

Lathom High School: A Technology College

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 119774 |
| Local Authority | Lancashire |
| Inspection number | 291541 |
| Inspection dates | 21–22 March 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Garry Jones HMI |

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 on roll | |
| School | 648 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Tom Moorcroft |
| Headteacher | Mr Douglas Bruce |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 September 2001 |
| School address | Glenburn Road Skelmersdale Lancashire WN8 6JN |
| Telephone number | 01695 725653 |
| Fax number | 01695 725654 |

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Age group | 11–16 |
| Inspection dates | 21–22 March 2007 |
| Inspection number | 291541 |

© 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a specialist college for technology and has Investors in People status for leadership and management. It is below average in size. It draws students mainly from the town of Skelmersdale. Parts of the town face considerable conditions of social and economic disadvantage and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is almost double the national average. There are high levels of mobility in the school population. Almost all students are of White British origin. There are a small number of students who are looked after by the local authority. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is twice the national average and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Lathom High School is a rapidly improving school. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory, but it has a number of good features. It provides satisfactory value for money. The school is valued greatly by the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the parental questionnaire and by the students. The care of students is outstanding and the support provided to the most vulnerable young people is exceptional. This has resulted in significant improvement in the personal attitudes and well-being of all students, which are now good. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. The vast majority of students attend regularly and enjoy school. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good and incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with effectively. A recent survey of students shows that they enjoy school and feel safe within the caring environment. The students report that there are few incidents of bullying and that these are addressed promptly. Students are well aware of the importance of healthy living. They have contributed to the improvement of the school meals on offer and participate willingly in sports and other exercise. There are well established systems for students to contribute to the development of the school through a wide range of positions of responsibility and the school council.

Students enter the school with attainment that is below that found nationally. Many have problems with literacy which are being addressed through an effective reading recovery scheme. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 remains below the national average and progress is also below average. In Key Stage 4 progress accelerates and the overall progress achieved in the school is broadly in line with that found nationally. Despite this, attainment remains below the national average at the end of Key Stage 4. However, few students leave without a GCSE or equivalent qualification and the proportion gaining five or more passes at grades A* to G is in line with that found nationally. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is improving as is achievement. The quality of teaching contributes to this improvement. Overall teaching is satisfactory, but there is a significant proportion that is good. There are good strategies to improve the impact of teaching further, including the revision of the school's learning policy. Teaching does not consistently provide sufficient challenge and pace to raise progress from satisfactory to good. Students' progress is monitored and underachievement is identified to ensure that appropriate support is provided. This monitoring is not sufficiently coordinated across the whole school, limiting its effectiveness. All students have targets that they are working towards, but the use of the targets in lessons to support improvement is not consistent.

The curriculum is good. The statutory requirements are met and adaptations in both key stages ensure that the needs and aspirations of the students are met. The development of a specialist team for the delivery of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is enriching students' awareness of this area. The school has used its technology college status and its extensive links with partners to improve its curriculum and those of partner schools. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment to enhance provision.

Overall leadership and management are good. There are outstanding partnerships with local schools, colleges and other groups and agencies to enhance provision. The leadership of the headteacher is exceptional. He promotes a vision that encapsulates the Every Child Matters agenda in a very inclusive school. He knows his school well and has established good systems for planning for improvement. The implementation of plans is monitored thoroughly and their impact evaluated effectively to show that initiatives are bringing about improvement. The school's self-evaluation was satisfactory and the majority of judgements were accurate. This

process does not yet sufficiently involve all stakeholders. The headteacher is well supported by an effective senior management team and governing body.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and attainment further.
- Improve the consistency of the teaching to provide appropriate challenge in all lessons.
- Improve the consistency of the use of data and targets to enhance guidance to students on how to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Students enter the school with attainment that is below that found nationally. Many students have limited reading skills which impairs their capacity to access the curriculum. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 remain consistently below the national average in English, mathematics and science. Whilst there was an improvement in the proportion of students gaining the nationally expected level in mathematics and science in the national tests in 2006, the proportion attaining at this level in English fell. The progress of students across the key stage was below that achieved by similar students nationally.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 remain significantly below average. However, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades at A* to G level was broadly in line with the national average in 2006 and the proportion gaining five or more grades at A* to C level was the highest ever achieved. The achievement of students across both key stages is broadly in line with that found nationally and has improved steadily over the last three years. Progress is better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 and girls make more progress than boys. The school is actively addressing these inconsistencies. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is also good. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good, although there is some low level disruption from a minority of students, particularly in Year 9. The students relate well to each other and to the staff. They enjoy their lessons. Attendance is satisfactory, but is improving due to the efforts of a committed team, including school based attendance officers, and the use of imaginative reward systems. The students feel safe in the school and instances of bullying are rare. There is an effective buddy system for Year 7 students and they feel able to approach Year 11 prefects and form tutors for help. Students are well aware of healthy eating through the Skelmersdale Food Initiative and there is good participation in sport. Students make a positive contribution to the wider community, for example, through students helping adults from the local community to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills and through charity fundraising. Students also contribute to the school community through the school council and the many positions of responsibility which they value and speak of proudly. Senior prefects, for example, work with governors on developing the school improvement plan. The focus on improving literacy skills and the development of good social and interpersonal skills together with opportunities for work-related

