all groups of pupils, or whether it needs to be adjusted.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and ensures that pupils have access to different pathways at key stage 4 depending on their interests and abilities. Pupils report that they are provided with a good range of information to help them make choices about their future and possible careers. Leaders are confident to make adjustments to the curriculum when pupils' needs indicate that this might be necessary. For example, in Year 7 it was identified that some pupils lacked confidence and that this was having a negative impact on their learning. Leaders responded to this by taking a lesson away from ICT and giving it to drama, so that pupils would have more opportunities to develop their confidence in a creative environment.

- Through the curriculum and additional input in assemblies, pupils are taught to value the views of others and to reflect on what it means to be a good citizen. This makes an effective contribution to their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development, as well as preparing them for life in modern Britain. Opportunities are provided outside lessons for pupils to participate in sporting or other activities such as drama and music. However, a significant number of pupils who were surveyed reported that they did not take part in any of these extra activities.

- The headteacher has a clear view of what needs to be done to improve and leaders have had an impact on improving some key aspects of the school's work as a result. For example, English was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection and this has now improved so that achievement at the end of key stage 4 is in line with national expectations. There have been changes to staffing in mathematics, including the recruitment of a new subject leader, to ensure that teaching in that area is improving. Leaders have achieved this improvement in a very challenging context. A significant number of pupils have joined the school, and more will follow, from a local school which is closing. More staff have had to be recruited and inducted into the school's expectations and systems at short notice. The fact that this has been accomplished with some success is evident in the way that those pupils have settled into the school and been made to feel welcome. Their progress is beginning to accelerate.

- **The governance of the school**
  - Since the previous inspection, the governors have taken steps to ensure that they receive more detailed information about how well the school is doing. They collect some of this first-hand rather than relying solely on the headteacher. They now receive more regular and detailed information about how well pupils are achieving. Each governor has a link with a subject leader with whom they meet to find out about the work in that area. They have supported the headteacher in making some necessary changes to staffing, for example in mathematics, in order to improve outcomes for pupils. They know how the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils has been spent, but are not yet certain about the impact of this spending on the outcomes for those pupils. They check that processes for performance management are robust and that teachers are provided with training to help them to meet their targets. However, they have an over-generous view of how well the school is doing because they believe that all aspects of the school's work are good.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff and governors receive regular, up-to-date training on child protection and safeguarding, including preventing radicalisation and protecting pupils from the risks of extremism. Checks on staff as part of recruitment processes are very robust. Leaders are quick to contact and work with parents and other agencies when pupils are vulnerable, to ensure that clear support is in place to minimise risk. Safeguarding checks and regular visits are made to alternative provision. Pupils who take part in that provision are known to be safe because their attendance is good.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment   requires improvement

- Teaching over time is not good because it has not secured good progress for the majority of pupils.
- Although teachers collect and hold information about how well pupils are learning, they do not use it well enough to plan lessons that meet the needs of pupils of different abilities in their classes. This is particularly true of the most able, who are often insufficiently challenged with low-level activities, word searches or 'filling in the gap' activities. Teachers do not use information about how well pupils achieved at key stage 2 when planning work in Year 7. In some cases, pupils repeat work which they have done at primary school. When this happens, activities do not engage them and they become bored and drift off task.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is sometimes inaccurate and they have an over-generous view of how well pupils are doing. This means that they do not always target the right pupils or focus on the correct things when providing additional support.
- The school has a clear marking and feedback policy, but teachers do not follow it consistently. As a result, pupils do not always know how well they are doing in certain subjects or what they need to do to improve. Sometimes, teachers' feedback does not provide pupils with clear enough models or examples of how they should improve, so they are not clear about what success should look like. There are some excellent examples of precise and detailed feedback, particularly in English, but these are not yet replicated across the school.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve and therefore they do not challenge pupils to do their best. This means that, in some cases, pupils are allowed to produce work which is incomplete, poorly presented, or below the standard of which that pupil is capable.
- There were examples seen of high-quality teaching over time which was leading to good progress, particularly for the least able. In English, for example, pupils in a low-ability group were provided with a very clear structure of how to produce a piece of effective persuasive writing, and were able to use this to complete an interesting and challenging piece of writing. This was aided by the fact that the teacher's subject knowledge was very good and delivered with real enthusiasm. The teacher also had a really good understanding of which pupils needed extra help in the lesson. Similar examples were seen of high-quality teaching in food technology, art and physical education. However, such examples were not consistent, even within the same departments.
- Examples were also seen of very high-quality support from teaching assistants, which had a significant impact on accelerating progress. In one lesson, the academic mentor had a very high level of subject knowledge and was able to use this to provide different examples and contexts for pupils to help them to understand the key concepts. She was very proactive, and knew when to help pupils and when they needed to be challenged to get on with work on their own. However, this same high quality is not consistent across all support staff.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare — require improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Although most pupils are responsible, courteous and respectful to each other and to adults, a small minority, particularly at key stage 3, are immature and silly. This meant that they were unable to talk sensibly to visitors about their school and did not value the importance of showing pride in it and presenting it in the best light.
- Pupils report that they feel safe in school because staff are clearly visible and prepared to provide support if pupils are in need. They feel that they are taught to keep themselves safe. For example, in ICT lessons, they learn about keeping themselves safe online in a variety of different contexts appropriate to their age.
- Pupils say that there is very little bullying in school and that when it occurs, it is dealt with quickly. They understand the different forms which bullying can take, such as cyber-bullying, and know how to protect themselves from it. They are adamant that individuals are valued in school and that diversity is celebrated. It was made clear by all pupils that there was no place in their school for prejudice and discrimination and they felt confident, for example, that any incidents of homophobia would be dealt with very quickly. The pupils who were new to the school felt that they had been well supported and welcomed by their fellow pupils.
- Pupils take pride in their appearance and look extremely smart in their uniforms. However, this same pride is not consistently evident in their work, which is sometimes poorly presented, rushed and incomplete.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Although pupils typically have a good understanding of what is expected of them and how they should behave in lessons, some struggle to follow this, particularly when work is not engaging or challenging enough. It is very noticeable that pupils are more cooperative and compliant in lessons in the mornings than they are in the afternoon. Pupils say that there are some lessons which are disrupted by low-level misbehaviour and that behaviour in lessons is not consistently good.
- Examples of boisterous behaviour were seen around the school. Pupils say that this is typical. Although it is not malicious, it can make movement around narrow corridors difficult.
- There are clear behaviour management systems in place which are understood by pupils, but not all teachers apply them in lessons. In some cases, minor incidents of misbehaviour are allowed to escalate.
- Attendance is lower than average and persistent absence is high. The school has a number of strategies to address this. For example, the attendance team has visited all the new intake of pupils at home, and the special educational needs coordinator works closely with the attendance team to identify pupils who are vulnerable. Pupils are provided with rewards for good attendance. However, there is not yet sufficient analysis of patterns in poor attendance or an understanding of reasons for pupils' unwillingness to come to school. Therefore, staff who have the lead responsibility for improving attendance are not able to target their actions well enough.

