

Netherhall School

Netherhall Road, Maryport, Cumbria, CA15 6NT

Inspection dates

10–11 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students have not made continuously good progress or attained good standards in English and mathematics GCSEs over time.
- Middle-ability students, those supported by pupil premium funding and some with special educational needs did not make good enough progress last year.
- Leaders have not yet secured consistently good teaching across the school. Teachers' marking, assessment and use of questioning are not always effective.
- In some lessons, students do not make the progress they should because teaching does not challenge them; activities are too easy and do not require concentration.
- Some of the changes that have been made to teaching and leadership are too recent to have improved students' achievement in examinations.
- Leaders and governors have not successfully improved all the areas identified at the last inspection, specifically those relating to students' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Students have good attitudes to learning. They are sociable and considerate in shared areas. Students say they feel safe and are cared for well.
- Teachers provide good guidance and support to help students develop constructive personal skills and good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- The sixth form is good. A range of courses and good teaching meet students' needs effectively so they achieve well.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's performance. There are thorough procedures to manage the performance of staff and check students' progress.
- There is good teamwork. All staff are driving through improvements. Teaching is improving and none is inadequate. Students are beginning to make better progress in lessons.
- Leaders have the capacity to secure further improvements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 part-lessons and sampled students' work in all year groups and subjects during visits to classrooms. They carried out a detailed scrutiny of Year 11 students' English and mathematics work.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and pastoral leaders. The lead inspector met with six governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body and with two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors met with groups of students and spoke to others in lessons and around the school.
- A range of documentation was examined, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, performance management and safeguarding procedures, attendance and behaviour records.
- Inspectors took account of 30 responses to Parent View, which is the Ofsted on-line questionnaire, and the school's most recent parent survey. They spoke to parents at their request. They took account of staff questionnaires returned from leaders, teaching and support 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

Jean Olsson-Law , Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Clive Hurren	Additional Inspector
Patrick Hargreaves	Additional Inspector
Peter Evea	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Netherhall is a smaller than average sized secondary school. It has a small sixth form.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium funding is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided to this school for students known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs and are supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The school uses the West Cumbria Achievement Zone for a small number of students who are provided with alternative off-site provision.
- The school is a strategic partner of the West Coast Teaching School Alliance and an alliance partner in the Western Lakes Teaching School Alliance. It also works with local consortia of secondary and primary schools.
- The school has gained a number of awards, including the Sports Partnership Mark, the Healthy School status and Careers, Advice and Guidance Award.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- There have been recent changes to the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 so that it is good or better in all subjects by:
 - using the effective practice in marking, questioning and use of assessment information to improve teaching in all lessons
 - making sure that in all lessons activities are challenging enough to extend students' knowledge, providing them with opportunities to develop their resilience and persevere with tasks.
- Increase students' rates of progress in English and mathematics, so that the progress of all groups is at least in line with national averages, by using the information from assessments to identify and address gaps in learning of students of all ability.
- Improve leadership at all levels, including governance by refining the evaluation of the impact of actions to improve the progress of different groups of students, including those receiving additional support and those with special educational needs.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Most students enter the school with attainment that is at or below the expected level in English and mathematics.
- Middle and low prior attaining students who left the school in 2013 did not make enough progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. Consequently, the proportion achieving five GCSEs at grade C and above including English and mathematics declined and was well below average. Higher ability students made expected progress.
- Many of the students who did not achieve a grade C in English or mathematics were eligible for support through pupil premium funding, including those known to be eligible for free school meals. On average, they were around one grade behind others in the school and attained below similar students nationally in these subjects. The lower than expected achievement was in part due to high absence amongst this group of students, but was also due to gaps in literacy skills and slow progress lower down the school.
- Leaders are successfully taking action to promote equality of opportunity for all students and ensure students currently in school make better progress. Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding is being used to provide additional, personalised support for eligible students from the earliest stages. A focus on promoting literacy skills is helping to raise achievement in a number of subjects and additional support for English and mathematics is helping students who have fallen behind in these subjects.
- Students' work and progress data show that students in Year 11 are beginning to make more rapid progress and achieve higher grades in English and mathematics. This is because assessment and marking are being used more effectively to make sure students know how to improve their work. The school does not enter students early for GCSE so all complete the full two year course.
- Students make good progress from their starting points in subjects other than English and mathematics, including in the wide range of work-related qualifications the school offers. Students' overall achievement including equivalent qualifications is well above average. Students who are eligible for pupil premium funding also make good progress and achieve well in these subjects.
- Students with disabilities and those with special educational needs make similar progress to the rest of the students in school. They do well in work-related subjects and make good gains in their personal development, but they do not make good enough progress in English and mathematics.
- A few students attend alternative provision at the West Cumbria Achievement Zone. Leaders monitor their attendance and the quality of provision carefully to make sure they achieve as well as they can.
- Virtually all students leave the school with five or more qualifications and move on to further education, training or employment. Around a third go into the school's sixth form where they make good progress, in both academic and vocational subjects. The vast majority of students went on to higher education or employment from the sixth form last year.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There has been too much variability in teaching over time, resulting in slower progress for students higher up the main school. This is partly due to difficulties recruiting teachers, but also because there has not been enough focus on improving teaching in the past.
- There has been a concerted effort to improve teaching in the last year. There is now good teaching in most lessons and some that is outstanding. However, teaching is not yet consistently good over time. There is variability both within and between subjects. Teachers do not always build on students' prior learning as well as they could from lesson to lesson.

