

Walton Le Dale Arts College and High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119743
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	358617
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Johan Mackinnon 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	565
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tony Pickup
Headteacher	Mr Tony Hill
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Twenty six lessons were observed and the same number of teachers seen. This included a series of joint observations carried out with an assistant headteacher. Meetings were held with staff, groups of students, the school council and members of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with the School Improvement Partner from the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at policies and procedures about safeguarding and the welfare and progress of students as well as documents showing how leaders and managers monitor, evaluate and review the work of the school. Inspectors also considered 187 parental questionnaires, 100 student questionnaires and 41 staff questionnaires.

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

- What the current levels of attainment and progress are, especially in English and mathematics.
- What the quality of teaching and assessment is across Key Stages and subjects.
- How consistent and effective middle leaders are.

Information about the school

Walton le Dale Arts College and High School is smaller than the average secondary school and is situated to the south east of Preston. It serves a wide geographical area, with some students travelling from a neighbouring authority to attend. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly above average and there are low numbers of students from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above average and the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is high. The school specialism encompasses the fine and performing arts and information and communication technology (ICT). It holds a number of awards including Artsmark Gold, the Inclusion Quality Mark and the ICT Mark and has Investors in People status.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Walton le Dale is a good school. It provides outstanding care, guidance and support. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of the school's ethos and students describe the school as 'like a family, where everyone knows each other'. Great care is taken to ensure that every student can participate fully in school life and receives precisely tailored support to meet their specific needs and remove barriers. The school's work to ensure equality of opportunity is outstanding. The quality of transition is a particular strength of the school, including for students who arrive during the school year. The headteacher and senior leaders have led the school with drive and passion on its journey of improvement and remain highly ambitious for the school and its community. They are held in high regard by students, staff and parents and carers. Students enjoy coming to school, feel safe there and treat each other with consideration and respect. The school council is effective in contributing to improving the school and senior students take on adult responsibility willingly as prefects. The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles is outstanding, encouraged by the wide range of related activities and services provided by the school.

The progress that students make is good, with particular strengths in vocational curriculum areas such as communications, creative media and sport. Attainment and progress in some key aspects, particularly English and mathematics, has been low but has risen and improvement is accelerating. High-quality tracking and intervention alongside outstanding care, guidance and support are major contributing factors to the good progress that students make. Strategies such as one-to-one tuition and support from additional adults in the classroom are implemented effectively and impact strongly upon the learning and progress of all students. The 'Opening Minds' humanities curriculum in Years 7 and 8 provides a particularly effective vehicle for developing independent learning skills within these lessons, although not utilised frequently enough across the school, and has had a marked impact on improving progress in Key Stage 3. Students enjoy these lessons and talk about them enthusiastically as a 'different way of learning' than is usual. Improved attendance and reductions in persistent absence are also contributing to better progress. Students have a positive attitude to learning. In lessons where this is harnessed effectively, through engaging activities with pace and challenge and opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning, they rise to the challenge with enthusiasm, behave well and make good or better progress. In lessons where teaching is less effective, typified by less stimulating activities which make fewer demands on students and offer little opportunity for students to take responsibility, students become disengaged and progress is limited. The curriculum increasingly provides a good range of options to meet varying student needs and support good outcomes. There are some excellent enrichment days and a wide range of well-attended extra-curricular activities.

The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and communicate high expectations effectively to

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staff and students. Middle leaders are less consistently well-developed but there are emerging strengths. There is a strong sense of teamwork. The governing body is highly committed and knowledgeable about the school and challenges and supports it ably. Safeguarding procedures are strong and are reviewed regularly. The school has built very positive relationships with parents and carers. Partnership working is strong, particularly in the welfare aspects of the school's work. The impact of the specialist status is felt most in its contribution to the highly effective transition and partnership work with primary schools. The school has developed well since the last inspection and is well placed to develop further, giving it a good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by:
 - making effective use of a wider range of styles and activities to engage students more consistently and secure pace and challenge for all students
 - providing more frequent opportunities for students to assess and lead their own learning and so develop independent learning skills
 - using marking and feedback more effectively so that students are always clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that middle leaders are consistently effective in evaluating provision and outcomes and in driving improvement in their areas.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students feel safe in all areas of the school and know who to go to if they need help of any sort. They are confident that the school will deal effectively with any incidents that do occur. Students show willingness to take on responsibility in lessons and around school and behave well. Their positive attitudes to learning and to personal development contribute to the good progress that they make. Students enjoy working and learning in small groups and apply themselves diligently when actively engaged but where lessons are teacher-dominated they become passive and less likely to contribute. The ways in which the school supports students to make healthy choices are particularly successful, resulting in high levels of involvement in healthy activities and a strong understanding of the importance of both physical and emotional health. The views of students are sought regularly by the school, particularly through the year and school councils, and students can see that the school takes their views seriously and responds to them. This regularly includes their views on classroom activities. Attendance is improving steadily and the proportion of persistent absenteeism is falling. Themed enrichment days and the 'Opening Minds' curriculum make a strong contribution to students' good spiritual, moral social and cultural awareness.

Students enter the school with attainment and skills which are broadly, and slightly below, average. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C is high as is attainment in a range of vocational qualifications. Low attainment in English and mathematics in recent years has been tackled and has improved sharply for students currently in Years 10 and 11. Accurate monitoring, including evidence from external examinations, shows that it is now equivalent to the national average and rising. The attainment and progress of higher-ability students, previously lower than expected, has

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risen and much greater challenge is now provided for these students. Very effective tracking and support for students with special educational needs, including excellent deployment of a skilled team of teaching assistants, ensure that they make similar progress to that of their peers. Students known to be eligible for free for meals also achieve at similar levels to those of their peers.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
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?

Outstanding care, guidance and support underpin the good outcomes of the school, supported by detailed knowledge of each individual student's academic and pastoral needs. The quality of tracking has improved markedly in recent years so that very effective intervention and support are in place from early in Year 7. The excellent transition programme, including the 'MOTHS' outreach project, is a major strength of the school. The role of the progress co-ordinators within the pastoral structure is increasingly focused on academic development alongside well-being. Concerted effort has improved attendance, with strong relationships built with families and a clear focus in school on the link between good attendance and achievement. All tracking and support explicitly checks the progress and participation of key groups of students to ensure that potential barriers are tackled and overcome. Innovative strategies, such as the availability of optician services on-site, reflect the commitment of the school to the care of the whole child. This care extends beyond the school gates into the local community.

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In the most effective lessons students' interest and enthusiasm are captured and sustained through a range of stimulating activities which are well-matched to challenging learning outcomes and so all students work hard and learn well. In an outstanding Year 7 'Opening Minds' lesson groups of students were leading their own learning in a series of different activities which required them to explore and discuss cultural issues from a range of perspectives. Where lessons are less successful, they are too teacher-centred and a limited range of teaching styles and activities is utilised resulting in students becoming disengaged and making slower progress. Whilst not enough lessons seen were of the quality needed to judge teaching to be good overall, nevertheless teaching is improving and this is having a positive effect on students' learning and progress. Most students are aware of their targets and how they are progressing towards them but are not always clear on how to take the next steps to improve. The quality of marking is not consistently effective in informing students about their strengths and how to improve. The use of questioning in lessons does not always promote deeper thinking or high-quality explanations.

The curriculum is good and improving. New courses have been introduced at Key Stage 4 to ensure that a wide range of needs and interests is met and have contributed to the rise in achievement and good outcomes. Extra-curricular provision is particularly rich and uptake is high. Enrichment days are used well to promote the development of personal learning skills and students enjoy them. The introduction of the integrated 'Opening Minds' curriculum in Key Stage 3 has successfully accelerated progress.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders lead by example and set high expectations for staff as well as students. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what it needs to do to improve and plan effectively to implement change. There is still work to be done to achieve this consistency at middle leader level. Staff are very supportive of each other and motivated to succeed within a culture which is open and receptive to sharing ideas and good practice. The school is increasingly using its most effective classroom practitioners to share best practice and drive further improvement. Good monitoring and support are improving the quality of teaching. Target setting and tracking systems are robust, with the school setting itself realistic and increasingly challenging targets. The governing body is well-informed and challenges the school effectively. A strong commitment to safeguarding students runs through every level of leadership and translates into good practical arrangements.

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Leaders and managers are highly focused on developing the whole child, reflected in the outstanding care, guidance and support and promotion of equal opportunities. This ensures that students of all backgrounds are equally able to succeed. All groups of pupils make similarly good progress at Walton le Dale as a result of its inclusive practice. The school is proactive in engaging parents and carers through a variety of activities, such as the work of the school attendance co-ordinator. Partnership working provides clear benefits for the students. Local community work is strong and the school recognises that this could extend further afield, including national and global links. It is beginning to take steps to achieve this. The school deploys its resources effectively to achieve good outcomes for students and so provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	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	1
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	2

Views of parents and carers

Around one third of parents and carers returned the questionnaire, a much higher response rate than average. Most parents and carers were positive, often highly so, about the school and how it provides and cares for its students. Several took the time to comment on how happy they are with the way in which the school supports their children, particularly those who arrived at the school during the school year or whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement. A few parents expressed concerns about homework. The school is reviewing this with the student council. Although a few parents said that they did not feel that the school communicated well with them, others praised the quality of information they receive and the ease of contact with staff. Inspectors found that the school is making every effort to communicate well with families, continues to review its practice and seeks to improve further.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Walton Le Dale Arts College and 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 187 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 565 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	83	44	92	49	7	4	4	2
The school keeps my child safe	102	55	80	43	3	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	98	52	79	42	9	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	43	93	50	11	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	77	41	99	53	7	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	63	34	104	56	15	8	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	30	109	58	13	7	1	1
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)	75	40	98	52	7	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	86	46	85	45	8	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	85	45	87	47	9	5	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	57	30	108	58	10	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	83	44	95	51	2	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	107	57	69	37	7	4	2	1

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



17 June 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Walton Le Dale Arts College and High School, Preston, PR5 6RN

Thank you for the way in which you made the inspectors welcome in your school and contributed to the inspection. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing the work you were doing. You told us how much you value the family atmosphere in school and the way that the staff take your views seriously. Please pass on our thanks to your parents and carers for completing the questionnaires, their views were most helpful.

We found Walton le Dale to be a good school with outstanding care, guidance and support and it is working hard to improve further. Exam results in key subjects like English and mathematics are broadly similar to the national average and getting better and in some subjects attainment is higher. You told us how much you enjoy the lessons where you get to take part in creative activities and be responsible for your own learning, such as in the 'Opening Minds' lessons in years 7 and 8. You treat each other with consideration and willingly take part in activities which help to improve your school and community.

The staff know you well as individuals and senior staff are clear about the strengths of the school and what needs to be done to improve further. The main areas we have asked the school to focus on now are to:

- improve teaching and learning by providing a wider range of activities which stimulate and challenge you, giving you more opportunity to take responsibility for your learning and ensuring that marking shows you clearly how to improve
- ensure that middle leaders are consistently effective at helping to improve the quality of their areas or subjects.

You have an important role to play by making sure that you continue to behave well, work hard and have high attendance. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Johan MacKinnon

Lead inspector

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