

West Lakes Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135632
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	361304
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Sara Morrissey HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
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	979
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	154
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Lee Peck
Principal	Mrs Vanessa Ray
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Thirty-three lessons were observed and 38 teachers seen; meetings were held with staff, groups of students and representatives of the governing body. They observed the school's work, and looked at assessment information, a sample of students' work, records of observations of teaching and learning, records and policies relating to the safeguarding of students, improvement planning and the responses to questionnaires from 125 parents and carers, 147 students and 29 staff.

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

- The achievement of middle-ability students (especially girls) and those at school action at both key stages to determine whether teaching is sufficiently challenging and tailored to needs.
- How effectively the academy has tackled variations in progress made by different groups of students.
- The impact of strategies to improve teaching on the pace of learning and students' progress over time.
- The extent to which leaders at all levels contribute to driving improvement and demonstrate the capacity to improve the school further.

Information about the school

West Lakes Academy opened in September 2008, a year earlier than initially planned, in the existing buildings of one of the two predecessor schools. An extensive building programme is currently on schedule for completion by spring 2012. The academy is sponsored by Sellafield Ltd, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN). It has subject specialisms in science and, since September 2010, the Arts.

The academy is average in size, serving the two distinct communities of Cleator Moor and Egremont and a wide surrounding rural area stretching to the south of the academy. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly below the national average. Nearly all students are of White British heritage and the number of students who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly below the national average, although the number with a statement to meet their special educational needs is similar to that of other schools.

Since the academy opened, the post of Principal has been held by four different leaders. Leadership has stabilised since April 2010 following the appointment of the substantive Principal. The academy has been successful in recruiting suitably qualified staff to fill a number of vacancies from September 2011. During the inspection, approximately half the students in Year 8 were on a residential visit to France, accompanied by seven members of staff. The academy also hosted an event for Year 6 pupils, who will make the transition to Year 7 in September 2011.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Following a period of turbulence and change, the Principal has provided very strong leadership and communicated a clear and unequivocal vision for school improvement. Well supported by the senior leadership team, she has secured a strong focus on achieving the academy's aim to 'change lives through learning'.

Students' attainment is broadly average and rising. This is because the curriculum has been adapted well to meet a broad range of needs and interests, and tailored strategies have proved effective in closing gaps in students' prior learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Consequently, students' progress and achievement, over time, are satisfactory. Good support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that they achieve as well as their peers.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although there are examples of good and outstanding practice that accelerate the progress made by students, in particular, those who are more able. However, the progress made by low-attaining students is more variable. This is because activities are not always tailored to meet their individual needs and do not always provide sufficient challenge. Opportunities are also missed to develop students' skills as independent learners.

A supportive community is well established in the academy that promotes students' personal development well. Good provision is made to promote healthy lifestyles and an increasing range of opportunities prepare students appropriately for their next steps in education, training or employment. Very positive responses to questionnaires from parents and carers and students reflect high levels of enjoyment of school and appreciation of actions taken to ensure that students are cared for well. Behaviour in lessons and around the academy is generally good and students report that they feel safe and very confident that any concerns will be dealt with by staff. Attendance has improved, as a result of effective support and guidance, so that it is now broadly average.

A whole-academy focus has secured improvement in the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. Leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. However, judgements about the quality of teaching are not routinely linked to the progress made by students over time. An overview of the characteristics of teaching that accelerate students' progress has not been fully established, to guide staff professional development and achieve greater consistency in the proportion of learning that is good.

Self-evaluation by senior leaders, the governing body and an increasing number of middle leaders has ensured that the rigorous actions taken to tackle urgent priorities have been effective. For example, improvements made in sixth form provision over the last 12 months have resulted in satisfactory outcomes for students. Reliable data show that

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outcomes for students in all years are improving securely and swiftly, reflecting the good capacity that exists within the academy to improve further.

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?

- Raise attainment and achievement, particularly of low-attaining students, by:
 - tailoring activities to meet the full range of learning needs
 - engaging students more actively in lessons and increasing their independence as learners.
- Increase the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress by:
 - establishing a clear overview of the characteristics of teaching that promotes consistently good learning across the academy
 - developing the role of all middle leaders to ensure that teachers are held to account for the progress and attainment of the students they teach
 - linking the outcomes of lesson observations more closely to students' progress and achievement over time.