- Teaching is most effective where teachers assess students learning thoroughly. Teachers use the information to plan lessons that address gaps in students' learning and provide interesting tasks that require perseverance. They teach subject-specific skills expertly and explain new knowledge clearly. Skilful questioning is used to probe and deepen students' understanding.
- Students are sometimes given tasks that are dull or too easy to capture their interest. Such tasks do not demand much concentration and do not take students' learning forward quickly enough. Sometimes, teachers miss opportunities to consolidate or extend learning because the questions they ask are too closed or too basic.
- Students receiving additional support for special educational needs or because they are eligible for support with additional funding receive some effective guidance in individual tutoring sessions. This is helping them to make more rapid progress in English and mathematics. However, the pace of learning is too slow in some group sessions; students being supported with basic skills, for example, were easily able to complete the task.
- An effective approach to marking and feedback has been established, giving students a good understanding of how to improve their work. Where marking is most effective, as seen in some English, mathematics, history and religious studies books, comments provide students with information that extends their knowledge and understanding. Marking is less effective when it just points out what students have done wrong or corrects errors in spelling.
- Literacy skills are constantly reinforced across all subjects and this supports students to develop their reading and writing in range of meaningful contexts.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good and meets students' needs well. Teachers have good subject and examination knowledge. They assess students' progress regularly and give detailed individual feedback so students know how to improve their work. For example, in a religious education A level group, students completed high quality essays which demonstrated their in-depth understanding of religious language and its use by philosophers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Good relationships between staff and students promote a calm and friendly atmosphere. Students are friendly, polite and considerate towards each other. They feel and are safe in school. Staff and parents who returned questionnaires are extremely positive about behaviour and feel students are safe and well looked after.
- Students have a balanced view and comprehensive understanding of different types of bullying, including the harmful effects of derogatory language, cyber-bullying and prejudicial attitudes based on sexuality, race or culture. The vast majority of students and parents feel bullying is rare and dealt with quickly and fairly if it does occur.
- Students have good attitudes to learning and the vast majority behave well in lessons. Where teaching provides good levels of challenge, students take responsibility for their learning and persevere with their work. Students of all abilities remain engaged in learning because they are able to choose relevant courses appropriate to their ability and interests.
- Students say learning is very occasionally disrupted by a small minority of students, although no poor behaviour was seen during the inspection. Students feel these incidents are reducing because lessons are more interesting and the rewards and sanctions for behaviour are clear and consistently applied.
- Students' personal skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are developed well in all subjects and assemblies. Students develop healthy attitudes to relationships and respect differences.
- Students with emotional, social or behavioural difficulties are supported extremely well. Good personal development and effective support through nurture groups helps them to manage their own behaviour. Learning mentors provide good support.
- Fixed-term exclusion increased in 2012 while leaders were implementing the new behaviour policy but reduced significantly in 2013 as the policy began to take effect. The proportion of permanent exclusions is similar to those nationally and reducing.

