

Ulverston Victoria High School

Springfield Road, Ulverston, Cumbria, LA12 0EB

Inspection dates 26–27 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good progress in their learning, achieve well and attain above-average standards.
- Teaching is good. In some lessons it is outstanding. Teachers are very knowledgeable, explain tasks clearly and convey considerable enthusiasm for their subjects, which enables students to enjoy learning.
- Teachers' marking is of high quality and students are given clear pointers about how to improve their work.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress and achieve well. An above-average proportion achieves the highest grades, particularly in mathematics.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. They relish opportunities to take responsibility, show great kindness and respect for others and are proud of their school. They say how very safe they feel at school.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Under the experienced and highly skilled leadership of the headteacher, well supported by governors and senior staff, the school has excellent capacity to improve further.
- Any slight weaknesses in teaching or in the achievement of all groups of students are quickly identified and tackled successfully. The school is not complacent. No stone is left unturned in seeking creative solutions to problems and striving for further improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is good but not enough is outstanding. In a small minority of lessons teachers do not move students on to the next task quickly enough or give them sufficient opportunities to work independently, share their ideas and assess their own and each other's work.
- Small differences in the rate of progress remain between students supported by the pupil premium and other students. Middle-attaining girls achieve slightly less well than other students in mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons and part-lessons, of which two were joint observations with senior staff. The headteacher and lead inspector made several shorter visits to classrooms. Inspectors listened to students read.
- Discussions were held with parents, students, staff and governors.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at students' books, progress data, safeguarding information and other documentation.
- One hundred and forty responses to the online questionnaire, 'Parent View', were considered as well as those from the school's own parental surveys and from school staff.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

Inspection team

Ann Ashdown, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Catherine Laing	Additional Inspector
Gary Kelly	Additional Inspector
Paul Rafferty	Additional Inspector
Clive Hurren	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is an above-average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families, is below average.
- A well-below average proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and a similar proportion speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action is below average as is the proportion supported at school action plus and with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing.
- Seventeen Year 10 and 11 students attend vocational courses Kendal College and a very small number of students attend a local pupil referral unit or are home tutored.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that it is always at least good and more is outstanding by sharing existing good practice to ensure that:
 - all teachers check students' learning regularly and quickly move them on to the next task when they are ready
 - students have equally good opportunities in all lessons to work independently, share their ideas in groups and pairs and assess their own and each other's work.
- Maintain the current focus on accelerating the progress of students who are supported by the pupil premium and that of middle-attaining girls in mathematics by;
 - monitoring and evaluating the impact of current initiatives to track their progress and provide specialist, carefully targeted extra help when this is needed.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- From their individual starting points, which are often above average, students make good progress over time and achieve well. Work in students' books, examination results and the school's own student-progress data all confirm the good progress that students are making.
- Students achieve well as they move through both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, and in 2012 reached significantly above-average standards in GCSE mathematics and English. This above-average attainment continues in 2013 and progress data for current students indicates that they are on track to achieve their challenging targets and even higher standards this year.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress overall and achieve well in GCE A-level examinations. In 2012 and 2013 over a quarter of examination results were at the highest A and A* grades. There is some variation between subjects with results in, for example, mathematics, being particularly high while those in general studies have been weaker.
- The school does not enter students early, or more than once, for examinations in any subject including mathematics and English.
- The more-able students achieve well, in 2012 this was particularly evident in music, English literature and mathematics. However, middle-attaining students, particularly girls, achieved slightly less well in mathematics in 2012 and 2013.
- Students have very good literacy skills. Those few who find reading difficult are given specialist extra help (partly through good use of catch-up funding) which enables them to accelerate their progress and enjoy reading for pleasure.
- Good use of extra funding (the pupil premium) has ensured that the gap between the attainment of the relatively small number of students eligible for free school meals and others has narrowed markedly this year. A raft of strategies to provide students with extra help has meant that the point scores they are achieving in examinations indicates they are now less than two terms behind their peers. However, a gap, particularly in rates of progress, does remain. The school recognises this and is relentless in finding ways to ensure that all groups of students achieve equally well.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs, those few from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language all make good progress. High quality coordination of all staff who support students with additional needs means that these students receive skilled and sensitive support from teachers and teaching assistants.
- The progress of students who attend off-site provision is carefully monitored. They attend regularly and behave well, are kept safe and make good progress in their learning.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in the vast majority of lessons, both in the main school and in the sixth form, is at least good and in some lessons it is outstanding. Teachers know their students well and lessons are conducted in an atmosphere of real respect and trust. Students are extremely keen to learn and respond with enthusiasm to the good teaching they receive.
- Teachers are very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subjects they teach. They explain concepts clearly and make these relevant to real-life situations. For example, in an A-level mathematics class work on ellipses and their equations was made both interesting and relevant by citing varied examples of how ellipses are used, such as in the chain wheels of the British cycling team and the construction of fuel tankers.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students and frequently ask demanding questions and set open-ended tasks which challenge all students including the more-able.
- Students' work is carefully marked and they are given precise pointers on how to improve further. Homework set builds on learning in lessons and extends students' skills and understanding well.