Outcomes for pupils — require improvement

- The majority of pupils start school with attainment which is broadly average. The proportion that left with five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics in 2015, though higher than the previous year, was still slightly below the national average. This indicates that, from their starting points, too few pupils are making good progress across the school in a wide range of subjects.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils and the most able requires improvement. The gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of others within the school are variable, but the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are not closing rapidly enough. Too few pupils reach the higher grades of A* and A at GCSE. This is because the most able pupils are not provided with enough challenge in lessons. Work is often too easy and does not provide them with the skills which they will need to reach the highest levels.

- Lower attaining pupils typically do better than other pupils in the school. This is because they are well supported and provided with clear structures for how to do their work. In some cases, they are provided with greater levels of challenge, relative to their ability, than the most able pupils. However, the progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability requires improvement. Although there is a range of provision in place, such as additional support outside lessons or in class, the impact of this support is not tracked well enough to check that it is meeting pupils' different needs.

- Achievement in English is accelerating and is now at least in line with national expectations by the end of key stage 4. Pupils are given opportunities to write for a range of different purposes. In their reading, they now study a range of more challenging texts at key stage 3, which is providing them with the skills they need to be successful at GCSE. Pupils, including the least able, are expected to write in detail and at length in English lessons and the majority persist with their writing so that they are able to do so. Although there are more opportunities to write in depth in other subjects than there were at the last inspection, expectations about extended writing are not yet embedded across the curriculum. Pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation, including subject-specific vocabulary, are not always corrected in line with the school's policy.

- The proportion of pupils who made good progress from their individual starting points in mathematics last year was below average. Leaders have taken steps to address this during the course of this year with the recruitment of new staff, including a new head of department. There is evidence of some improvement as a result. Teachers are identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge and taking steps to address these, and to tackle any misconceptions. Pupils are developing increased confidence in their mathematical ability as a result. However, too much time is spent on the easier types of question at the expense of the more challenging questions that will enable pupils to use and apply their skills in a range of different contexts.

- Progress in other subjects is variable. Pupils typically achieve well, for example in food technology and physical education, but progress tends to be much slower in art, graphics and geography.

- Pupils who attend alternative provision are well supported to make progress through a curriculum which matches their needs and is closely monitored to check its impact. There is evidence that the pupils who have transferred into the school from another school are beginning to make accelerated progress and to catch up with the rest.

School details

Unique reference number	119774
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10008161

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	621
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Cotterill
Headteacher	Jane Galbraith
Telephone number	01695 725653
Website	www.lathomhighschool.org
Email address	info@lathom.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–26 February 2014

Information about this school

- Lathom High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has taken up post.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is average.
- The school currently makes use of alternative provision for 24 pupils at the Acorns Centre (a pupil referral unit), the Eco Centre and the West Lancashire Training and Learning Centre.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased by approximately 70 pupils since September, and will increase by another 40 at the end of June because of the closure of a local school. The decision to close the school was not made until August 2015. Senior leaders at Lathom High School had reduced the number of staff because of falling rolls. This meant that they had to recruit new staff and alter the curriculum and timetable to meet the needs of new pupils at very short notice.
- The school receives support from a national leader of education based at Penwortham Girls' School and from the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum national expectations for attainment and progress.
- The school's website meets most requirements, but does not provide sufficient detail about what is taught in each subject in each year.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 33 lessons. Some of these lessons were observed jointly with two different leaders.
- Samples of pupils' work in books were scrutinised in lessons. In addition, jointly with the headteacher and an assistant headteacher, inspectors reviewed work in science, humanities, mathematics, languages and English books from Years 7, 9 and 10.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including minutes of meetings, information provided to governors, action plans, examples of anonymised performance management targets and records of leaders' monitoring activities.
- Inspectors spoke formally with senior and middle leaders, as well as with the chair of the governing body and five other governors, a cross-section of school staff, a representative of the local authority and the national leader of education who provides additional support to the school. They also held formal meetings with a number of groups of pupils, as well as talking to them informally at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors took into account 135 responses to a pupil questionnaire, 24 responses to the parent questionnaire (Parent View) and 36 responses to a staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Christine Birchall, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
John Leigh	Ofsted Inspector
Dympna Woods	Ofsted Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Ofsted Inspector

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