

Dowdales School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112383
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	367395
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2011
Reporting inspector	David Brown 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	1063
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Craig Bland
Headteacher	Ms Julie O'Connor
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 43 lessons taught by 40 different teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner and nominated staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including its self-evaluation, school improvement plans, lesson observation records, safeguarding procedures and other performance information. In addition, 219 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised along with questionnaires returned by school staff and 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 the school had maintained its outstanding performance since the previous inspection.
- The rates of progress of all groups of students.
- The quality and consistency of teaching and learning in the school and the extent to which this has an impact on the progress students make in different subjects.
- How well teachers use assessment information to ensure that lessons meet the needs of all learners.
- The breadth and relevance of the curriculum offered.

Information about the school

Dowdales is an above-average-sized secondary school which draws most of its pupils from Dalton and surrounding villages and is oversubscribed. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and almost all have English as their first language.

The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average although the number of students with a statement of special educational needs is slightly above the national average. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school is a specialist school for the Performing Arts, is a Leadership Partner School and has Coaching School status. The school is a member of the Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils. The headteacher took up post in September 2010.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Dowdales School is a good school and, following a dip in achievement in 2010, is now improving well. The care, guidance and support provided for its students are outstanding. The school community is notable for its highly positive relationships throughout. A typical comment made by parents is, 'I cannot tell you how impressed I am with the care and support my child receives' and sums up their views well.

Students join the school with above-average levels of attainment. By the end of Key Stage 4 students' attainment is high and the proportion gaining five good GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics, rose to 63% in 2010. This is well-above the national average. School assessments and the results of external modular examinations show that students currently in Year 11 are on track for higher attainment this year and this, together with the standards seen by inspectors in lessons, indicates they are now making good progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive excellent support and make progress in line with that of their peers. There are detailed equalities policies in place which embrace the principle of valuing each student and their contribution to life at the school. All students are treated fairly, irrespective of religion, race or other characteristics.

The overall quality of teaching is good and the great majority of teaching is securing good progress and learning. Teachers know their subjects well and carefully match learning objectives and tasks to their assessment of students' learning needs. Students know their targets and how to achieve them. In the best lessons teachers use a wide range of well-planned resources to enhance student progress. In less effective lessons, assessment data is not used to plan lessons which challenge or meet the needs and prior attainment of all students.

Students respond very positively in lessons and are courteous and welcoming to visitors. Their behaviour in lessons is outstanding. Students say that they enjoy coming to school and this is demonstrated by the excellent attitudes and attendance of all year groups. Students are extremely well prepared for life beyond school. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well through a wide range of sporting opportunities with a high uptake, although a few students, parents and carers believe that the school could do more to encourage healthy eating, especially at lunchtime.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and recent changes, including additional vocational options at Key Stage 4, are addressing the varying needs of most students. The progress of some students, however, has been limited by the curriculum choices on offer. An extensive programme of enrichment and extra-curricular activities makes a valuable contribution to students' enjoyment of school. The school's specialism in performing arts makes an outstanding impact and widens the range of activities available to students of all ages.

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The new headteacher has a clear vision for the future and, along with the leadership team, is highly ambitious for the school and its students. The school development plan correctly identifies the priorities for improvement; planning is regularly reviewed and the impact of actions is monitored effectively. Leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Self-evaluation is honest and accurate and, as a result, the school is demonstrating a good capacity to improve. The very large majority of parents who expressed their views were highly positive about the quality of education provided. School leadership ensures that the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures is outstanding and the school provides excellent value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of students' learning and their progress throughout the school by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment information effectively to plan lessons which meet the learning needs of every student in the class
 - ensuring that curriculum opportunities match more acutely the differing needs of all groups of students in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The progress of students is good and improving. Progress is carefully tracked and monitored and the school has developed effective strategies to deal with students not making at least the expected progress. Lesson observations, the scrutiny of students' work and current data confirm this trend. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported by well-trained teaching assistants and make progress at rates similar to those of their peers.

The vast majority of students feel safe in school and the few instances of bullying are tackled quickly. In lessons students' behaviour is outstanding. They are highly attentive and enthusiastic about their learning, cooperate well in group activities and are considerate towards each other. In one challenging Year 9 religious studies lesson on the ethics of killing a snake, students rose well to the opportunity to argue and debate a case, compare perspectives and think beyond the obvious. Students have a good understanding of what they need to do to keep themselves healthy and participate willingly in a range of extra-curricular activities. The school promotes healthy eating among its students but there is a less effective take-up of healthy lunchtime options by Key Stage 4 students. The views of students are sought regularly by the school through a number of student-voice groups. Students agree that the school responds to what they say; this increasingly includes their views about teaching and learning. Students are enthusiastic in their fund-raising for local, national and international good causes.

First-hand experience of working environments ensures that students' preparation for the next stage of their education and the world of work is outstanding and almost all continue in education, training or employment. Students have high aspirations and are determined to achieve well. Attendance is high and punctuality at lessons is very good. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. As one Year 10 student said, Dowdales is more than just a school.'

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

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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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?

