

Ullswater Community College

Wetheriggs Lane, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 8NG

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Although the school's GCSE results have improved overall, students do not do as well as they should in mathematics and English.
- Teachers do not always take students' abilities fully into account when they plan lessons. Consequently, the pace of some lessons is too slow and the more-able students do not make as much progress as they should.
- Teachers' marking of students' work is not effective enough at helping students understand how to improve. This means that they do not always learn from their mistakes.
- The sixth form requires improvement because standards of achievement are too variable across subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- It is a happy, caring place in which students behave well, feel safe and enjoy making a positive difference to their community.
- Achievement has risen significantly at Key Stage 4 because a broad range of courses helps students to make choices that reflect their abilities and interests.
- Governors and leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and are taking determined action to raise standards in the main school and the sixth form.
- Leaders have improved the quality of teaching in many subjects through effective monitoring, appropriate training and sharing of good practice. Performance management is rigorous.
- The school caters well for students with disabilities or special educational needs, particularly through its special resource provision, so that they are included in the life of the school and make good progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 59 lessons, of which eight were joint observations with the school’s senior leaders. In addition they made other short visits to lessons. They also attended assemblies, observed tutorial sessions and listened to students reading.
- Five groups of students, including representatives of the school council, met with inspectors. Meetings were also held with school staff, including senior leaders, heads of department, heads of year, a governor and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 38 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). They also considered parents’ responses to school surveys and analysed 48 questionnaires completed by school staff.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a range of documents, including the school’s self-evaluation and improvement plan, monitoring reports, behaviour logs, details of staff performance management and records relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Shirley Gornall, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Margaret Farrow	Her Majesty’s Inspector
David Brown	Seconded Inspector
Janice Gorch	Additional Inspector
Mark Simpson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority, is much lower than found nationally. The vast majority of students are White British and virtually all students speak English as their first language.
- The school includes a special resource centre for students who have severe learning difficulties. The proportion of students that is identified as disabled or with special educational needs is higher than found nationally. An average proportion of students has a statement of special educational needs.
- The student population is very stable and the sixth form is well-subscribed. The proportion of students completing two years in the sixth form is higher than the national average.
- The school has specialist status for business and enterprise and holds the International Schools' Award and the Continuing Professional Development Award in recognition of its provision for staff training.
- A small number of students in Key Stage 4 are educated off site, mainly at Kendal College and Newton Rigg.
- The school meets the government's floor standard, which is the minimum expected for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate at which students make progress in mathematics by teaching mathematical skills and concepts and providing students with good opportunities to use and apply their understanding.
- Increase students' progress in English through a consistent approach to developing their writing skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching to the best in school by:
 - using teachers' knowledge of students' ability levels to provide work that stretches every individual
 - ensuring that lessons are well-paced, challenge students' thinking and are re-enforced through appropriate homework
 - marking students' work thoroughly so that all students know how to improve, especially with regard to spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - ensuring that students act upon their feedback.
- Ensure that all leaders focus on students' learning and progress when making judgements about the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C has risen sharply over the last two years and is significantly better than the national figure. This is due to strongly improved teaching in many subjects and the provision of a broad range of courses that interest students. However, the proportion of students achieving five good grades including

English and mathematics is below average and has declined.

- Standards in mathematics are too low. Students do not make enough progress from their starting points. Results from examinations taken by students now in Key Stage 4 indicate that there is an improving picture of achievement.
- Standards in English are variable. In 2012, girls' GCSE results showed that while they made good progress the boys' performance was much weaker. Evidence from their current work indicates that students' writing skills are not as well developed as their skills in reading. Sometimes students find it difficult to produce sustained pieces of writing.
- Sensitive and carefully considered support for students with special educational needs, particularly in reading, helps these students make good progress. This is because the teacher in charge of supporting students with special educational needs has a clear understanding of the abilities of each individual student and ensures that they receive timely support, the impact of which is carefully monitored and shared with parents and carers.
- School leaders recognised that students' speaking and listening skills in all subjects were an area for improvement. A concerted effort by teachers to encourage students to explain their ideas more fully, using standard English, has been effective in improving these skills.
- The standards reached by students in the sixth form are variable. Students achieve particularly well in theatre studies, health and social care and art and design, but in other subjects, such as accounting, applied business, media and sociology, they make less than expected progress. The school has recognised the need to offer some alternative courses to sixth-form students, so that they do well in all the subjects taught. The focus of school leaders on improving teaching has had a good impact on the sixth form. Students state that they are well-taught and that the standards expected of them have risen.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There are examples of good teaching in all subjects in the school, but there is too much inconsistency in practice. As a result students' progress is hampered, most evidently in mathematics lessons. In the least effective lessons, teachers often expect all students to complete the same work in the same amount of time, which slows the learning for the more-able students. On some occasions, students do not have enough time to practise using and applying their mathematical skills, which means that they do not have a secure grasp of the concept. As a result some students have gaps in their learning, which have not been recognised by their teachers. Students state that mathematics is the subject they enjoy least. The homework they receive is inappropriate in its content to enable them to ensure that they fully understand what they have been taught.
- Some teaching is of good or outstanding quality, and inspires students to achieve the highest standards. In dance and physical education, students' skills are developed rapidly in well-paced lessons which enable them to work cooperatively to improve their performance. In art and design, students benefit from highly creative teaching that encourages them to develop their individual expression, leading from exciting exploration of artists' techniques. In religious education, thought-provoking exploration of 'the big questions' leads students to think critically and express complex ideas with confidence.
- There is variability in the teaching of English. Students generally enjoy their lessons and are enthusiastic readers who talk knowledgeably about contemporary authors and have effective strategies for reading unfamiliar words. Their teachers encourage them to develop a wide vocabulary. Sometimes the pace of lessons slows because of an over-reliance on students giving feedback on each other's work before they have had time to develop their own ideas fully. This approach reduces students' opportunities to write at length or get their work to the standard they wish before sharing it. There is an inconsistent approach to students' work being displayed, celebrated and used as a point of reference in classrooms, in English and other subjects.
- Most teachers mark students' work regularly but their comments are not always useful and

