

West Lancashire Community High School

School Lane, Chapel House, Skelmersdale, Lancashire, WN8 8EH

Inspection dates 18–19 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The new headteacher and her senior team have swiftly set out a clear vision for the school. As a result, there is high staff morale and good capacity for the school to improve further.
- Pupils behave well in and out of lessons. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions so that they keep safe and to support their peers if they need help. Teachers and teaching assistants contribute extremely well to ensure pupils' strong social, moral, cultural and spiritual development.
- Pupils engage enthusiastically in lessons, including those eligible for support through the pupil premium. The great majority make good or outstanding progress in their reading, writing and mathematics.
- The sixth form is good and is a strength of the school. Students have many opportunities to develop socially both within school and in the local community. The vast majority move successfully on to further education or work-based placements having gained a range of external accreditations.
- Senior staff regularly monitor the school's work, especially teaching, learning and behaviour and safety. Governors are informed about improvements and have contributed significantly to developments in the sixth form provision.
- Teachers work well together when they look at pupils' work each term and then agree about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers' day-to-day marking and feedback to pupils are not as consistent as they should be. Some staff do not always follow the school's agreed policy.
- The communication systems in school do not always lead to clear information sharing or decision making between staff.
- Not all governors are fully clear yet about the achievements and progress of pupils with complex needs.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 16 full or part lessons taught by 10 teachers, one of whom was a supervised trainee teacher. The headteacher and deputy headteacher joined inspectors in observing three of these lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the senior leadership team, three governors and the local authority representative.
- Inspectors met separately with two groups of pupils and listened to readers in the library.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in and around the school building, including in lessons, on the corridors, outside breaks and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at the school's documentation, including its improvement plan, self-review document, information about pupils' achievements and progress, safeguarding and behaviour policies and governors' meetings and minutes.
- An inspector met with three parents and considered a written note from one other parent. Inspectors were unable to take account of the views of the nine parents who used Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) because there were too few responses.
- Inspectors received 27 returns from the staff questionnaire about the school.

