

Lymm High Voluntary Controlled School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111448
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	325388
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Sue Harrison HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1976
Sixth form	438
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Jones
Headteacher	Miss A Walsh
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2005
School address	Oughtrington Lane Lymm Cheshire WA13 0RB
Telephone number	01925 755458
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average comprehensive school, based in a rural area. It recruits mainly from prosperous areas, but there are students from less advantaged backgrounds. There are few students from minority ethnic groups. The number of students with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average, although overall the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school gained specialist status in modern foreign languages in 1996. It also received designation as a sports college in April 2007 and gained training school status in September 2007. The school owns its own leisure centre, shop and a residential property in North Wales. It has won several awards, including the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) International Schools Award, Sportsmark Award and National Healthy School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school because of the excellent curriculum that meets individual needs and the support students receive to enable them to succeed. The standard of students' work is high. They make good progress overall and outstanding progress in some subjects and in the sixth form. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do exceptionally well. Progress in English and mathematics was satisfactory in 2007. The school took action to address this and students are now making good progress in these subjects.

Personal development is outstanding. Student involvement in school life is exceptional. Attendance is high and there are very few exclusions. The school provides a very inclusive ethos and students develop an excellent awareness and understanding of social cohesion. They develop skills that help to prepare them for the future and gain awards and prizes in a wide range of activities. The majority of parents are extremely positive about the school and the impact it has had on their children. A few are less satisfied with specific aspects, such as the behaviour of a small minority of students. However, inspectors found behaviour to be good.

Teaching and learning are good overall. There are many outstanding lessons across a range of subjects but the school recognises it has a small amount of teaching which is satisfactory and could be better. Sharing of good practice to address this is one of the school's priorities. In the majority of lessons, students are well challenged; they enjoy the work and make good or outstanding progress. Marking of student work is excellent in some cases, but inspectors found inconsistencies in the regularity and rigour of marking. Teaching and learning are outstanding in the sixth form.

The curriculum is outstanding. The school continually reviews its curriculum and offers students an exceptionally wide range of options and opportunities. The breadth of enrichment activities is astounding. Care, guidance and support are also excellent. The school works very hard and effectively to ensure young people transferring into this large school settle quickly and feel valued as an individual.

The range and quality of support mechanisms is excellent.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior leaders have recognised where there are areas for improvement and are taking effective action to bring this about. There is no sense of complacency. The vision of the new headteacher is to build on best practice to maintain high standards and bring about further improvement in student progress in some subjects. She is well supported by staff and governors. Issues raised by parents are being taken seriously, for example, there are plans to address concerns expressed by a few parents about overcrowding at lunchtime.

The range and effectiveness of work with external partners is outstanding, and the school has managed its specialisms extremely well to enhance its own curriculum and its work with other schools.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Most Year 11 students stay into the sixth form and are joined by around 40 students from other schools. An early residential course for all ensures that students quickly get to know each other. Retention between Years 12 and

13 is good and almost all students complete their courses. Students achieve high standards in their work. When compared to their prior attainment, they generally make excellent progress, although the school recognises and is addressing some variation between subjects. Students display a high level of maturity. They willingly accept the responsibilities they are given; helping younger students to strengthen their numeracy and literacy skills and coaching sports in local primary schools are just two examples.

Students learn well because teaching is excellent. Teachers have high expectations of students and constantly challenge them to think for themselves and develop independent study skills. As a result, students are happy to contribute in lessons and tackle work with interest and enthusiasm.

A very rich curriculum allows students to choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Optional courses, for example, in personal finance, languages, first aid and, 'lunch on a student loan' add colour. Contributions from guest speakers help students make future choices. Students are very well prepared for their future well-being, including those who seek a gap year. All students on BTEC courses undertake work experience in Europe. There are opportunities for all to participate in Youth Enterprise.

There is very good leadership and management of the sixth form. Progress is rigorously monitored. Students speak highly of the care, guidance and support they receive. Growth in student numbers has put pressure on existing accommodation, especially the space available for private study.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the range of subjects where student progress is excellent by spreading the good and outstanding practice that exists in much of the teaching and learning.
- Improve the consistency of marking of students' work to ensure they are clear about what they need to do to improve further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Student achievement is good. The school caters for a range of abilities; overall students enter the school with significantly higher than average levels of prior attainment. The standard of their work is high. At Key Stage 3 students' results in national tests are significantly above average in all three core subjects. At GCSE the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C in any five subjects was 94% in 2007. The proportion gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics was 67%. Unvalidated data for 2008 shows a similar picture.

Overall, students make good progress against their starting points and progress is outstanding in some subjects, notably science and physical education. In modern foreign languages, one of the school's specialisms, students make good progress. In English and mathematics, student progress was satisfactory in 2007. Action taken to strengthen these areas is proving successful. Inspectors found student progress in lessons observed in these subjects to be generally good, and in some cases outstanding. Data from current students who have taken the GCSE English examination early, and modular results in mathematics, also demonstrate significant improvement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and make outstanding progress at the school.

In addition to academic qualifications, students achieve high standards and win awards in a range of extra-curricular activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is outstanding. They develop excellent values about care, hard work, personal achievement and respect for diversity. In discussions about important topics such as current affairs, human rights and equality they put forward well argued and articulate points of view. Educational visits and opportunities in religious studies enable students to learn well about the multicultural nature of society. Inspectors found that behaviour is good, although a small number of parents expressed concerns about the behaviour of a few students. Students display outstanding enjoyment of school life and all that the school has to offer. Attendance is excellent. Students have very good attitudes to healthy living. They know what foods are good for them and participation in sports is very high. Students' contribution to the school community is exceptional. Inspectors were very impressed with the school and sixth form councils which have influenced governors and senior staff in school development. Students are gaining an excellent range of skills to ensure their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. There are examples of outstanding lessons across a range of subjects. There is an increasing emphasis on identifying good practice to share across departments and this is being enhanced by work developed within the school's second specialism. Across the school students enjoy good relationships with teachers. Planning is good and focuses well on learning. Specialist staff and teaching assistants are very effective in supporting the learning of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, they make exceptional progress.

In the most successful lessons, students respond very well to the high expectations of teachers. Challenging tasks are set. The praise and encouragement they receive motivates them. Very well targeted and highly effective questioning deepens students' understanding and extends their thinking. As a consequence, students thrive and make great strides in their learning. In a small number of lessons teaching is less effective and the pace of learning is slow. Therefore, students become bored and sometimes go off task. Some marking of students' work is excellent, but the quality and frequency of marking is inconsistent. It does not always show students what they have to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and fully supports the inclusive ethos of the school. It provides very effectively for the needs of its students, placing a strong emphasis on their personal and academic development. Exemplary features are the breadth and diversity of courses on offer. There is also an extensive programme of enrichment from all areas of the curriculum, driven by the school's specialisms.

An international dimension and theme of global citizenship feature strongly across different subjects and form a very valuable part of the curriculum. Excellent programmes for personal, social, health education and citizenship make a positive contribution to students' personal development and are key factors in promoting their awareness of the local and broader community.

The wide range of vocational and academic routes is enhanced by specialist facilities, for example, in sports and catering. There is an extensive range of languages and sports opportunities; mandarin Chinese, Italian, water polo, sailing and British Sign Language to name but a few. The school's centre in Wales, T'yn-y-Felin, provides residential experiences for all year groups to enhance their skills and relationships with staff and each other through recreation and outdoor activities. Students of all year groups tell us that they thoroughly enjoy these experiences. The high level of sports activity is reflected in students being represented at local, national and international levels. At weekends there is a high take-up of team sports. There is good promotion of basic skills across the curriculum needed for success in further education and in the world of work and excellent promotion of wider skills such as teamwork and problem solving.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school provides very effective welfare and support systems for all students, resulting in outstanding personal development and good achievement. Arrangements for transition are very effective at helping students settle into this large school. The 'hall' system ensures students are treated as individuals and have a sense of belonging to a smaller unit as well as to the whole school. Students say they feel safe and well cared for and that the few instances of bullying are well dealt with. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable students is very well organized and managed. This results in outstanding achievement in the great majority of these cases because they are fully included in all the school has to offer. Relationships are very good at all levels. Representative views from students include, 'teachers always give us extra help if we need it and always have time for us'. The tracking of students' progress is good. Appropriate procedures for safeguarding, health and safety are in place. Students respond very positively to the system of rewards for good behaviour and achievement. The number of exclusions from school is exceptionally low. Links with outside agencies are very strong so that specialist support and guidance can be arranged quickly when necessary.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The newly appointed headteacher has a clear vision for the school based on continuous improvement. She and her senior colleagues are implementing strategies that are well informed by best practice to maintain high standards and further improve achievement. The school has extended further the outstanding curriculum it offered at the last inspection, and it continues to offer an excellent level of care and guidance. In view of its inclusive ethos, the outstanding quality of its curriculum and students' good levels of achievement, the school provides excellent value for money.

Senior managers energetically support the headteacher. The monitoring of departments and evaluation of teaching and learning is rigorous. Since the last inspection, there was a drop in performance in a small number of subjects. However, the school's excellent systems for self-evaluation identified this and actions taken have been very effective; inspectors found students to be making good or outstanding progress in these subjects. Senior managers are driving an increased focus on targets that are challenging but realistic. Middle managers are skilful at using this information to identify areas for improvement and establish action plans in departments. Progress against plans is monitored regularly and there is substantial evidence of the success of this strategy, for example in English and mathematics. A strong sense of common purpose is evident across the school and targeted professional development is well placed to bring about further improvements. The governing body effectively provides challenge and support to the school's managers. Self-assessment judgements are accurate and the school demonstrates excellent capacity to make further improvements.

Community cohesion and the involvement of students within the school and the wider community are both excellent. Governors and school managers have worked hard to provide imaginatively for students' understanding of social cohesion at school, local, national and international levels. Equality of opportunity has a high priority to stretch the most able and support students of all levels of ability. Students are frequently consulted about developments in the school and are represented by observers at governors' meetings.

The school makes very good cross-curricular use of its specialisms, resources and copious external contacts. It has excellent links with local agencies, schools, colleges and employers to enhance the curriculum and the support it offers. The school manages its specialisms well and is very involved in local partnerships, providing outreach support to other local schools.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

As you know we recently inspected your school. Thank you for helping us to find our way around and giving us your views about the school. I am writing to tell you about our findings.

We think Lymm High is an outstanding school. You told us how much you enjoyed school life and we were impressed by the amazing range of courses and extra-curricular activities on offer. We think that the standard of work you produce is high and that you make good progress in most subjects and outstanding progress in some. You attend well and are very enthusiastic learners in most of your lessons.

As well as your academic qualifications, you are gaining confidence and skills that help to prepare you for when you leave school. We think you participate extremely well in the life of the school and the wider community. Well done to those who have gained awards and prizes in a range of sporting, musical and many other activities.

You told us that there is very good care, guidance and support to help you settle quickly into this large school and that you feel treated as an individual. We think that behaviour is good overall, though we are aware there are a few instances where this is not the case.

We think the school is very well led and managed. The new headteacher has a clear vision to maintain all the excellent things about the school and improve some aspects, and she and her team are very clear about how to do that. Inspectors saw improvements in English and mathematics, where you are now making good, and in some cases outstanding, progress. We have asked the headteacher to focus on two particular areas for improvement.

- Extend the range of subjects where student progress is excellent by spreading the good and outstanding practice that exists in much of the teaching and learning.
- Improve the consistency of marking of students' work to ensure they are clear about what they need to do to improve further.