

Ulverston Victoria High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112385
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	357096
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1173
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	293
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Wilkinson
Headteacher	Mr Denis Fay
Date of previous school inspection	31 October 2007
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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 46 lessons observing 43 teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of students, members of the Parental Advisory Group, the inclusion forum, the School Improvement Partner 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, 237 parental questionnaires were scrutinised along with questionnaires returned by a representative sample of students.

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

- Whether strategies to improve students' attainment and progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 have been effective and are sustainable.
- Whether teaching and learning are sufficiently challenging to promote better outcomes for students.
- Whether the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation by leaders and managers at all levels is sufficiently well embedded to drive and sustain improvement.
- Whether leaders and managers, at all levels, have the necessary capacity to sustain improvement trends.

Information about the school

Ulverston Victoria High School is a larger than average-sized secondary school serving the market town of Ulverston and the further Furness peninsular. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, as are the number with a statement of special educational needs. Students join the sixth form from several local schools. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing. The school holds the Investors in People award, International School status, The Princess Diana Anti-Bullying Award, Healthy School status, The Prince of Wales Feathers for English teaching, an award for high performance in mathematics and English from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and has achieved the gold standard of the Inclusion Chartermark.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Over the last four years Ulverston Victoria High School has been on a transformational journey from special measures to the establishment of high attainment and very good progress for all its students. This is now an outstanding school. Outstanding and inspirational leadership from the headteacher has driven a culture of high attainment and aspirations. Very capable senior leaders are highly focused on a well-defined improvement agenda. Middle leaders have been empowered to manage and drive improvement within their areas of responsibility.

Teachers and support staff are highly motivated and very committed; they enthusiastically supported the introduction of rigorous data and monitoring systems. Self-evaluation is robust, honest, embedded and relentlessly focused on improvement. Above all, students enjoy and are committed to their learning; they espouse high aspirations from Year 7 through to the sixth form. One student aptly summed up this harmonious learning ethos 'We all help each other and celebrate each other's achievement'.

Attainment at Key Stage 4 is now well above the national average and continues to improve. The school has an outstanding sixth form where students excel in their attainment, progress and aspirations. Teaching is good, although the school recognises the need to provide more opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills at Key Stage 3. The curriculum is broad and well balanced and its quality ensures and cements high performance across all groups of students. The excellent practice and achievements of the specialist subjects of mathematics and computing are disseminated across the curriculum.

There is excellent support, care and guidance for all students. Parents are actively engaged in the school and are highly supportive. The governing body is now better able to hold the school to account, while being highly supportive and involved in numerous school activities. The school has developed exceptional links and partnerships with its local community which have had real impact on the quality of students' outcomes and provision. The school acknowledges the challenges ahead but has outstanding capacity to meet them and excel further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide students with more opportunities to develop their independent learning skills, especially at Key Stage 3, by:
 - – ensuring questioning is used effectively to challenge individual students according to their needs and to improve their oracy skills

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- – promoting a greater focus on independent and group learning skills through developing a greater variety of learning activities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Analysis of data and inspection lesson observations indicates that overall, students make at least good progress from above average starting points as they move through the school. Students convey a sense of enjoyment and delight in inquiry and learning. For example, in a number of mathematics lessons covering three key stages, students worked with enthusiasm and challenge honing their cooperative skills in pair and group work. They made outstanding progress and exuded enjoyment in their evolving understanding and approaches to the problems set. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is outstanding and reflects the exceptional care that they receive. From a low base in 2007 attainment levels in Key Stage 4 are now high. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE rose significantly from 2007 to 2010 to well above the national average. When English and mathematics are included this figure is also well above the national average. The most recent modular examination results and scrutiny of current tracking information indicates that a strong trend of improvement is continuing at Key Stage 4. Performance across different groups of students is high.

Students' personal development is good and sometimes outstanding. They report that they feel safe and that instances of bullying are dealt with quickly. Sixth form students act as positive role models for younger pupils. Students behave very well and make an exemplary contribution to the establishment of a harmonious and caring school community. Involvement with the wider community through a variety of activities, such as the Victoria Outreach initiative, is outstanding. Students understand what they need to do to lead a healthy lifestyle. They participate regularly in the ample sporting opportunities provided by the school. The school has rigorous procedures in place to follow up student absence and, as a result, attendance is now above average. This, together with high attainment in literacy and numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, is ensuring that students are prepared very well for the next stage of their education or the world of work. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
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	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good and this represents significant and sustained improvement over the last three years. In the best lessons time is well used and planning is good. These lessons were characterised by enthusiasm, very effective use of timed activities, a good pace, and high expectations. There is good use of ICT to support learning. Marking demonstrates consistency of quality with detailed and informative feedback on how to progress further. Resources are well designed and used effectively. Data is used well to plan lessons and group activities that are suitably matched to students' abilities. In the satisfactory lessons the pace was slow and there was too much teacher talk. Questioning was not used to challenge and develop students' participation. In these lessons, students had fewer opportunities to develop skills of self-reliance, independent working and lacked the opportunities to assume responsibility for their own learning. These missed opportunities were more frequently observed at Key Stage 3. Initiatives to improve teaching have been influenced by consistently outstanding practice in the mathematics specialism.

The quality of the curriculum and its contribution to the achievement of high outcomes is outstanding. The school provides a very broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs and aspirations of its students from Year 7 to the sixth form. This is achieved through three distinct and high quality pathways in academic, vocational and work related courses; the great majority of students follow the academic pathway. However the school has significantly developed its vocational curriculum in recent years and ensured high

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quality provision to tackle the needs of the most vulnerable students. The school offers an increasing number of vocational options, many through well-developed partnerships with outside providers. There is outstanding cross-curricular provision, especially in the core subjects. The specialisms in mathematics and computing play pivotal roles in contributing to the breadth and quality of curriculum development and initiatives. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities which have a good take up by students.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Transition arrangements and partnerships with primary schools are extensive and thorough. When students arrive in Year 7 the school is immediately and fully prepared to meet their individual and collective needs. Links with parents and carers throughout all transition processes are excellent. The school provides excellent support for vulnerable students and ensures that all staff feel responsible for their well-being and progress. This is particularly reflected in the quality of provision and success of the Engagement Centre where students are encouraged to reassess their approach to learning and their place within the school community. In meeting so well the needs of all its students, the school has established outstanding partnerships with external agencies through such initiatives as the inclusion forum. This highly effective multiagency group monitors the needs of vulnerable students and their families and exemplifies the outstanding approach the school has to care and support. Data is used well by pastoral staff to monitor the progress of all students and provide well-tailored intervention strategies. The quality of guidance, including careers guidance, throughout the students' journey from primary transition to the sixth form and beyond is outstanding and contributes to a highly aspirational culture.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The inspirational leadership of the headteacher has galvanised the work of all leaders and managers in the pursuit of improvement. Leadership is presenting a sharp focus on improvement which is shared across the school. The efforts of senior and middle leaders have been successfully coordinated so that they now carry out their roles with a view to whole school impact rather than concentrating on their own particular spheres of responsibility. This has brought about a very rapid improvement in promoting an exceptionally strong sense of purpose across the school and rapidly rising attainment. Leaders and managers carry out rigorous procedures for self-evaluation and use the outcomes astutely to identify priorities in their forward planning and effective strategies to tackle them. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored rigorously; the outcomes are used to identify weaknesses and bring about consistent and rapid improvement.

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Targeted professional development underpins the rapid rise in the quality of teaching and learning.

The supportive governing body is developing its capacity to challenge the school and hold it rigorously to account. Parents and carers have very high levels of confidence in the school. Communication with parents is of a high quality. The establishment of the Parental Advisory Group is an innovative response to encouraging active involvement of parents and carers in decision making, for example, there is parental involvement in interviews for staff appointments. Strong partnerships with feeder primary schools ensure pupils' transition is seamless. The Victoria Outreach initiative provides highly effective links with local businesses that benefit students' enterprise and add significantly to their future economic well-being. The school promotes equality of opportunity exceptionally successfully.

Exemplary promotion of equal opportunities ensures all students, regardless of ability or background make very good progress and achieve very well. The school has developed highly effective monitoring and evaluation procedures for different groups of students. Community cohesion is good. The school has been successful in promoting an exceptionally cohesive school society and has a strong understanding of impact within its local community. The impact on students' understanding and appreciation of national diversity is developing. Safeguarding is good; policies and procedures are comprehensive in range and coverage. The school's value for money, set against outcomes, is outstanding.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding and is characterised by highly engaged and aspirational students. Results in 2010 at GCE A level were high and progress

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excellent. All teaching observed in the sixth form was good or better with much that was outstanding. Pastoral care, support and guidance are outstanding. Students have a high degree of confidence in their teachers and relationships are excellent. Students are highly ambitious and many progress to leading universities. The leadership of the sixth form is outstanding and highly motivational for both staff and students. Monitoring and tracking systems are well developed and fully embedded. Enrichment activities offer students numerous opportunities. Sixth form students are excellent role models for younger students acting as mentors and working with them in lessons and in enrichment activities to promote their aspirations.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The response rate, at around 20%, was above average for this type of school. An analysis of responses to the questionnaire indicates that the majority of parents and carers are happy with their child's experience at school and that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that their child is well prepared for the future. A small minority felt that their children do not lead healthy lifestyles or that the school does not help them support their child's learning. Inspection findings did not support these views but the concerns were brought to the school's attention.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ulverston Victoria High 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 237 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,173 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	82	35	144	61	7	3	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	99	42	132	56	3	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	99	42	128	54	9	4	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	91	38	129	54	11	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	80	34	142	60	6	3	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	26	135	57	30	13	4	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	54	23	142	60	29	12	5	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)	76	32	132	56	9	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	75	32	147	62	7	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	78	33	128	54	18	8	4	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	65	27	127	54	15	6	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	114	48	110	46	6	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	107	45	120	51	7	3	1	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.



18 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Ulverston Victoria High School, Ulverston, LA12 0EB

Thank you for the warm and friendly welcome that you gave my colleagues and me when we inspected your school this week. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your school. We would also like to commend you for your very good behaviour and your commitment to making the school a harmonious place in which to work. We would particularly like to thank those of you who spoke with us.

Our inspection found that yours is now an outstanding school. You are making very good progress throughout your time at the school. Your results are high and well above national averages. There is much good and some outstanding teaching in the school. In these lessons, you respond well to the teachers' high expectations. Your curriculum options are outstanding. The teachers and support staff give you outstanding care, guidance and support. The sixth form is outstanding with students making excellent progress and developing high aspirations.

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:

- enable more opportunities within lessons, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, for you to develop your independent learning skills.

You can help your school to improve further by ensuring everyone continues to focus on the pursuit of excellence and for you to continue your endeavours in your studies so that you can achieve your full potential in life.

I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty

Her Majesty's Inspector

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