- Attendance is improving for all student groups and is average overall. Leaders go to great lengths to encourage good attendance by establishing good relations with families through learning mentors.
- Sixth form students are very good role models. They take responsibility around the school and play an important part in supporting GCSE and younger students to develop their skills. They develop good work-based and study skills. The vast majority go on to university or appropriate work placements.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses and there is a thorough, well organised action plan to bring about improvement. There is a determined drive for improvement from all staff and governors.
- Procedures to manage the performance of staff are rigorous, setting clear targets for students' progress, teaching and additional responsibilities. There are appropriate links to teacher standards and salary progression.
- Middle leaders say they feel 'galvanised' by the new senior leadership team. There is a consistent approach to departmental improvement planning. Where improvement planning is most effective, it is based on a thorough analysis of students' performance in assessments and examinations. This is helping to hone teaching to meet students' learning needs precisely, but the impact is not yet seen in all subjects.
- Leadership and management are not yet good because leaders have not secured sufficient improvement in teaching and achievement, particularly in English and mathematics. Many developments are too recent to show sustained improvement in these aspects of the school's performance.
- Leaders at all levels have not fully evaluated the impact of various initiatives on the achievement of key groups, for example those eligible for pupil premium and some with special educational needs.
- Students say they benefit from a wide choice of subjects. Leaders effectively review the subjects on offer each year and amend Key Stage 4 to best meet the needs and aspirations of students. The recent review of the Key Stage 4 curriculum appropriately puts more emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills and the important GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics.
- There are good arrangements with primary schools to support students' transfer into Year 7. Teachers are gaining more insight into the primary curriculum during shared teaching at primary schools. The summer school was beneficial for a number of students, especially those eligible for pupil premium funding.
- Leaders and governors ensure that good relationships are fostered, discrimination is tackled and all pupils have equal opportunities to learn and make good progress. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are given good pastoral care in school and through a range of partnerships with external agencies.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the on-line parent view survey feel their child is happy, safe and makes good progress. They are extremely positive about the leadership and management of the school.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Students' achievement is closely monitored and support is put in place for any who are not on track. Students receive very good information, advice and guidance about their next steps and good help in applying to university. Effective partnerships with local employers enable students to benefit from relevant work experience.
- Teachers and leaders have benefited from professional development from the local authority and through school to school support. Training and coaching are planned carefully to support improvement plans and individual needs.
- The local authority provides good support and challenge. School leaders, governors and local authority officers work together effectively through the school specific monitoring group (SSMG). They carry out regular in-depth checks on students' achievement and review progress with

improvement plans. Local authority advisers have provided helpful advice to support the school in improving the teaching of literacy skills. They have supported the school in making links with other schools to share best practice. Governors have also benefitted from a range of training, including some specifically tailored for the school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is well organised with a good range of expertise. Governors understand the key strengths and priorities for improvement, set a clear vision and have high aspirations for all students.
- Governors carry out a range of monitoring activities and ask searching questions of leaders, so they are well informed about the main issues. However, they have not yet been able to carry out a detailed analysis of the most recent school data and have an overly positive view of the achievement of students supported by pupil premium. They have a detailed plan outlining how additional funding, including the pupil premium, will be spent and its intended impact on raising students' achievement for this year.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet all requirements.

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	112382
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	428839

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
Number of pupils on the school roll	617
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Little
Headteacher	Jonathan Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	12 September 2012
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