

Little Lever School Specialist Language College

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 105256 |
| Local Authority | Bolton |
| Inspection number | 355740 |
| Inspection dates | 24–25 November 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Patrick Geraghty 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 | 1008 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Judith Twentyman |
| Headteacher | Mr Phil Hewitt |
| Date of previous school inspection | 23 January 2007 |
| School address | Church Street Little Lever, Bolton Lancashire BL3 1BT |
| Telephone number | 01204 333300 |
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time observing teaching and learning, in 41 lessons which represents the observation of over 60% of available teaching staff. They held meetings with staff, groups of students, the School Improvement Partner, external support partners, and members of the governing body. Documentation was scrutinised including information related to the tracking of the academic and personal progress of students; detailed analysis of students' attainment and progress; school development planning; school and subject self-evaluation; records of recent classroom monitoring; minutes from meetings of the governing body; and evidence to demonstrate how the school supports students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Inspectors also examined evaluations undertaken by the school to ensure that it meets statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding. In addition, 58 parental questionnaires were scrutinised, along with questionnaires returned by a representative sample of staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether strategies to improve student attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 have been effective.
- Whether teaching and learning are sufficiently challenging to promote better outcomes for students.
- Whether attainment data is used to ensure that lessons are more challenging.
- Whether leaders and managers, at all levels, have the necessary capacity to improve the outcomes for students more rapidly.

Information about the school

Little Lever is a larger than average secondary school, with specialist status in languages, and serves the local community four miles east of Bolton. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both below the national average. Over a third of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which is well above the national average, although a broadly average proportion has a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals is at the national average. The current headteacher has been in post since January 2009.

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****2**

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

This is now a satisfactory and improving school. Strong strategic planning, decisive action and a tenacious approach by the headteacher have overcome significant barriers to improvement. Over the last 18 months, a new senior team has been appointed along with some 19 new teaching staff, many since September 2010. Key new appointments have been made in English and mathematics, including the posts of subject leaders. The ethos of the school has been transformed and a culture of high aspiration and improvement is being embedded. This is now impacting on outcomes and teaching and learning. The standard of students' work and the progress they make have improved significantly at Key Stage 3, bolstered by a strong focus on developing literacy skills. Standards at Key Stage 4 have improved at a slower rate, particularly with respect to mathematics at GCSE level. However, inspection evidence demonstrates positive change in mathematics as a result of new staff and leadership and the greater emphasis placed on focused intervention and active learning. During the inspection four fifths of mathematics lessons observed were good or better, with a significant proportion of those outstanding. The school acknowledges the need to raise more rapidly attainment for students attaining five or more GCSE grades at A*–C including English and mathematics.

Teachers are enthusiastic and actively seek new ways to improve their skills. The school recognises that there is insufficient sharing of good practice and a need to involve the very good and outstanding teachers in disseminating their exemplary practice so that standards can be raised more rapidly at Key Stage 4. Students readily confirm the improved approach to learning. Behaviour has improved and attendance continues to be above the national average. The curriculum increasingly matches students' needs. Care, guidance and support are good with a growing focus on those most vulnerable and at risk of not achieving to their potential. The school does not engage parents and carers fully in their children's learning but this is recognised as a priority for improvement.

Self-evaluation is accurate and the school is aware of where further improvements need to be made. Middle managers are now held accountable for performance. The governing body has embarked on a review of its own practice so that governors can better challenge senior leaders on the quality of performance and provision. Safeguarding is outstanding. The school provides satisfactory value for money. The school's capacity to improve is good because of the extensive journey made in a short time to transform some key areas of provision. In particular, inspectors found much good, as well as a significant proportion of outstanding, teaching that gives the school good capacity to improve further and raise standards and progress more rapidly.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To raise attainment at Key Stage 4 so that outcomes for five GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics exceed the national average by 2012.
- Involve the best teachers in the dissemination of their good and outstanding practice so that the quality of teaching and learning are further strengthened and outcomes for students improve.
- Improve communications with parents and carers and engage them as more active participants in their children's learning.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

When students join the school in Year 7, their attainment is broadly average.

The quality of work in students' books seen during the inspection is at least satisfactory. Students in lessons show high levels of engagement and enjoyment. Inspectors noted good learning and progress across all year groups, backed by robust data confirming improved performance at the end of Year 9. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support and make good progress. Examination results at Key Stage 4 in recent years have been below national averages, particularly so in the core subjects of English and mathematics. Expectations have been raised, challenging targets set for students and there is strong evidence of improving performance. In most subject areas, students not only know their current attainment levels but also what is needed to reach the next level. Evidence from the observation of teaching and learning indicates that standards are rising. There are strong indications from coursework and early entry results that the current Year 11 will achieve well in their GCSE examinations. The school recognises that standards in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 will need to show more rapid year on year improvement if challenging targets are to be met.

Students say that they feel very safe in school and that there is always someone that they can turn to if they have any worries or concerns. Racist incidents and those of bullying are very rare and when they occur are effectively dealt with. Parents and carers strongly agree that the school keeps their children safe. The school has made a concerted and successful effort to improve behaviour. Inspectors found behaviour in class was almost always good and that the general ethos of the school was calm and conducive to good cooperative learning. Students have a good awareness of health-related issues. There is a good range of after-school activities on offer. Students are proud to be part of the school and welcome the opportunities that they have to take on responsibilities. Prefects act as reading mentors to younger students. There is good engagement with the local community. Pupils are extensively involved in charity work at local and national level. A large number of pupils contribute to local projects, for instance cleaning up the local environment and tree planting. The school works well with other agencies in order to prepare students for future employment. The 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) figures are well below national averages and decreasing. The school offers a variety of activities that contribute to economic understanding. The school recognises the need to further develop the basic skills of numeracy and literacy. Attendance has improved

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since the time of the last inspection and remains above the national average. The proportion of persistent absentees is below that found nationally. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning | 3 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attainment ¹ | 4 |
| 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 1 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attendance ¹ | 2 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |

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

How effective is the provision?

There is much good and better teaching. Staff welcome the approach that school leaders are taking to meet their professional development needs. Strategies reviewed in recent training to develop students' higher order thinking skills and active learning techniques are already evident and impacting in the classroom. In the best lessons, there is effective use of assessment information to ensure that there is a wide range of learning activities to meet the needs of all students. In particular, there is good use of peer assessment and a widespread use of active learning techniques to engage students and secure pace and challenge in learning. Teachers use praise and questioning to encourage students' ideas. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace. Technology is generally well used to support learning. In the less effective lessons the use of questioning to probe understanding and develop oracy is less apparent. These lessons are characterised by more teacher-centred activity and lower levels of challenge. There is variability in marking in some areas. The best teaching practitioners are insufficiently involved in the dissemination of their good and sometimes outstanding practice.

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The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and improving. The development of students' literacy skills assumes a high priority, particularly in Years 7 and 8. In these early years, students follow specific courses that develop teamwork, thinking and literacy skills. Literacy development is increasingly well integrated across the curriculum. The school works with partners to provide a range of courses to suit the needs of all students in Year 10 and 11. Students benefit from two weeks of work experience. At Key Stage 4, the school provides a broad range of academic and vocational courses. In a recent development, students on an alternative vocational curriculum have a personalised timetable, which blends their progress in basic skills with work-based learning activities. The school's specialism in languages is presently under review. Many students take part in extra-curricular activities. Sporting and music clubs are popular, as are visits abroad.

Care, guidance and support are good. Staff experienced in youth work and guidance offer students good support. Students value the care and respect shown to them by staff. High quality personalised support provided by the school, with a wide range of outside agencies, contributes significantly to students' positive attitudes and relationships as well as their good attendance and behaviour. Students' progress is systematically and regularly monitored. A recently introduced technology system enables pastoral leaders to monitor very effectively students' successes, progress and areas for development and concern. The new specialist educational needs coordinator has introduced a strong range of intervention packages to improve student literacy, numeracy, behaviour and self-esteem. There is a positive reward system which earns students points towards vouchers, trips and school events. Students who are vulnerable are very well supported. Students are consulted on many aspects of their care and guidance and their contributions are valued. Those new to the school adapt well and quickly become confident in their new surroundings. Progression guidance is timely, well considered and effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Through strong vision, focused strategic planning and decisiveness the headteacher has, with alacrity, brought significant change to the composition of senior and middle management. These changes along with substantive changes to teaching staff have impacted on the quality of teaching and learning and the school's capacity to deliver further and sustained improvement. Senior leaders now communicate high expectations about securing improvement. The development of data analysis and evaluation to inform and target intervention strategies is effective at a senior level and is being embedded at middle management level. Middle managers are now fully accountable for performance. Teachers now make better use of data to inform lesson planning. The management of

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teaching has improved, as has professional development opportunities. A strong focus is now placed on active learning. One teacher aptly summarised the change: 'We were a silent school, now we are an active learning one.' Governance is satisfactory. Currently governors are undergoing a period of change, reflection and training so that they can better support the school and challenge the school leadership on performance and the quality of provision.

Links with parents and carers are improving but the school acknowledges that more needs to be done to engage parents and carers as active participants in their children's learning. Links with external providers and agencies add to the students' learning and the good quality of care, support and guidance. Much effort has resulted in the effective promotion of equality of opportunity through support programmes, external support and an improving curriculum. Safeguarding is outstanding. The school practice in relation to safeguarding procedures is consistently of the highest quality and in some cases exemplary. For example, all pupils take an e-safety CD home to view with their parents or carers.

The school is developing its work on community cohesion. However, it remains at an early stage in developing a fuller understanding of its local communities and its potential impact on those communities. The management of resources is good and the school's value for money, set against outcomes, is satisfactory.

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 |
| 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 | 3 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 2 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 1 |
| 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

An analysis of responses to the questionnaire indicates that the majority of parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at school and that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that their children are well prepared for the future. However, a small minority expressed concerns about ineffective communication. Inspectors noted these

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parental concerns and have asked the school to work more actively with parents so as to more fully involve all of them in their children's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Little Lever School Specialist Language 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 58 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1008 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 11 | 19 | 39 | 67 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 16 | 28 | 38 | 66 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress | 8 | 14 | 38 | 66 | 11 | 19 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 10 | 17 | 38 | 66 | 7 | 12 | 1 | 2 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 6 | 10 | 42 | 72 | 6 | 10 | 1 | 2 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 5 | 9 | 32 | 55 | 14 | 24 | 1 | 2 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 7 | 12 | 32 | 55 | 14 | 24 | 1 | 2 |
| 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) | 8 | 14 | 33 | 57 | 7 | 12 | 1 | 2 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 8 | 14 | 37 | 64 | 10 | 17 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 4 | 7 | 34 | 59 | 8 | 14 | 3 | 5 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 5 | 9 | 30 | 52 | 10 | 17 | 1 | 2 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 8 | 14 | 36 | 62 | 9 | 16 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 11 | 19 | 38 | 66 | 4 | 7 | 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 all 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

| | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------|------------|
| Type of school | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 58 | 36 | 4 | 2 |
| Primary schools | 8 | 43 | 40 | 9 |
| Secondary schools | 10 | 35 | 42 | 13 |
| Sixth forms | 13 | 39 | 45 | 3 |
| Special schools | 33 | 42 | 20 | 4 |
| Pupil referral units | 18 | 40 | 29 | 12 |
| All schools | 11 | 42 | 38 | 9 |

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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.



26 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Little Lever School Specialist Language College, Bolton,
BL3 1BT

Thank you for the warm and friendly welcome that you gave my colleagues and me when we inspected your school this week. We would also like to commend you for your good behaviour, and your commitment to making the school a pleasant place to work in. As you know your school was given a Notice to Improve at its inspection in October 2009. We were delighted to take it out of that category and grade it as a satisfactory and improving school. We were impressed by how much you all enjoy school and the positive relationships you have developed with each other and with adults. We would particularly like to thank those of you who spoke with us.

As mentioned, yours is now a satisfactory school with some good aspects. You are now making better progress throughout your time at the school. However, while your GCSE results are improving, you need to do better in mathematics and English. There is much good teaching in the school. In these lessons, you respond well to the teachers' high expectations. Your curriculum options are satisfactory. The teachers and support staff give you good care, guidance and support.

The leaders in your school worked with us to decide on some ways in which your provision could be better. We decided that to achieve this the school should:

- improve your results in GCSE examinations and particularly in English and mathematics so that they match and exceed national averages
- involve the best teachers in sharing their good and outstanding practice so that teaching and learning improve further and your examination results improve at a quicker pace
- involve your parents and carers to a greater extent in understanding how you learn and make progress in your studies.

You can help your school to improve further by ensuring everyone focuses on the pursuit of excellence for all of you and trying hard in your studies so that you can achieve your full potential in life.

I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector

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