Inspection team

John Ashley Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Halford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides education for 93 pupils aged between 11 and 19 years who have a wide range of complex disabilities or special educational needs. The number on roll in the sixth form is 25. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The range of special educational needs includes those with autistic spectrum disorders, moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and some with additional sensory impairments or health and medical needs.
- All school staff are trained in meeting the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. The school has three classes for these pupils.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported through the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The headteacher is recently appointed (September 2014). The previous headteacher was a local leader of education (LLE).
- Older students have the opportunity to attend courses based at West Lancashire College.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning further by ensuring:
 - all teachers consistently follow the school's policy when checking pupils' work
 - all teachers make regular reference to pupils' current levels of learning in lessons and their agreed targets when providing comments and feedback.
- Improve the school's communication systems further so that:
 - all staff are fully clear about each other's roles and responsibilities
 - all staff are fully informed about or partake in the planning of school improvement activities
 - all staff are fully informed or partake in the evaluation of school improvement activities.
- Update governors' knowledge and understanding of the progress and achievement of pupils with complex learning needs so that governors:
 - are able to have a greater insight into teaching and learning in lessons
 - are able to further challenge the headteacher and staff about the work of the school.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has quickly established an optimistic feel within the school which has created high staff morale and a clear vision for the future. She is keen to include staff views and opinions as part of the process of identifying what the school does well and what needs to be done to make further improvements. Senior leaders and governors recognise that further work is required to ensure that systems of communication are such that everybody is informed about the work of the school and the progress that is being made.
- The school's systems for checking on pupils' abilities in English and mathematics are well established and indicate that the majority of all pupils make good or better progress, including those pupils who benefit from pupil premium funding or Year 7 top-up funding. Middle leaders also ensure that they meet termly to look carefully at pupils' work so that they can agree their levels of ability and then set targets for them to reach over the next term. The consistent use by all staff of the school's good marking and feedback policy is not yet in place to add weight to these strong systems.
- Senior staff conduct regular lesson observations with teacher colleagues and provide feedback that is seen as supportive and helpful. Performance management policies and procedures are in place and monitored by the governing body, especially when there might be any concerns about the quality of teaching in regard to movement up the pay-scale. The local authority representative has assisted in joint lesson observations with the headteacher. He has provided strong support for the school, especially during the transition period of the new headteacher settling into post. He agrees that teaching has continued to improve since the last inspection and that it is mostly good or better.
- Middle leaders have worked well together with subject leaders to produce a revised curriculum policy in line with new national requirements. This information has been shared with parents so that they can work in partnership with teachers to develop pupils' independent skills for life in modern Britain. It is clear that the school promotes equality of opportunity well as lessons are planned based upon the needs and ability levels of different pupils. There is a wide range of activities that capture pupils' attention; for example, when they are able to practise and play adapted musical instruments or partake in motivational after-school activities such as cooking or art clubs.
- Students are well prepared for the next steps after school because staff in partnership with the Young People Services ensure that they experience college and work placements before going on to destinations in further education or the workplace.
- Partnerships with parents are very positive because they are able to keep in touch through home-school books, newsletters, the website and open evenings. Other agencies, especially the occupational therapist, school nurse and speech and language therapist provide strong support for the school's work in meeting the social, emotional, communication and physical needs of complex pupils.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements are strong and leaders work extremely well to promote good attendance and behaviour both in school and when students attend college or work placements. As a result, pupils feel safe and are able to engage enthusiastically in their lessons and other activities provided by the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good because staff provide many opportunities for them to take responsibility for themselves and for each other.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have established committees that meet regularly about specific aspects of the school's work so that they are knowledgeable and well informed, particularly with regard to finances, staffing matters and the sixth form accommodation. They ask challenging questions and some governors arrange to visit and sit in lessons alongside senior staff. They oversee decision making about staff performance and agree whether or not teachers advance through to the next salary level based upon their applications. Governors would benefit from learning more about how staff assess the needs of pupils with complex needs, set targets and check on progress. This would enable them to develop a deeper understanding about work in the classroom.
 - The previous headteacher and the new headteacher have provided comprehensive reports to governors so that they are kept abreast of such matters as staff training, school improvement progress and the pupil premium or Year 7 top-up funding. Governors know that certain groups of pupils have benefited from funding and additional resources that have led to measured progress in attendance, emotional well-being and learning for these groups, and who have exceeded the progress made by their peers.
 - Governors have received a range of training, including in safeguarding and the new inspection framework.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In all contexts, pupils conduct themselves with great responsibility in and around school. They respond very well to the calm, experienced staff, especially when given clear instructions or guidance. Even the most challenging pupils react quickly to staff so that they can then focus more upon their learning rather than distracting behaviour.
- The school is clean and well maintained. There is no evidence at all of graffiti or litter. Pupils take a pride in their work and how they conduct themselves. It was very evident how older or more able pupils would willingly assist their peers, for example in their reading, or share roles and responsibilities when cooking a meal together. These were good examples of the school's work in promoting good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Attendance is good for most pupils, but a small group have medical or health needs which adversely affect the overall figure. The school works very well with families and relevant services to promote good attendance in support of pupils' families.
- Behaviour in lessons is nearly always good and sometimes outstanding, especially when the activity is exciting or stimulating; for example, in a music lesson where pupils were working closely together or helping each other to play 'Jingle Bells' using colour-coded chimes.
- There have been no fixed-term exclusions this academic year and the school has benefited from the role played by the lead teacher on behaviour in providing strong support for vulnerable pupils and running training with staff. She has also overseen the consistent use of an effective rewards system for attendance and behaviour which motivates pupils as they can 'cash in' earned merits for trips out or other activities.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Parents spoken to say that, 'The pupils are like a family – they protect each other.' They say that bullying is not an issue and that, if there has been an incident in school, it is more likely to relate to the special needs of the pupil than being a deliberate act.
- Behaviour incidents and accidents are well recorded and followed up, for example by informing parents.
- Pupils themselves say they feel safe and cared for by staff and that they know and understand about e-safety. They say they feel very well supported by the nurture class.
- There is an Education Visits Coordinator who ensures that staff follow the correct procedures when organising off-site visits.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time since the last inspection report has been mostly good or better, indicating continued improvements.
- Teachers have worked well to discuss pupils' work each term to agree ability levels in reading, writing, mathematics, science and other subjects and then to set challenging targets. The information from these exercises has been used to plan lessons which also take account of pupils' special educational needs and whether or not they might also benefit from visual resources, close teaching support or advice from the occupational therapist.
- When pupils' individual education and behaviour plans are referred to closely, the most able and least able pupils tend to make good or better progress and are fully engaged in their learning; for example, in a reading for pleasure lesson where independent readers were able to develop higher order skills and the less able received close support in recognising letters and the sounds that they make. Staff's ongoing recording of pupils' reading provides information for staff and pupils to consider next time they read. A systematic approach to the teaching of letters and the sounds they make is helping pupils to make small steps of progress in their reading. This system has been funded from Year 7 top-up funding, used to help pupils catch up if they fall behind their peers in literacy.
- Pupils in the Key Stage 3 department are placed in ability groups for mathematics and English. They work well together and demonstrate an ability to hold numbers up to 10 in their heads and add one on, before recording their answers in their work books. The most able were given opportunities to extend this task to working with higher numbers and did so successfully. Some pupils were also able to talk about what they were learning with reference to their work books. These are neatly presented and regularly marked with a clear reference made to their current ability levels and what they are aiming to achieve over the term.
- In some classes, the whole-school marking and feedback policy is not consistently applied. As a result,

some pupils are unclear about what they have achieved or what their next steps are which affects their pace of progress.