students do not routinely act on the written feedback they receive. Marking is generally good in English, where teachers identify errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, and expect students to correct these. This practice is not apparent in all teachers' marking across subjects and results in errors in basic English persisting unnecessarily.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most parents consider the school to be safe and students' behaviour to be good. These views are confirmed by the students themselves. As one stated, 'We have rules but we don't often need to be told about them because we want to learn, so we listen and behave.' The school's rules are applied consistently and fairly. Any incidents of misbehaviour are recorded and followed up swiftly. Very few students are excluded from school. Students are taught about different forms of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying, and know what to do if they witness or experience it. Through assemblies and tutorials, students are encouraged to think about the moral dimension of decisions and they recognise their own responsibility for making sure there is no discrimination or unfairness in school. They have great confidence in their form tutors and heads of year, whom they feel they can turn to with any problem. Students with disabilities work and socialise readily with their peers.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school's large campus is consistently good. Students are friendly and good-humoured. They take responsibility readily as councillors and mentors. Sixth formers give active support to younger students in the school, particularly those who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Students enjoy involvement in the school's varied extracurricular programme that includes a wide range of sports, impressive musical and drama productions and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. When given opportunities to work cooperatively, students willingly work with different partners and show sensitivity to others' viewpoints in discussing ideas, such as in religious education, where mutual trust enables them to express individual opinions openly without fear of ridicule.
- Students value their own community and contribute significantly to local charities such as the Eden Hospice and Penrith Mountain Rescue. The school ensures through an impressive programme of visits, visitors and international connections, that they are also involved in the global community.
- Students' attendance is in line with national average, although there was a dip in the last academic year. Very few students are late to school, despite having to travel considerable distances and punctuality to lessons is excellent. The school has worked hard, including with parents and other services, to reduce the number of students who have low attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a very clear and uncompromising ambition for all students to achieve their best, both academically and personally. His work in leading substantial change at the school is valued by students, staff and parents. Students find the headteacher approachable and interested in their work. Staff who completed the inspection questionnaire are unanimously proud to belong to the school and are supportive of its rigorous plans to improve. Since his appointment three years ago, the headteacher has implemented clear management systems focused on raising achievement. Regular observation of teaching by senior leaders, with clear advice to teachers on how to improve their work, along with regular sharing of good practice are improving teaching rapidly. There has been substantial turnover in staff, including those at a senior level as well as those with responsibility for leading subjects. New staff have benefited from effective induction and mentoring and, as a result, are performing well in their new roles. The new senior team in charge of leading the school's development is dynamic and determined to drive forward improvements.

- The school's team of subject leaders model good practice in teaching and are enthusiastic about their subjects. Their role in monitoring the work of their departments is clearly defined and they know the strengths and weaknesses of the areas for which they are responsible. Senior leaders have worked conscientiously with them to ensure that they have an accurate view of priorities and that they provide the appropriate support to improve the quality of teaching in their subject area. This has resulted in rapid improvements in the teaching so that performance in most subjects is rising quickly.
 - The school's self-evaluation is wide-ranging and accurate. The views of students and parents are sought and listened to. The local authority has provided valuable support in moderating the school's judgements, including through reviewing departmental performance and observing lessons alongside school leaders. Sometimes lesson observations have focused too much on teachers' actions rather than on students' learning and progress, resulting in some judgements being too generous.
 - The school's performance-management arrangements are strong, and are instrumental in improving teaching rapidly. Underperformance is rigorously challenged and decisions about staff pay increases are directly related to the quality of their work. Senior leaders have managed staff turnover effectively to ensure that the drive for improvement in teaching is evident throughout the school. Senior leaders have improved the curriculum in both the main school and the sixth form to make it broad, balanced and relevant. Vocational courses, including motor vehicle engineering, provide students with good practical skills. Experience of work-based learning is complemented by individual advice on preparation for future careers. Students benefit from plenty of opportunities to understand different people's beliefs including through the Spiritual Cumbria project that younger students value highly. Through the school's business and enterprise specialism, students learn about business ethics and fair trade principles.
 - The school spends its budget wisely. The additional funding the school has received through its pupil premium budget has been used effectively to provide additional teaching for students at risk of underachieving. It has also provided staff with training on how to use particular support programmes, including those to improve students' literacy levels. These programmes are helping to improve the reading and spelling skills of students who have low attainment.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Holds the headteacher to account for the work of the school, including through a robust performance-management system.
 - Works directly with heads of subject and heads of year to ensure that improvements are made and celebrated in all aspects of the school's work.
 - Fulfils its statutory duties, including with regard to safeguarding.
 - Ensures that spending decisions are made wisely and that funding, including the pupil premium budget, is used to raise standards.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112393
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	401260

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	1415
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Vice Chair	Alan Davis
Headteacher	Nigel Pattinson
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2010
Telephone number	01768 210206
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