

Lathom High School : A Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119774
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	339532
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2010
Reporting inspector	John Coleman 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 of pupils on the school roll	670
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T Moorcroft
Headteacher	Mr T Farr
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2007
School address	Glenburn Road Skelmersdale Lancashire WN8 6JN
Telephone number	01695 725653
Fax number	01695 725654
Email address	t.farr@lathom.lancs.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 28 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of data and documents provided by the school including safeguarding policies and procedures and questionnaires received from staff, students and 73 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which the school's specialist status is improving students' opportunities and raising their attainment
- whether the quality of teaching is consistently good enough to ensure that all groups of students make good progress
- the rigour of the leaders' monitoring of the school's provision, especially of teaching and learning and the outcomes for students.

Information about the school

Lathom is a smaller than average school with a rising number of students on roll. Almost all students are White British and speak English as their first language. There are a high number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the number with a statement of special educational needs is twice the national average. In every year group there are slightly more boys than girls. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The school has specialist technology college status which it has held since 2004. A new headteacher took up post on the 1st January 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Students enjoy coming to Lathom High School because they are very well cared for and feel safe. The staff are vigilant in their supervision of students and there is consistent application of the school's expectations for students' behaviour. As a result, students are courteous, polite and their behaviour is good in lessons and around the school.

Consequently, the school is an orderly and calm place for learning to take place.

Students are appreciative of the many ways in which they are involved in the school community, such as helping to run the main reception and in the Every Child Matters (ECM) Centre. The Centre provides excellent support for vulnerable students who are able to consult readily with a range of external agencies that guide and improve their well-being. Additionally, the Centre provides opportunities for students to receive individual tuition, to catch up with coursework and to improve their homework. The progress of students who access the centre is good and it is carefully monitored through good liaison with the school staff.

There is significant variation in the attainment and progress of students. Overall, students make satisfactory progress in their learning and reach broadly average standards. More progress is made in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3 and girls make better progress than boys. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make adequate but slower progress than others and the good progress made in science, modern foreign languages and technology is much better than in most other subjects. This variation is due to the inconsistent quality of teaching and learning, which ranges from outstanding to inadequate. Overall, teaching is satisfactory with some good features. The lack of challenge in some lessons means that students do not always make the progress of which they are capable. A common problem is that too much time is spent on mundane activities, such as copying the lesson objectives or taking the register. Partly, this is because the school's policy outlines these expectations. This limits the time for learning and restricts students' progress. Some teachers expect too little of students' learning and there is insufficient use made of assessments of their prior learning in order to plan the next skills and knowledge to be learned. Marking is variable; some teachers give useful comments which help students to improve their work, but this is not consistent across the school.

The school's leaders are aware of the relative strengths and weaknesses in provision and in the outcomes for students, but they are over generous in their evaluation of these. Consequently, the school's capacity to improve is judged as satisfactory. For example, they rightly identified inaccuracies in the school's tracking system, when the 2009 results for mathematics fell short of the school's predictions and expectations. Also, they highlighted correctly a group of students who underachieved and were the

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underlying reason for this shortfall. However, until very recently, the school did not have a quantifiable system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, leaders' view of teaching and learning is based on a small number of lesson observations which does not accurately reflect the regular quality of teaching which students receive. In turn, this results in leaders over estimating the amount of progress that students make in lessons. The school has suitable priorities and plans in place to further improve the provision and outcomes for students. These plans do not consistently identify how the success of initiatives will be measured, and there is insufficient emphasis placed on the need to improve the consistency of teaching so that it is of at least good quality. The school has established a range of strong partnerships which impact effectively on the provision for students and on their outcomes. Specialist technology status is used well through links with local primary schools and the school provides support to these schools in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Good links with the local authority are made and the Connexions service provides career guidance to students. Relationships with the neighbouring high school are developing and plans are in place to share teaching and resources in science to facilitate a new BTEC qualification. Close collaboration is made with other providers, such as post 16 colleges and the introduction of Diploma courses is at an advanced stage.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, by:
 - ensuring consistency in terms of a high level of challenge for all students in lessons
 - using the outcomes of assessments of prior learning to inform new learning
 - providing lessons which maximise the time for learning so that the rate and consistency of progress improves
 - ensuring that teachers' marking gives feedback to students about how to improve their work.
- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning, by:
 - fully implementing a rigorous system for observing, monitoring and evaluating lessons
 - utilising the outcomes of monitoring to identify good practice to share widely across the school
 - prioritising improvement to the weaker aspects of teaching and effectively targeting professional development for teachers
 - ensuring greater consistency across subjects, cohorts, key stages and student groups.
- Ensure that the school's assessments of students' work are accurate and robust.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5

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inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

In the lessons seen by inspectors students' progress was satisfactory overall. There was significant variation and the best progress was in lessons where teachers provided challenging activities which were well matched to the students' starting points for learning. Students attain broadly average standards, though these fluctuate from year to year and between subjects. The proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades, including English and mathematics at GCSE, rose steadily in recent years but dipped sharply in 2009 and was below average. The percentage of students gaining one or two GCSEs in science is above average, as are the numbers who gain a GCSE in either Spanish or French. All students follow a course in ICT and in the last two years all students have passed their external examinations. The prior attainment of students when they enter school in Year 7 has been rising over the last five years. Whilst the Year 10 and 11 students have below average prior attainment, this is broadly average for the students in Years 7 to 9. The progress made by students is satisfactory overall, but is good in English and mathematics, science, technology and modern foreign languages. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall.

Students' attendance is broadly average, but is rapidly improving due to the effective strategies of the school and in particular the good work of the attendance officer who has established strong links with parents and carers. This is beginning to help improve the progress that students make. Students are suitably equipped with basic skills in English, mathematics and ICT. They have opportunities to undertake work-based learning and these experiences and skills prepare them well for their future economic well-being. The school successfully encourages students to make safe and healthy choices through good educational provision for sport, sex and drugs education and e-safety. Overall, the school successfully enables students to enjoy school and their achievement is satisfactory. Whilst the school ensures that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is sound in the school setting, there are limited opportunities for students to experience the wider community. This means that their appreciation and understanding of cultural differences is restricted.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent but is satisfactory overall. There is some outstanding teaching, which motivates students through high levels of challenge using engaging styles of learning, probing questions and time limited tasks. In an outstanding mathematics lesson seen by inspectors, the teacher moved students' learning on quickly by using searching questions to build their knowledge and to test their understanding. In too many lessons, however, students' progress stalls because the same demands are placed on all students, meaning that some find the work too easy. This is because insufficient use is made of the assessments of students' prior learning to ensure that tasks are pitched at a suitable level of challenge for individuals and groups of students. Time is not always used efficiently to maximise learning.

The curriculum is well organised and meets the needs of most groups of learners. In Key Stage 4 it is largely GCSE based, but a range of alternative courses and qualifications have been expanded to match the needs of students relative to their abilities. In Key Stage 3, support for the lowest attaining students is provided through specialised literacy courses and this effectively improves learning. Specialist status successfully improves the cross-curricular provision across a range of courses in technology. All students study a modern foreign language to GCSE. There is a broad range of enrichment activities which make a significant contribution to students' enjoyment of school and to their personal development. For example, the school makes a visit to Barcelona as part of the Spanish curriculum. Overall, however, the opportunities for students to widen their curricular experience through trips and the contribution of visitors are underdeveloped.

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The care of students is an outstanding feature of the school. The ECM Centre provides excellent support for vulnerable students. Other aspects of guidance and support are good. Staff throughout the school are caring and vigilant in their attention to students' needs. The school has good transition arrangements when students begin in Year 7. Staff make visits to feeder primary schools and students sample high school before they transfer. The school has a good tutor system which provides well for the care, guidance and support of students and mechanisms are in place which keep students safe and enable them to feel safe.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has made a rapid impact by quickly evaluating the work of the school through an audit of senior leaders' views and by effectively scrutinising the outcomes for students. He is well informed about the school's priorities for improvement and he communicates his ambition for the school clearly and articulately. The school's leaders have successfully maintained the high quality of care seen at the last inspection and have developed the choices available to students in the curriculum. The recent introduction of more robust monitoring strategies is embryonic, but demonstrates the school's recognition of the need to improve these areas and their determination to do so. The governing body provides good support and has all the statutory requirements in place, such as the safeguarding systems for vetting and checking staff. The governors are not sufficiently involved in evaluating the outcomes of monitoring so that they can challenge the school's view where appropriate. The school's finances are well managed and the satisfactory outcomes for students mean that value for money is satisfactory. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion through a set of actions based on an audit of the school's context. The school promotes equality of opportunity for pupils and tackles discrimination satisfactorily.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

About 12% of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. The vast majority of parents and carers are supportive of the schools' work. A small proportion of replies raised concerns about homework. The inspectors spoke to students and examined the teachers' planning and the work in the ECM Centre. The quality and use of homework does vary but is a regular feature in the planning of lessons. The Centre provides good support for those students who access it and at lunchtime some subjects offer additional help with homework. Overall, the homework provision is satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Lathom High School : A Technology College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 73 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 670 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	44	36	49	4	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	47	35	48	4	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	45	34	47	5	7	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	40	40	55	0	0	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	30	41	39	53	2	3	2	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	32	39	53	10	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	32	41	56	7	10	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	29	40	39	53	1	1	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	36	44	60	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	34	41	56	6	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	29	44	60	7	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	23	32	42	58	4	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	45	38	52	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



10 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Lathom High School: A Technology College, Skelmersdale, WN8 6JN

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons, meeting with you, and were particularly impressed by your behaviour and the high level of care provided for you by the school.

These are the main strengths of your school.

- The school cares for you well and provides good support when you need help, especially in your personal development.
- There are many good links and partnerships with your community and the choices available in Key Stage 4 for different courses are improving.
- The school keeps you safe by having good, effective systems to check on people who work at the school and makes sure your health and safety are looked after.
- Some of you make good progress, especially in science, English, mathematics, technology and in your study of Spanish or French.

We have asked the headteacher and the school's leaders to:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning by increasing the proportion of lessons that are good or better
- improve leaders' monitoring of lessons
- ensure that the assessments of your work are accurate.

You can do your part to help by ensuring that you attend school regularly and always work hard. The team joins me in sending you best wishes for your studies and we hope that you all do very well in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mr John Coleman

Her Majesty's Inspector

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