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

Students' attainment is broadly average by the time they leave the academy, which reflects satisfactory progress overall, relative to their starting points. Older students have benefited from adaptations to the curriculum and targeted support to regain ground that has been lost in the past. Consequently, the proportion of students attaining five GCSE passes at A* to C, including English and mathematics, has risen significantly since the academy opened. National minimum targets set by the government have been exceeded and results from early entry to examinations taken by Year 11 in 2011, indicate that the gap between attainment at the academy and that seen nationally is closing swiftly and is approaching the national average. Progress in other year groups is satisfactory and, for some groups, is accelerating at a faster pace. However, boys make slightly less progress than girls, especially in English. Middle-ability students make expected progress in relation to their starting points but lower-attaining students do not always achieve their full potential because their needs are not met precisely enough. Good support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those at school action, ensures that they make at least satisfactory progress.

In lessons, students make brisk progress where activities provide challenge and test their knowledge and understanding. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson, higher-ability students made rapid progress in developing their knowledge of themes in 'Othello' because practical activities and effective questioning extended their thinking about the play. Where learning is less effective, activities lack pace and sometimes, teachers dominate for too long so that students do not all develop the necessary skills to become independent learners.

Students speak positively about the raised aspirations and clear expectations that have been communicated by academy leaders. During the inspection, they showed great

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maturity in responding to the constraints presented by the building programme underway on a site that is immediately adjacent to their current accommodation. Attitudes to learning are generally positive, although where teaching is less effective, students become passive and behaviour occasionally deteriorates. Extra-curricular activities, such as the 'fitness club' promote healthy lifestyles and students are able to take on responsibility within the academy, for example, as members of student councils. However, opportunities for making a broader contribution to the wider community are not as well developed. Students have highly developed skills that support their social and moral development, but their spiritual development and awareness of cultural diversity are less well advanced.

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	3
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	3
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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

How effective is the provision?

Improvements to teaching and the quality of the curriculum are having a positive impact on raising attainment and achievement across the academy. The quality of teaching is satisfactory with an increasing proportion that is good or better. Common characteristics in most lessons include teachers' good subject knowledge and sharing learning intentions that are reviewed with students as the lesson proceeds. The most effective teaching incorporates a variety of practical activities that include group and paired work. Regular checks on progress enable teachers to adapt plans so that students are challenged and make brisk progress as a result. Where teaching is less effective, resources are not matched well enough to meet the needs of all learners and students are sometimes over-

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reliant on adult support to meet learning objectives. The quality of marking is variable. Good examples of written feedback were seen during the inspection that provided clear guidance for students about what they have achieved and their next steps. However, this is not consistent across all subjects and scrutiny of students' work indicates that they do not always act on the helpful advice provided.

The curriculum is tailored well to support students with different needs and interests.

A good emphasis is placed, in particular, on developing literacy skills and in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. Transition arrangements for students joining the academy are strong and good consideration is given to ensure that the needs of students with specific learning needs are met. Early results from examinations taken by Year 11 in 2011 indicate a much higher success rate than in previous years on a range of courses that have greater relevance and interest for students. A good range of extra-curricular activities are popular and well attended. The academy's sponsors have contributed to curricular enrichment through links established with other providers and businesses. Subject specialisms are making an increasing contribution to the curriculum. For example, popular Arts events have a high profile and highlight strengths in provision. Recent developments in science are also beginning to have a positive impact on students' outcomes.

Very effective steps taken to engage with parents and carers, especially those who are hard to reach, reinforce the good systems in place to support students. Rigorous procedures are in place to monitor attendance and manage behavioural issues. The positive impact of actions taken is evident in the rise in attendance and significant fall in fixed-term exclusions. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable benefit particularly well from personalised guidance and care that makes good use of support provided by external agencies.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The Principal has tackled key priorities vigorously and established a dynamic team of senior leaders, who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and are working together effectively to drive improvement. She has communicated a clear vision that is understood by many middle leaders and their contribution to the monitoring and evaluation of the academy's performance is increasing. The Principal has strengthened capacity further across the academy during a period of transition associated with staff changes. For example, she has adopted innovative models of leadership to ensure that attainment has continued to rise in English and mathematics.

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Improvements to teaching have been supported by a good programme of professional development and a rigorous system of quality assurance. However, while records of lesson observations provide accurate evaluations of teaching and learning, the direct link has not been made between the quality of teaching and students' progress over time between different classes and subjects. Middle leaders are still developing their skills in holding staff to account for students' performance through the analysis of assessment information.

The governing body includes representatives of all the academy's sponsors and the local authority, who bring a range of valuable expertise that enables them to provide suitable challenge and support for the academy. Individual members of the governing body ensure that statutory requirements are met fully. Arrangements for governance are currently under review in order to increase the contribution of the governing body to academy improvement.

Students' well-being is supported well through the good levels of engagement with parents and carers. This has been enhanced further via a direct link to the parent governor, made available on the academy's improved website. Partnerships are also effective in promoting students' well-being and recent developments are beginning to have a greater impact on their learning. A very high profile is given to ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective and significant attention has been paid to ensure that the site is secure during the course of the building programme.

The academy takes rigorous steps to ensure that discrimination is tackled. However, the uneven progress made by some groups of students means that equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Suitable steps are taken to promote community cohesion. Although the academy meets students' needs well in terms of its local context, their preparation for life as a member of multi-cultural society in a national or global context is less well developed.

In their questionnaire responses, a very small number of staff raised concerns about the pace and nature of change that has taken place in recent times. However, a strong commitment and determination exists within a large core team of staff, at all levels, to fulfil the academy's aim to improve outcomes for all students.

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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	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Sixth form

Following some disappointing examination results in summer 2010, rigorous action has been taken to build on strengths and tackle weaknesses in provision in order to improve outcomes for sixth form students. A closer match has been made between the range of courses available and the students' interests and abilities. The variety of courses on offer is being enhanced further through links with other providers. The positive impact of this action can be seen in high success rates in the results from a broad range of courses that have already been published. Assessment information gathered through regular updates also indicates that students are on track to meet their targets following recent AS and A level examinations.

Students feel well supported by their teachers and enjoy the variety of activities that engage them actively in their learning. All students have been issued with a small laptop computer which helps to develop their use of ICT skills and support their learning. Enrichment activities and opportunities to undertake voluntary work supporting younger students enable sixth form students to develop useful skills for the future. Retention rates across the sixth form are above average and students report that the guidance they receive is helpful in preparing for further education, training or employment.

Leadership of the sixth form has been strengthened following the new appointments from September 2010. Expectations have been raised and actions have been prioritised effectively to raise attainment and ensure that students are well prepared for their future. The learning mentor works very effectively with students and has had a significant impact on improving students' attendance. The head of sixth form has established firm foundations on which to build, although systems to evaluate the impact of sixth form provision on outcomes are in the early stages of development.

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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

Parents and carers were generally positive in their responses to the questionnaire and also in two calls made to the lead inspector during the inspection. A very small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about the management of poor behaviour. However, responses from students' questionnaires and other evidence gathered during the inspection indicate that the academy handles behavioural issues effectively and that students feel confident to raise any concerns with staff. A second concern was raised by a few parents and carers about the level of challenge provided for gifted and talented children. Inspection evidence indicates that this group of students make better progress than others, overall, because teaching meets their needs more closely.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at West Lakes Academy 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 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 979 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	18	79	63	16	13	5	4
The school keeps my child safe	36	29	77	62	11	9	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	48	38	68	54	8	6	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	26	69	55	16	13	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	19	15	84	67	11	9	5	4
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	18	70	56	21	17	7	6
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	14	78	62	20	16	5	4
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)	30	24	73	58	11	9	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	20	73	58	17	14	6	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	16	67	54	23	18	8	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	11	69	55	23	18	5	4
The school is led and managed effectively	21	17	76	61	16	13	5	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	22	74	59	13	10	7	6

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.



8 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of West Lakes Academy, Egremont, CA22 2DQ

Thank you for your welcome when we inspected your academy recently. We appreciated the opportunity to meet with some of you and to talk about your work and experience at West Lakes. Thank you also to those of you who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. We were delighted to see the high numbers who responded positively about all aspects of your experience at the academy. We were also impressed by the way in which you conducted yourselves so safely around the site, given that space is so limited with the building work that is going on all around you.

Following the inspection, we have judged that West Lakes provides you with a satisfactory education overall and that, in the past twelve months in particular, it has made some significant improvements. This is because academy leaders are very focused on making sure that you all achieve as well as you can during your time at the academy. Some of you told us that the expectations of you have risen and that you are more confident about reaching targets that are more challenging. Your attainment and rate of progress in lessons is improving because of improvements to the curriculum that make it more relevant for you. Teaching is satisfactory and in an increasing number of lessons, it is good or better. We found that your behaviour is generally good and that attendance has improved as a result of good care, guidance and support. In order to help the academy improve further, we have asked the academy leaders to:

- raise your attainment and achievement by ensuring that you all get the right levels of challenge and support in your lessons and more opportunities to learn independently
- ensure that teaching helps you to make good progress more consistently in all your lessons
- develop the role of middle leaders so that they can check with your subject teachers that you are achieving your full potential.

You have an important contribution to make in helping the academy improve by attending regularly and doing your best in all your studies.

Yours sincerely,

Sara Morrissey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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