learning, enterprise and vocational courses prepare students well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the satisfactory lessons the level of challenge was too limited to ensure good progress. In some of these lessons activities were dominated by the teacher which resulted in lapses of concentration and a passive attitude to learning by students. Low level disruption by a very small minority in some lessons was usually handled well, but in some cases slowed the pace of the lesson and adversely affected progress. However, there was a significant proportion of good teaching, which enabled students to make good progress in lessons and over time. Year 11 coursework in design and technology, for example, showed how students have been helped to develop high level analytical and evaluation skills. Good learning took place where the teacher had a clear understanding of students' prior knowledge and used assessment effectively. Well-directed questioning, stimulating discussion and challenging tasks kept students interested and well motivated. In these lessons there were opportunities for using initiative, working independently or in pairs and groups. This reflects the efforts of staff working groups to develop a greater range of teaching and learning styles, but these are not yet embedded in all areas. This initiative is supported by the skills being developed within the independent learning centre. Marking was regular but the provision of advice on improvement was inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. In Key Stage 3 it is broad and balanced. The needs of individual learners have been taken into consideration and effective additional support for the development of literacy skills has been included for some students. In Key Stage 4 students have the opportunity to follow a wide range of courses that are matched to their interests and abilities, but there remains an emphasis on a broad and balanced curriculum. Students develop a good understanding of citizenship and healthy lifestyles through PSHCE lessons which are taught by teachers who are specialising in specific areas. The school works successfully with other schools and the local college to ensure that students are provided with additional vocational choices such as construction. There are very good links with a large range of partners to develop students' understanding and experience of work-related learning and enterprise skills. The school's specialist status has increased the number of ICT suites available and this has had a positive impact on skills and achievement, particularly in design and technology, science and maths. The student independent learning centre is well used at lunchtimes and after school. There is a good range of enrichment activities including trips and visits. Students enjoy a large number of extra-curricular activities, including dance, netball, music, band, show rehearsals as well as attending homework clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. The care of students, particularly of the most vulnerable, is exceptional. The Every Child Matters centre is making a highly significant impact

on supporting students who are facing difficulties. There is an emphasis on a coordinated approach to addressing the emotional, behavioural and learning needs of identified individuals. Students are also able to refer themselves to counsellors and other staff. Effective links are established with external agencies such as the school nurse, educational psychologist, occupational therapists, the children and adolescent mental health team and the county inclusion service. There is very effective liaison with primary schools to identify students who face difficulties and coordinated support is then provided to ease transition. Students receive very good advice from staff about possible future pathways and the majority go on to further education or work-related employment.

Academic guidance is not as well developed. The progress of students against their academic targets is monitored regularly to identify underachievement in order to provide support. However, the monitoring is not sufficiently coordinated across the whole school to maximise its impact. The use of targets to support learning in lessons is inconsistent and not all students are aware of what they have to do to attain their targets.

There are well established systems for ensuring the health and safety of all students. Procedures for ensuring that appropriate staff are appointed to work with young people are in line with current government guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides exceptional leadership. He has a clear vision for the development of the school which is built on a perceptive understanding of the barriers to achievement in the community. He is well supported by an experienced deputy headteacher and an extended senior leadership team who share his vision. The school improvement plan is detailed and there is clear evidence that the strategies are bringing about improvements in the personal development of the young people and on their achievement. The impact on achievement is clear, but has yet to make achievement good. The senior leadership team and governors monitor the implementation of the plan closely and the plan is amended each term to reflect changing priorities. The process of self-evaluation is in place, but does not yet involve all stakeholders sufficiently. The strengths and areas for development of the school are known well by the senior leadership team and the governing body. The governing body is effective in holding the school to account through an established system of committees. It is ably led by an experienced chair of governors. The school provides satisfactory value for money and has very good capacity to improve.

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 |
|--|-----------------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | |
|--|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

| | |
|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 |

Personal development and well-being

| | |
|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 2 |
| 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? | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

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? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | 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

Lathom High School

Glenburn Road

Skelmersdale

Lancashire

WN8 6JN

21 March 2007

Dear Students

You may remember that recently a group of inspectors visited your school. Thank you for the help you gave us during the inspection. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and getting your views on the school.

Many of you told us how much you think your school has improved. We agree that it is a rapidly improving school. It is currently a satisfactory school, but there are some very good features. We believe that your school looks after you exceptionally well. When you face particular difficulties you receive exceptionally effective support from the staff in the

Every Child Matters centre. As a result most of you behave well, enjoy school and attend regularly.

The school is very well led by your exceptional headteacher who has a clear idea of the type of school you need and deserve. He is well supported by his senior colleagues, the governors and some of you when planning for the improvement of the school. The senior leaders have made certain that you have the opportunity to study a good range of subjects in Years 10 and 11 to prepare you for the future. There are a good range of additional activities for you to take part in and there are many opportunities for you to take on responsibilities.

Although we saw some good teaching we have asked the school to make sure that all of the teaching is equally good and consistently challenges you to improve. We think that you are making satisfactory progress, but we believe that you can attain higher standards. We have also asked the teachers to make sure that you know exactly what you have to do to reach your targets. They will need your help. In some lessons some of you do not concentrate hard enough and allow your good behaviour to slip.

Best wishes for the future!

Garry Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector