

Wennington Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119873
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327143
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Boarding provision
Social care URN
Social care inspector

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Max Lunt
Headteacher	Mr Joe Prendergast
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2005
School address	Lodge Lane Wennington Lancaster Lancashire LA2 8NS
Telephone number	01524 221333
Fax number	01524 222140

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Inspection number	327143

© Crown copyright 2009

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 additional inspector and one social care inspector.

Description of the school

This is a maintained residential and day special school. There are currently 48 boarders. All students have a statement of special educational need with the primary category being behavioural, emotional and social need. Many students also have additional learning difficulties and/ disabilities, including attention deficit and hyperactive disorders, autistic spectrum disorders and speech and language difficulties. A few students have moderate learning difficulties. Some 10% of students are looked after by the local authority. English is the first language of all students and all are White British. Socio-economic backgrounds are very varied. On entry, most students have very low self-esteem and few aspirations for the future. Many have been excluded from previous schools and/or have been poor attenders.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

To visit this outstanding school is a life-affirming experience. From very low starting points, both educationally and in terms of their personal development, students make excellent progress. They develop confidence and self-respect and this opens doors for them to gain a wide range of good qualifications before they leave. This achievement and progress stand students in excellent stead for adult life. Outstanding boarding provision contributes enormously to students' achievement, personal development and to seamlessly extending the curriculum around the clock.

The school is widely respected by parents, students and the many other schools throughout the local authority area with which it has formed excellent relationships. These partnerships contribute enormously to securing better futures not only for Wennington Hall students but also many others, including those in mainstream schools. In addition, the school works extremely closely with a wide range of professionals and agencies to resolve issues that are not necessarily school based. Relationships with the local community are outstanding, with all of the excellent facilities being shared with its members on a regular basis. Outstanding leadership, management and governance in past years have put in place excellent, sustainable systems that have contributed to the rapid pace of improvement and an outstanding capacity to build on this further in the future. This capacity to improve is greatly helped by the school's excellent reputation, both locally and nationally. In turn, this means that there is always a good response to advertisements for staffing vacancies, putting the school in a position where it can employ many of the best.

Teaching is excellent. Nearly all teaching in lessons is at least good and about a third is outstanding. In most cases, only minor improvements are needed to convert more of the good teaching to an outstanding standard. The overall effectiveness of teaching is judged to be outstanding because it leads to students achieving exceptionally well and nearly always exceeding challenging personal targets in a wide range of subjects across the whole of the excellent, outstandingly well-enriched curriculum. The evidence of inspection strongly supports the school's prediction that this year's academic results will be the best in the school's history. This complements the fact that in 2008, value added scores from the start of Key Stage 3 to the end of Key Stage 4 put the school in the top 5% of all schools nationally.

The outstanding personal development and well-being of students are central to the success of the school. Students often arrive at a very low point in their lives but quickly grow in confidence because they begin to understand that conditional trust, reciprocated by their own commitment and effort to keeping themselves and others safe and free from harassment or bullying, brings huge benefits. One of the joys of this school is the open accessibility of facilities. Supervision throughout the school day is vigilant but not oppressive. Students respect this and, with occasional lapses, behave outstandingly well. Given the fact that many students enter the school with appalling attendance records in previous schools and the fact that this school secures significantly higher attendance levels than similar schools, this is an outstanding achievement. High levels of trust between students and staff are rapidly developed. Students' enjoyment of school is clearly evident in their wholehearted participation in classroom and recreational activities. The school strongly promotes the adoption of healthy lifestyles, recognised recently by becoming the first in the area to achieve 'Flagship Status' and a commendation for its smoking cessation programme. Wennington Hall is a community within a community. Students have a very strong say in how they feel it could improve further and

they also contribute enormously to the local community by helping to dispel some of the myths surrounding young people like themselves. Students also develop an excellent understanding of people beyond their own community and those within it who are different to themselves by nature of their disabilities or their ethnic origins.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The headteacher, senior management team and staff members have a wealth of experience, which enables students' needs to be met extremely well. Reflective practice and critical analysis on performance have led to many creative and innovative ways to further develop the already high standards. A culture of continuous improvement is established, which places high expectations and challenging targets for all the young people. Pride in performance is embedded within the school culture and this allows many different learning opportunities for students' personal growth and development. Students gain experience and confidence to succeed in life. Practice fully meets with the requirements of Residential Special Schools' national minimum standards.

The senior management team provides excellent support in maintaining a competent, well-qualified workforce. There is good clarity of purpose in how staff are being managed. Staff receive feedback through performance management reviews. The school holds the prestigious Investors in People award for the high standards of support staff receive. Staff morale is excellent and their enthusiasm and skills make the whole school environment an extremely interesting place for students.

There is a comprehensive development plan outlining how the school's operation will be maintained. The availability of high quality data from the school's monitoring system informs where future improvements can be made. Project work is introduced frequently. This means that new initiatives keep the school at the 'cutting edge' of practice. School governors and an independent visitor report findings in a transparent way. Finances are effectively managed. The school recently achieved the Financial Management Standards in Schools award. Policies and procedures are detailed and subject to regular review.

The school's prospectus highlights numerous awards, charter marks, outstanding contributions to students' lives and achievements. These include the Lancashire and the National Healthy Schools awards. The personal development and well-being of each student is given the highest priority. Students, with staff encouragement, have adopted healthier lifestyles. There is an external network of support from professionals and agencies developing students' knowledge on lifestyle. This is particularly evident within programmes on smoking cessation, diet, healthy eating and exercise. Specialist agencies support mental health. School health services, education welfare officers, social workers and Connexions support care staff and the education curriculum in the delivery of personal, social and health education and citizenship.

Each student has a specific health plan. Up-to-date health information is held. Students confirm satisfaction with how health and well-being issues are handled. Key workers organise routine medical, optical and dental appointments. Suitable controls for administering medicines are established. Policy and guidance have been developed over a number of years with support from health professionals.

Meals are varied, healthy and nutritionally balanced and include students' favourite food preferences. The catering manager ensures boys' birthdays are celebrated. Special themed meals support the school's work on looking at cultural diversity.

A robust vetting, recruitment and selection procedure, including input from the students, is following for all staff appointments. This means that students are looked after safely by skilled and experienced staff. The response to health and safety matters is extremely well coordinated. Detailed risk assessments and behaviour management plans support individuals to achieve and develop to their full potential. Personal safety and hazard identification are regular topics discussed during school assemblies.

Detailed policy and guidance are available, covering a wide range of safeguarding matters. Arrangements for complaints, child protection, bullying and behaviour management are handled extremely well and ensure that students feel listened to and protected. No concerns were highlighted. Practice at the school is transparent in reporting incidents. The senior management team has access to data-rich information and uses this to monitor practice. Analysis allows students' individual programmes to be continually evaluated, in line with their specific needs.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Equality and diversity matter at this school, which leads to each student being treated fairly. A broad, balanced and relevant curriculum provides support for the students in acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding. There is a culture of high expectation that allows students' self-esteem and confidence to grow, as they acquire skills relevant to adult life and the world of work. Each individual is fulfilling their potential in an environment appropriate to his special educational needs. Students learn about discipline, take responsibility and respect the rights and needs of others.

Each student makes good progress in meeting his individual targets. The school has greatly improved its academic results over recent years. The school's vocational centre provides opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications and skills, which have a positive impact on their future lives. There are active partnerships with other schools and involvement in many aspects of charitable work. Cross-curricular activities allow students to experience some real-life project work. Students frequently organise and lead activities for less fortunate children. This allows them to gain a greater understanding of wider community issues. This work is closely linked to celebrating difference. A seamless response is evident between the school's education and residential provision.

Staff practice engages the students in an extensive range of activities. Developing skills and individual potential through new recreational experiences are clearly linked to educational attainment and the vocational department. School resources are exceptional. Equipment is of a high specification and well maintained. Staff efforts are valued by the students and their enthusiasm has received many official awards. There is a positive team spirit, which promotes success.

The staff's effective ongoing consultation maintains positive relationships throughout school placements. Inter-agency work is coordinated extremely well and communication is facilitated, using an extensive range of methods. Parents receive regular school updates on their child's progress. Statutory reviews and meetings take place and parents confirm that school rules are being discussed. The boys' council provides a genuine opportunity for students to voice their views and opinions.

The school is stable and clearly fit for purpose. Each area has its own unique character and there is great attention to detail. Each boarding house provides first class accommodation. Maintenance of the whole school site is coordinated. Consultation with the students occurs about plans and developments at the school. Students talk with pride about their school and in particular, developments within vocational departments. The school ethos secures positive outcomes for students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Maintain the currently successful drive to increase further the amount of outstanding teaching.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students often enter the school at a low level, both in terms of their prior achievement and their willingness to address the situation. Current Year 7 students' starting points varied from reading, spelling and mathematical ages often as low as those found in Years 1 or 2 in students in mainstream schools to, occasionally, those that are broadly matched to their age.

From this starting point, students achieve outstandingly well. Initially, the greatest progress is in terms of their personal development and the overcoming of their initial attitudes to working hard to achieve success. This is reflected in the fact that while achievement is good in Years 7 and 8, it takes off in Year 9, with most students making sufficiently rapid progress to considerably exceed challenging individual targets. These are set taking into account the wishes of parents, students' Key Stage 2 results, cognitive ability testing and Year 8 assessment data.

The progress made by students accelerates throughout Key Stage 4. In summer 2008, almost nine out of ten students gained GCSE passes in eight or more subjects, mainly in the lower range of grades, but nearly all including English, mathematics and science. This represented a doubling of success over the previous year. This year, on the evidence of inspection, the school can confidently expect even better results, with more passes and at higher grades.

Achievement extends well beyond the academic, with many students gaining nationally recognised vocational qualifications at a high level. Many also achieve considerable sporting success.

The school rigorously monitors the progress of clearly defined groups of students, including those who are looked after and those who have special gifts and talents. Great care is taken to ensure that any student who needs a bit of extra support is given it. As a result, all students share an equal opportunity to achieve their potential.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The promotion of students' personal development and well-being is central to the school's purpose. Deficiencies in both areas are the main reason for referral. Outcomes are outstanding, paving the way for excellent academic achievement and the laying of the foundations on which students can rebuild their lives and face the future with considerable, justified optimism.

Excellent attention is paid to ensuring that students become less self-centred and show increasing consideration for the lives of others. Their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is exceptional. In a particularly inspiring assembly during the inspection, they demonstrated their awareness of people who are physically disabled and of those who do not speak the same language as themselves. Even without taking into account previous histories, behaviour is outstanding. This is because the school helps students to understand why they behave as they do. It instils in them the awareness that anger and frustration are more likely to lead to problems than solutions and that their own actions can either support or compromise the safety of others. An excellent system of rewards and sanctions, developed in consultation

with the students and rigorously observed and understood by staff and students alike, contributes enormously. The excellent curriculum, with its amazing range of high quality enrichment activities ensures that students, often for the first time in their lives, express huge enthusiasm and enjoyment for coming to school. The school has a longstanding reputation for promoting healthy lifestyles. Students eat sensibly in school, participate wholeheartedly in an excellent range of physical and adventurous activities and have responded very well to a smoking cessation initiative.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The hallmark of outstanding teaching is seen in the excellent achievement of students. Teachers show a great affinity with the students and the problems they face. They very perceptively balance the attention they give to students in developing their academic and personal development. As a result, relationships between adults and students are trusting and respectful. The effectiveness of teaching rests more with the consistent regularity of good teaching, which builds systematically on prior learning, well informed by increasingly thorough assessment procedures, than the incidence of outstanding teaching. That the incidence of the latter could be increased to bring about even further improvement is fully recognised by the school's leadership and management. Teachers rarely have to exercise behaviour management skills because they keep students interested in what they are learning, make excellent use of computers to vary tasks and are quick to spot early signs of unrest. Because students' behaviour is so good, teaching assistants are freed to provide invaluable learning support rather than behaviour support. This team of assistants is exceptionally well managed to maximise the carefully targeted support it gives to individuals, not only in classrooms but also in the 121 (one-to-one) class where students with additional difficulties receive extra support for short periods each week.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum considerably exceeds all requirements. The strong focus on promoting the basic skills of numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) is not allowed to impinge on the promotion of students' personal, social and health education nor their enjoyment of school, which is enhanced by an excellent range of high quality, purposeful enrichment activities. The school provides students with precisely the curriculum they need and respond to. As a result, students tolerate those parts they are less enthusiastic about because they recognise that along with the rough comes the smooth. The curriculum benefits all students equally and this contributes significantly to students' enjoyment of school. Anyone who has a special talent in a specific area is facilitated and encouraged to achieve excellence, be it in academic attainment, sporting prowess, vocational aptitude or motor sport. Any student who experiences difficulty in any area of the curriculum is offered carefully targeted support to help them through periods of difficulty.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Students are offered outstanding care, guidance and support. Through rigorous initial assessments, the school quickly fills up any gaps in information from previous schools or support agencies. Very high levels of care, coupled with the provision of a huge range of interesting activities mean that students are keen to come to school and this contributes greatly to the promotion of excellent attendance. Staff support students extremely well, be it in the classroom, where teachers and assistants offer carefully tailored learning and behaviour support, or in the residence, where care staff can be seen to be supporting learning through helping students with their homework. Rigorous attention is given to meeting students' medical and physical needs, helping them to stay safe and healthy. Assessment is rigorous. Students identified as needing extra support with their learning benefit from skilled support in the 121 class. Those with special gifts or talents are strongly supported to develop them, be they in the subjects of the curriculum, motorsport, sporting prowess or the arts.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school has benefited from many years of stable, visionary leadership, management and governance. The inspirational headteacher stands firmly at the forefront of this. Underpinning the success of the school is its single-minded drive to make students' lives better and secure the best possible futures for them. Excellent school self-evaluation is widely supported by the contributions of staff, students and their parents. Improvements are made more by a process of evolution than reaction, and are strongly supported by an outstanding three-year development plan that is rigorously monitored and adapted to meet changing need. The school's commitment to providing all students with equality of opportunity is exemplary, as is its determination to stamp out any form of discrimination or harassment. Its strong commitment to promoting community cohesion is evident at many levels. Experiences are planned, not only locally, through involvement with local sports clubs, on the national and global stage, for instance, through the Belarus project and links with Lithuania and Australia. Community cohesion is greatly supported by students learning about how people from cultures other than their own live their lives. The large numbers of staff are deployed to excellent effect. The school is very successful in raising additional funding, for instance, through sponsorship of motorsport activities. Governors are strongly supportive of the school and play a full and valuable role in its self-evaluation.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	1
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

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

3 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Wennington Hall School, Lancashire, LA2 8NS

It was a joy and a pleasure to inspect your school the other day. Special thanks to those of you who spared me some time to talk about your school and helped me out when I looked lost. I left with a very favourable impression of Wennington Hall School and judged it to be outstanding in every respect.

I was particularly impressed by how sensibly behaved and polite you were. I could see why you like coming to school. You are getting a very good deal in a safe and happy environment. The outstanding quality of teaching is helping you to achieve as well as you can, not only in lessons, but also in the huge range of other activities you participate so wholeheartedly in. Your personal development is excellent. You are clearly learning what valuable members of society you can become by trying your hardest and helping others. I was extremely impressed by how enthusiastically you throw yourselves into energetic and exciting exercises such as canoeing, rock climbing, and motorsport. Well done to all of you participating in the smoking cessation programme.

I hope you are proud of your achievements. Last year's leavers left with some very good qualifications and it would appear that this year's will do even better. Those of you in the residence live very full lives and it was great to see day students being able to share a lot of your after-school activities.

Of course, a lot of the school's success can be put down to outstanding leadership, management and governance but without your own effort this would count for nothing. Well done!

I left only one recommendation to make the school even better. That was to set the school a target to increase the number of outstanding lessons being taught. A lot of them already are but I felt there was no harm in wanting more.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector