

Lancaster School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115445
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	357751
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Lucie Calow

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Sharp
Headteacher	Margaret Rimmer (Executive Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	9 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Eleven lessons were observed during which 8 teachers were seen. Meetings were held with students from each key stage, with members of the senior leadership team and with members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation form; progress tracking data; monitoring logs including teacher observation records; and a sample of student records. They analysed 31 parental questionnaires, 64 student questionnaires and considered 38 staff questionnaires.

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

- Whether there is quality teaching and how well lessons are tailored to meet the needs of individual and groups of students.
- What is the extent and rate of academic and social learning from students' individual starting points?
- The extent to which provision, including the curriculum, is personalised to meet the needs of all learners.
- How senior leaders ensure internal assessment, monitoring and evaluation systems are in place.

Information about the school

All students at the Lancaster school have a statement of special educational needs. Almost half the students have severe learning difficulties and approximately one fifth have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Approximately 20% of students have more moderate learning difficulties. The main need of a few students in Key Stage 5 is autism.

The large majority of students are White British. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with national averages for mainstream secondary schools. There are more male than female students and the ratio fluctuates between year groups. The school has achieved several awards, including Investors in People, Healthy Schools, Eco-schools and Basic Skills and Inclusion awards. The school is currently undergoing a period of change in its leadership team. It is led by an executive headteacher who shares her time between Lancaster and another school. There is also a full-time head of school.

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 at the Lancaster receive a warm welcome in a caring, supportive environment. Students are happy, well looked after and there is a high level of parent and carer satisfaction. Committed and responsive staff have good-quality relationships with students, who often have high levels of physical and personal needs. Personal care needs are met well. Staff are able to provide this attention because the school has developed strong partnerships with health professionals. The impact of these can be seen in programmes for hydrotherapy activities and the way in which use of standing frames and electronic communication aides are an integral part of lessons.

Attendance is low and in the main, although not exclusively, this is explained by the complex medical and health needs of some students. Behaviour management strategies for those students who need them are implemented well in classrooms, contributing to a calm environment throughout the school. This is echoed in social times, such as in the lunch hall. However, behaviours which contribute to independent learning are not yet as well developed. Some students are not as self-motivated or as independent as they could be.

Lessons are often enjoyable and teachers make good use of games and activities, but there is an insufficient focus on learning targets, as opposed to industrious activity. Monitoring of teaching by senior leaders is in place, but this has not achieved a robust view of good teaching and how to support the staff in delivering it. The curriculum is currently too content-driven and is not yet strongly personalised from students' starting points. The school has correctly identified this issue as a priority for improvement, along with the scrutiny of accreditation routes in both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. Planned changes have not yet had time to have an impact.

The school has systems in place to monitor and track students' progress and aspects of well-being, but these outcomes are not always evaluated systematically by leaders. This is partly because there has been confusion over lines of responsibility and partly because not all the necessary data have been collated. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve because it has accurately identified areas which need improvement and has established an appropriate framework of systems. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and leaders understand what needs to be done next.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the depth and relevance of the curriculum so that:

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- students with different levels of need are motivated and able to achieve the maximum amount of learning possible
- students have more opportunities to develop independent life skills
- students can gain the best possible accreditation at the end of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.
- Improve the quality of teaching across the school by:
 - sharing a clear understanding and high expectation of students' progress in all areas
 - matching each lesson carefully to the learning targets of individual and groups of students
 - developing support strategies which encourage students to take on more responsible, active roles in the classroom.
- Ensure that leadership and management in the school have clearly defined lines of responsibility and accountability so that:
 - a shared view of good teaching and learning is secured and its implementation is effectively monitored
 - barriers to achieving the best possible attendance are identified and overcome
 - internal procedures have robust reporting, monitoring and evaluation systems.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students in both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 make satisfactory progress overall. School data are at an early stage of compilation and analysis. There has been an appropriate focus on the importance of securing reliable baseline information about students on arrival. Some key subjects are the focus of formal tracking procedures, but other areas of students' development are not monitored as closely. In some instances, scrutiny of data has led to appropriate interventions. For example, information about reading suggested some students made less than good progress and as a result a new reading scheme was purchased. The school's emerging data suggest that in carefully tracked areas many students are making good progress in English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. However, similarly clear systems are not in place for all areas of learning, such as for Science in Key Stage 4.

Some students do not currently make as much progress as others. Those with moderate learning disability, for example, do not routinely make as good progress from their starting points as those with severe learning difficulties. This finding is mirrored in some lessons. For example, in lessons where considerable time is spent in whole-class activities, students, ready and keen to move on, spend too much time practising skills or rehearsing knowledge they have already acquired. Students with the highest starting points within the class range are not always sufficiently stretched to make good progress.

Students' behaviour is good because behaviour management is effective. Students are polite, happy, get on well together and support each other. They appreciate the ways in which the school helps them to stay healthy. In particular, recent relationships education has had an impact on them. They are encouraged to be active and to engage in a wide

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range of physical activities, including hydrotherapy, swimming at a local pool and horse riding, as well as in school-based sports. The school celebrates a wide range of cultural events. Appropriate individual arrangements for students from differing cultural backgrounds are put in place, such as meals provision, in discussion with parents and carers. There are opportunities for self-expression through performances and performing arts.

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	
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	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	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teaching provides enjoyable lessons. However, too much time is spent in whole-class delivery with an over-reliance on verbal question and answer sessions. Lessons are planned to include different levels of support for individual students. This is not matched by an equal focus on students' progress in learning. Students are aware of what they are doing, but not of what they are learning or why. Current accreditation in Key Stage 4 is accessed through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), which includes some pertinent areas such as work-related learning. A recent initiative has made available GCSE mathematics for a very few students, in partnership with a neighbouring school. Assessment in Key Stage 4 does not provide as keen a focus on science as it does on other core subjects. School leaders have rightly identified necessary

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extensions to the curriculum and to accreditation options, but not all arrangements have yet been secured. Care, guidance and support are good because of careful attention to care needs, including close supervision, such as during morning arrival routines. There are good transition arrangements on entry to Key Stage 4. This can be seen in staff attendance at annual reviews for Year 9 students hosted at the main feeder school.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

A committed governing body has ensured that the school has received appropriate support during its period of change, including the employment of an executive headteacher. They are frequent visitors, carrying out monitoring visits such as health and safety checks, and the governing body has rightly been attentive in investigating issues of concern raised with it. The school has paid good attention to site security.

Senior members of staff have continued to seeking further improvement during this period of change. Systems for collecting and recording information are in place and monitoring is carried out. These procedures, however, are neither deeply embedded nor consistently evaluated. Leaders, therefore, are aware of the school's work, but do not have all the data required to make self-evaluation robust.

The school engages parents and carers in a wide range of ways, including weekly drop in sessions and family swim events out of school hours. The school surveyed parents and carers recently, the findings of which were broadly in line with inspection questionnaire results. Leaders have forged effective links with other agencies such as the Connexions service. They have shown tenacity, when required, in securing agency involvement for some students. Staff are suitably trained. The school fosters partnerships with mainstream and other special schools and some local organisations. It is a cohesive community with an emphasis on understanding individual needs.

Groups of students who may require specific support are appropriately identified and available data are analysed in respect of them. For example, data the school holds on subject progress are considered in light of whether English is an additional language. There is no significant difference in outcomes for groups of students depending on their cultural or social backgrounds. However, there is some variance in outcomes for students in some subjects, depending on their level of need.

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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	2
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Accreditation in Key Stage 5 is also accessed through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). It involves completing modules of work and the number of modules followed can be varied between students. There is provision for course content to focus on areas of personal and social development. However, this is not always strongly supported by a drive in lessons to secure the maximum amount of student independence possible. Key Stage 5 students engage in some off-site learning activities. On-site lessons do not always incorporate best use of supported communication systems such as signing. Leaders have correctly identified that the curriculum needs to build more on individual progress and, as part of a recent curriculum and accreditation review, there are plans to make amendments.

There is a range of student needs in Key Stage 5 which includes a few students with autism. Students join Key Stage 5 from a wider range of provision than at Key Stage 4 and the school conducts a baseline review of their needs on transfer. Students with more moderate learning disabilities who join Key Stage 5 do not always make best progress in their first year at Lancaster. This is in part because of settling, but also because not all lessons are sufficiently focussed on challenging targets.

Students enjoy the contribution they are able to make to the school, for example through the school council. They talk readily about charitable events they have been involved with, such as the Earthquake fund, and cultural celebrations they have taken part in such as a harvest festival. They have a good awareness of the importance of healthy eating.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

'A wonderful school, with a very caring and understanding staff. The school is like another part of our family,' is how one parent/carer captured the ethos of Lancaster. All parents and carers who responded said that their children are happy, that they feel well informed and involved with their children's learning and that behaviour is well managed. Parent and carer views mirrored those of students. Most said that they are happy, that teachers are interested in their views and that the school helps them to be healthy. Inspectors also found the ethos to be caring, warm and happy. A very few parents and carers expressed concern over the amount of progress their children are making, but felt the school took account of their concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Lancaster School 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 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 74 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	77	7	23	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	84	4	13	1	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	22	71	9	29	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	58	10	32	2	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	20	65	10	32	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	65	11	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	61	11	35	0	0	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)	17	55	12	39	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	58	12	39	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	61	9	29	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	65	10	32	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	20	65	10	32	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	74	8	26	0	0	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



4 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Lancaster School, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 0RT

My colleague and I enjoyed visiting your school this week very much. We want to thank you for your contributions to the inspection. We found your questionnaires and talking with you very helpful in making sure we know what it is like to come to the Lancaster school.

We think that you come to a satisfactory school and that there are some good things about coming to Lancaster. You told us that you enjoy coming to school and that you appreciate especially how adults care for you, listen to you and help you stay healthy. We think that too. We think also that you behave well. We know you enjoy the extra opportunities you have to go swimming and to get involved with special events. We want more of you to come to school more often so that you can learn as much as possible at school.

We found that adults in the school work hard, but that your lessons could be better. Sometimes, when you are all doing the same activities in lessons, you do not learn new things. We found also that you need more opportunities to be independent.

We have asked your teachers and school leaders to

- make sure that you are learning the most that you can
- help you to learn faster and to do more for yourselves
- record how well you are doing and how they are helping you.

You can help, too, by coming to school as often as you possibly can and by continuing to be well behaved and enthusiastic.

Yours sincerely

Lucie Calow

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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