- Teachers make good and imaginative use of visual resources and deploy skilled teaching support staff to provide sensitive support and guidance to particular pupils. For example, in an English lesson with older students on the autistic spectrum the teacher included an imaginative range of visual resources to reinforce a story about a 'bear hunt'. Pupils with complex social and communication needs were skilfully included in exploring the adventure of the main character when repeating phrases from the book or putting their hands in water, mud and ice! The teacher's explanations and references to the story were clear and helped pupils maintain their attention and enjoyment.
- Teachers and their teaching assistants work very effectively when planning practical subjects such as art, physical education (PE) and music. For example, colour-coded chimes were well used in a Key Stage 4 music lesson to include a wide range of abilities. The pairing of less able pupils with the most able ensured that there was a high level of challenge when learning to play a Christmas carol where the pupils had to read the musical notation which matched the colour of the chimes.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The achievement of pupils is good; many make good or better progress from very low starting points. Because of regular and systematic checking of pupils' ability levels and the setting of challenging and realistic targets in their work, school leaders are able to demonstrate clear patterns of achievement and progress of different groups of pupils. This shared information has led to good planning, further enhanced by the assessments and guidance of other agencies involved in the school.
- By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils achieve well in regard to their academic targets and also achieve recorded outcomes in the national standard assessment tests in English, mathematics and science although these were below national averages.
- Disadvantaged pupils who are supported through the pupil premium, including those looked after by the local authority, have made greater progress, using the school's progress measures, than their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. The great majority of all pupils have made good or better progress in these subjects.
- A number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders respond particularly well when staff provide visual or physical prompts to aid their learning or to re-engage in a lesson, for example when taking part in a shared story with the rest of the class.
- Pupils demonstrate a genuine love of reading, particularly when they partake in reading for pleasure lessons. The most able pupils rise to the challenge of selecting books of interest and then being asked to talk about the content to their peers or to an adult. They develop a greater understanding of number operations and how they can be used to solve problems; for example when measuring out quantities in food technology lessons. They use computer programmes to practise and improve their skills in following instructions using their knowledge of number.
- Pupils respond enthusiastically in practical lessons such as music and PE. They learn to speak and listen in different contexts and are able to perform or act out their ideas, for example when performing two-footed jumps in a gymnastics lesson or when designing Aboriginal art pictures together (a good example of how the school promotes good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development).
- By the end of Key Stage 4, the majority of students achieve up to seven Entry Level qualifications including English, mathematics and science. In previous years, one or two students gained low grade qualifications in GCSE English, mathematics and art and design, demonstrating how well the school promotes equality of opportunity.
- On occasion, because marking and feedback has not been fully referred to in planning lessons, one or two pupils find it difficult to understand what is required of them, especially when there is a wide range of ability within a given group.

The sixth form is good

- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good and have improved since the last inspection report so that some aspects are particularly strong.
- Staff provide a wide range of opportunities to sixth form students to enable them to develop their independence and confidence both within the school and into their local communities. Such opportunities are in the form of external accreditation, college courses, work placements and close support from Young

People Services to identify next steps on leaving the school. As a result, there have been very few students over the past three years who have not moved on to further education or the world of work and then remained there.

- Students who have transferred into the sixth form have continued to attend and their attendance rates are good. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary, particularly their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Governors, with support from the local authority, have provided a new building for sixth form students. This has led to students feeling a greater sense of independence and privilege. They take their responsibilities seriously and demonstrate impressive social and communication skills; for example, in a lesson on 'communities' where they were able and willing to engage in a discussion about their experiences as members of a youth or sports club.
- There is a strong emphasis upon the further development, use and application of English, mathematics and computer skills so that students have opportunities to achieve a range of further accreditation, including in English and mathematics.
- One or two students benefit from attendance on courses at the local college. They are accompanied by staff so that behaviour, attendance and progress are carefully monitored.

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	131258
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	448018

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	90
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Price
Headteacher	Carole Austin
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2011
Telephone number	01695 721487
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	head@westlancs.lancs.sch.uk

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