

Lathom High School: A Technology College

Glenburn Road, Skelmersdale, Lancashire, WN8 6JN

Inspection dates

24–25 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		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students do not make fast enough progress in all their subjects and so their attainment is below the national average.
- Some middle ability students and boys make slower progress than others, particularly in mathematics.
- Despite improvements, teaching is not yet good enough to secure good progress for all students. This is because the work set is not always at the right level for students and students sometimes spend too long listening to their teachers.
- Students do not have enough practice in all subjects to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills or their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Senior leaders and governors are too slow to pick up signs of underachievement and halt it quickly enough. They do not check teaching often enough to know exactly how good it is.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is a happy place where students feel very well supported and cared for, particularly those who find reading difficult.
- The headteacher is energetic and determined to improve the school and teaching has improved since the last inspection.
- The school has put in place strong new systems to hold staff to account and to check students' progress more effectively.
- The headteacher and some senior and middle leaders show good capacity to drive further improvement in the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one half-day's notice.
- Inspectors observed 36 lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of other short visits to lessons in English, mathematics and science, an assembly and tutor groups.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chairs of the Finance and Environment Committees and staff, including senior and middle leaders. A telephone discussion was held with an external educational consultant to the school.
- Inspectors took account of the small number of responses to the Parent View online questionnaire along with the school's own surveys of parents' and students' views about the school.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including: data on students' current progress; planning and monitoring documentation; records relating to behaviour and attendance; and documents relating to safeguarding. Inspectors also looked at a sample of students' written work over time.

Inspection team

Susan Wareing, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sally Kenyon	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mary Lanovy-Taylor	Additional inspector
Paul Latham	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Lathom High School became a Foundation Trust School with Trust in 2011.
- It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average.
- The proportion of students identified as disabled or having special educational needs is below that found nationally. Their needs relate mainly to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and moderate and specific learning difficulties.
- Very few students are from minority ethnic groups, or are at an early stage of learning to speak English.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 attend training courses at local businesses, colleges and schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expected for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has had specialist status in technology since 2004.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by ensuring that:
 - in all lessons tasks are set at exactly the right level for each student
 - teachers provide more opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning
 - planning in all subjects gives students more chances to improve their skills in reading, writing and mathematics
 - students are better enabled to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness
 - senior and middle leaders check teaching more often to gain a more accurate overview of the quality of teaching.
- Raise achievement, especially for students of middle ability and boys, by ensuring that senior and middle leaders use promptly information about students' progress to support their learning needs in all subjects.
- Undertake an external review of the governing body to identify what further support and training governors need.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Progress in mathematics and for some middle ability students requires improvement and they do not achieve as well as they could. Teachers do not always set work at exactly the right level for each student in the class or tell students exactly how to improve their work.
- The standards that students reach at the end of Year 11 are not yet good enough. When students join the school in Year 7, they are working at the same level of attainment as found nationally. Results in the 2011 GCSE examinations, although showing some improvement, were below the national average.
- Senior leaders have not been quick enough to react to signs of underachievement amongst some groups of students. The school has now introduced a much stronger system for checking students' progress, but this action came too late to significantly improve the 2012 examination results. However, information held by the school points to a likely upturn in the 2013 results.
- Most students do very well in sciences because the school has introduced more appropriate courses that give more students a better chance of gaining a GCSE qualification. Art and design and physical education are strong subjects. Spanish and statistics, although below average, are now beginning to improve.
- Girls' achievement is higher than that of boys, but the difference is similar to the national average and the gap is narrowing.
- The levels of attainment reached by students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding), when they join the school are significantly lower (by 2.4 average points score) than those of other students. The pupil premium provides extra training, counselling courses and small class and individual support for English and mathematics. The rates of students' progress improved in 2012 to the national average and most students continued to further education or training.
- The progress of the majority of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. This is because they thrive on the high quality support and care that the school provides for them.
- The school provides early entry for high ability students in Year 10 to the GCSE examination in statistics and in Year 11 to mathematics. Most students who take their examinations early achieve at least in line with the national average.
- The school's Reading Recovery classes for Year 7 students are a strength, allowing students to make up to two and a half years' progress in reading in a single year. One student seen during the inspection smiled with delight at her progress, saying: "Look at how many words I've learned to read today!" In other lessons students do not have enough practice in reading, writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Despite hard work by senior leaders to improve the quality of teaching since the last inspection, teaching is still not strong enough to ensure that all students, especially boys and students of middle ability, progress as well as they can.
- Inspectors saw some examples of good and outstanding practice, but the school overestimates the overall quality of its teaching. Around half of the teaching seen was good or outstanding and half required improvement. There were two inadequate lessons, in mathematics and religious education.
- Lessons that require improvement are hampered by teachers setting work that is either too easy or too hard. For example, in a mathematics lesson all students did the same tasks, whatever their ability, so some students did not make enough progress. In several lessons, teachers talked too much, and their questions were sometimes too simple to lead students to a high level of discussion.