- Disabled students and those with special educational needs receive good support for learning in lessons. All teachers and teaching assistants are well aware of their needs and good systems of communication throughout the school ensure that staff work together to ensure these needs are fully met.
- In the majority of lessons students are encouraged to work both independently and in groups and pairs, sharing ideas and assessing their own and each other's work. However, this good practice is not yet fully shared so, in a small minority of lessons, students do not have the same good opportunities to develop these skills. In a few lessons students' learning is not checked regularly enough to ensure that they are moved on quickly to the next task and, consequently, their pace of learning is slower.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students, typically, have excellent attitudes to learning. They are extremely keen to succeed, answer questions and complete extra tasks readily and work very hard in lessons. In such ways they make an exceptional contribution to their own learning. Behaviour around the school, in the dining rooms and in classrooms is outstanding. Students show respect for each other, staff and visitors. They are proud of their school and are keen to be ambassadors for it.
- Students are keen to take on extra responsibilities, such as being part of the thriving school parliament, raising money for charities, helping younger students to read and playing their part in improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. They are enthusiastic about all the extra opportunities the school provides and are keen to pick up a 'grab bag' provided by the school kitchen so they can eat a healthy lunch and go to an extra class or activity.
- Attendance is above average and continues to improve. Students are very punctual to school and to lessons. Exclusions are rare.
- Students say how very safe and well looked after they feel in school. Parents echo this view and the large number who responded to the online questionnaire were extremely positive about the support the school gave their sons and daughters. Excellent arrangements for the transition of students from primary schools into Year 7 mean that they settle particularly well into secondary school.
- The engagement centre is part of an extremely well-organised integrated support system. It allows students who may have difficulties in working in larger classes to make good progress in their learning and personal development.
- Students are very knowledgeable about different types of bullying, including cyber bullying, and well aware of the dangers, for example, of drug and alcohol abuse. Students say that any, rare, incidents of bullying in school are swiftly and effectively dealt with.
- A very calm and purposeful atmosphere pervades the school. The university like atmosphere of the library and the sixth-form lounge prepares sixth formers well for later life. These sixth formers in turn provide excellent role-models for younger students.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides extremely experienced, outstanding leadership, which motivates and empowers staff to quickly tackle weaknesses and successfully bring about improvements in teaching and students' progress. Senior and middle leaders share the headteacher's vision for continual improvement and their blend of outstanding skills and expertise promote students' good and improving achievement and outstanding behaviour and safety.
- The school has an excellent understanding of its strength and weaknesses. It is particularly aware of groups of students, such as those supported by the pupil premium and middle attainers in mathematics, who are achieving slightly less well than other groups. Its relentless focus on looking for and finding ways of speeding up the progress of these groups is now accelerating their learning.

- Across the school communications are excellent. Well organised, integrated systems ensure first-rate support for students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and disabled students and those with special educational needs. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated and the school is relentless in its pursuit of equal opportunities for all students.
- Staff questionnaires indicate that staff feel valued and morale is high. Systems to ensure high-quality management of staff performance and continued professional development to further improve and fully share teachers' skills are firmly in place.
- Staff and resources, within the confines of a tight budget, are extremely well deployed. Senior staff welcome the opportunities they have to gain experience by sharing their expertise with other schools.
- The curriculum is reviewed regularly and continually developed to fully meet the need of students and very successfully promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It also prepares students very well for employment and for further study. A wealth of enrichment activities gives students the opportunities to develop their creative, musical, dramatic and sporting talents as well as promoting their physical well-being. Students speak very enthusiastically about activities as varied as trips overseas, winning national competitions in mathematics, participating in orienteering competitions and designing children's clothes as part of their textile course.
- Arrangements for safeguarding fully meet requirements. Staff are very well trained and the school's excellent systems ensure that all are aware of, for example, child-protection and risk-assessment procedures.
- The local authority now provides appropriate light touch support for this good school. The school advisor has provided specific support for the induction of newly qualified teachers and brokered arrangements for senior staff to gain experience by providing support for other schools. The headteacher feels he has received good support in moving the school forward.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are extremely knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses. In common with other school leaders they are relentless in seeking improvement and tackling weaknesses. They have an excellent awareness of how well the school is performing, how good teaching is and how the performance of staff is managed. Finances are very well managed and governors hold the school to account as to how extra funding such as the pupil premium is spent and what impact this is having.

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	112385
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	428911

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	1,180
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Wilkinson
Headteacher	Denis Fay
Date of previous school inspection	16 March 2011
Telephone number	01229 483900
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