Good, and at times outstanding, teaching was seen in the majority of lessons observed during the inspection. Teachers form very positive working relationships which motivate and engage the students in their learning. The best lessons are characterised by real enthusiasm for the subject, high expectations and an excellent range of targeted activities. In one outstanding Year 10 geography lesson, for example, the teacher used his accurate knowledge of the students' abilities to prepare targeted resources and activities which challenged and enthused every member of the class, leading to outstanding progress. In less effective lessons planning does not ensure that activities set meet the needs of all students and the range of teaching strategies is narrower. Students are aware of their targets but not all teachers use these targets when planning their lessons. Inspectors saw some outstanding practice in the use of assessment information but this is variable in its use across different subjects.

The school's good curriculum contributes well to students' personal and academic development. The curriculum is well planned, is broad and balanced across Key Stages 3 and 4 and provides effectively for the majority of students' needs and aspirations. The school has extended its provision for vocational courses at Key Stage 4 although the range of different qualifications from which students can select does limit the choices of some students. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the

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curriculum is not as prominent as it should be and too few opportunities are provided for students to develop the skills they have learned in ICT lessons. The school makes good provision for the students to engage in physical exercise through physical education (PE) lessons. The range of sporting and cultural extra-curricular activities is outstanding. Enrichment opportunities, in particular those relating to the school's performing arts specialism, are many and varied.

The school knows its students very well and has an excellent understanding of their strengths and areas for development. Students value very highly the outstanding care, guidance and support that the school offers and through the outstanding work of its mentors the school has recently been awarded Coaching School status. All students are aware of their academic targets and, where underperformance is noted, it is tackled at both an individual and group level. The inspectors scrutinised case study evidence that demonstrates how well the school, working effectively with other agencies, supports students whose circumstances make them vulnerable so that they are able to overcome significant barriers to their learning and to personal development. The school has a very effective programme for the induction of students from primary schools.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team provide strong direction and successfully communicate high expectations to staff and students. Leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are now fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and improvement plans are focused on key priorities. There are clear actions on what needs to be done to move the school further forward. In the last year attainment has risen and achievement has increased due to the very good use of performance data to monitor the progress of students and to provide additional support where needed. The leadership team is well supported by the good work of middle leaders, who are actively involved in checking both the progress of students and the work of subject departments. There has been a concerted effort to improve the quality of teaching and a recent emphasis on the use of assessment data and targets has sharpened both students' and teachers' awareness of the next steps in learning.

The governing body has a good range of expertise and experience and governors are systematically involved in evaluating the school through their links with departments and the reports they receive from the headteacher. Safeguarding is outstanding and given a high priority; the safeguarding policy is clearly stated and rigorously followed and all reasonable actions are taken to ensure that the school is a safe place. Child protection

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procedures are strong and well administered, and training for staff is thorough and of good quality. The school has a positive relationship with parents and carers and achieves very high levels of attendance at consultation and information evenings. Partnerships with other schools and agencies, including those to support the work of the performing arts specialism, make an outstanding contribution to student progress and well-being.

The school's outstanding commitment to promoting equal opportunities has a clear impact on outcomes and there are no significant differences between the progress made by different groups of students. Community cohesion is promoted within the school and wider community through a developing range of curricular and extra-curricular activities; students have worked with the local community to achieve the Eco Schools Green Flag award and the school has a number of developing partnerships with schools overseas, although the impact of these initiatives has not as yet been evaluated sufficiently.

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	2
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

An average proportion of parents and carers responded to the parental questionnaire and the overwhelming majority showed high levels of satisfaction with the school. In particular, almost all believe that their child enjoys school and feel that their child is safe. A small number of parents and carers who responded added written comments. Many praised the school; however, a small number commented on incidents of unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors investigated this concern and concluded that staff deal well with such problems. The views of parents and carers were useful to the inspection team in helping them to see that care, guidance and support were outstanding. The strong set of positive responses from parents endorses the inspectors' view that Dowdales is a good school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dowdales 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 219 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1063 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	78	36	131	60	8	4	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	106	48	106	48	5	2	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	86	39	125	57	5	2	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	93	42	111	51	9	4	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	87	40	121	55	5	2	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	69	32	122	56	21	10	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	56	26	141	64	17	8	1	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)	82	37	118	54	4	2	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	75	34	131	60	8	4	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	76	35	117	53	10	5	4	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	53	24	128	58	17	8	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	66	30	121	55	18	8	4	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	90	41	119	54	6	3	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 Dowdales School, Dalton-in-Furness, LA15 8AH

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were pleased to be able to take your views into account. It was also very helpful that many of your parents and carers completed the questionnaire, as we could also take account of their views. It is clear from the evidence that we collected that you enjoy being at school and feel well cared for by your teachers. You said that everyone is friendly and that there is a positive and supportive atmosphere in school. I thought you would like to know what we thought about your school.

- Dowdales is a good school. The new headteacher and senior leadership team are making the right improvements to help you achieve even more.
- The school provides you with a good education. You make good progress from your starting points when you join the school.
- Your attendance is high and your behaviour is outstanding.
- You receive good teaching in lessons.
- The school provides you with outstanding support, particularly those of you who need additional help.

To help the school improve further, we have asked senior leaders to:

- ensure all teachers use assessment information to plan and deliver lessons that are closely matched to your individual needs
- ensure the curriculum is matched more closely to the needs of all students.

You can help your teachers by continuing to behave well and working hard at all times. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Brown

Lead inspector

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