- In the lessons with good or outstanding teaching, teachers make clear to students exactly what they have to do to succeed. In an outstanding history lesson, the teacher's questions made students think more deeply and use a wider range of language in their answers. This helped them to make rapid progress in their reading and writing as well as in their skills in history.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Students generally behave well in lessons and around the school and they are courteous and welcoming towards visitors. Relationships in lessons are positive and students say that the new behaviour code has also improved behaviour.
- Despite these positive attitudes, students' behaviour requires improvement because it is not good when lessons are dull, when work is too easy or when teachers talk for too long. Students do not develop enough confidence to take responsibility for their own learning and show initiative.
- Older students feel safer than some of the younger ones, especially around crowded corridors and stairways. However, most students say that there is always an adult to help them when they have concerns. Inspection evidence shows that few parents who expressed their views had concerns about behaviour.
- Exclusions are low because the school offers a wide range of approaches to help students who find it difficult to settle in school. For example, students can refer themselves at any time to the Every Child Matters Centre which provides anger management, counselling and supports learning in lessons.
- Attendance is broadly average and improving. Most students generally arrive on time for school and lessons.
- The majority of students say that it is easy to make friends in the school and that students who are disabled, those who have special educational needs and students from different ethnic backgrounds respect each other and get on well together.
- Students believe that all forms of bullying are rare, but when they occur staff will deal with them immediately. A few students are not as aware as they should be of the seriousness of using homophobic language. Students understand how to keep themselves safe when using mobile phones and the internet and the school has effective systems to protect them.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The headteacher is ambitious for the school to improve and has worked very energetically to tackle the issues raised at the last inspection. New systems for the management of teaching have resulted in a greater proportion of good or better teaching since the last inspection. New target setting measures are starting to raise achievement, but the school does not always take prompt enough action when achievement starts to slow for some groups of students. Nevertheless, the school takes its responsibilities for promoting equality seriously.
- Salary progression for teachers is firmly linked to the Teachers' Standards and to good and outstanding performance. Under performing teachers are quickly provided with effective packages of support. However, the quality of teaching still varies too much between teachers and subjects. This is because staff do not have enough opportunities to plan together and share expertise and because senior leaders do not check the quality of teaching often enough.
- Senior leaders are supportive of the headteacher's vision for the school and new appointments have strengthened the team. Middle leaders show good capacity to drive further improvements to the school but have not yet done enough to check the quality of teaching.
- As a Foundation school with Trust it is involved in a wide range of partnerships with local businesses, schools and a nearby university. One benefit of this is well supervised training away from school for some students in Years 10 and 11 who are at risk of failure.

- The school draws effective support from the local authority and increasingly from independent consultancy. This has led to some improvements in English and languages but there is more work to be done, especially in mathematics.
 - The curriculum is broad and balanced and more suitable courses have been introduced that lead to GCSE qualifications. Planning for the improvement of students' reading, writing and mathematics in all their subjects is at an early stage.
 - The school develops students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through visits to local places of worship, visits abroad and the school supports a local charity that combats child poverty in Nepal. However, the school does not yet plan this learning systematically in all subjects.
 - Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors bring a wide range of professional expertise to their work for the school. They are very committed to supporting its improvement and aware of their responsibilities. They know the school well through links with subject departments and ensure that the school's finances are sound. Because the school's checking systems have not been sharp enough, governors have not had a clear enough oversight of teaching to mount a prompt challenge to the school when standards began to fall. The recent creation of a smaller core group of governors has the potential to increase their effectiveness.
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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	119774
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	401875

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	686
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T Moorcroft
Headteacher	Mr T Farr
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2010
Telephone number	01695 725653
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