

Appleby Grammar School

Battlebarrow, Appleby-in-Westmorland, Cumbria CA16 6XU

Inspection dates

10–11 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress across the school, particularly at key stage 3. The least able do not achieve as well as the most able and there are wide gaps between the achievement of boys and girls, particularly in English.
- Teaching is not consistently good across the school. Not all teachers follow the school's marking policy, so feedback does not always enable pupils to make good progress with their work.
- Teachers do not all have high enough expectations of pupils' presentation or promote their literacy skills well enough. Basic spelling, grammar and punctuation skills are not consistently checked. The literacy skills of boys, in particular, are weak and limit their progress in subjects which require a lot of writing.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' work are often too generous. The work in pupils' books does not always match the grades awarded. Leaders are therefore unable to rely on the information which is entered into the school's pupil tracking system.
- Attendance is low for the small number of disadvantaged pupils.
- Processes for checking how well the school is doing are not followed rigorously enough. Leaders, including governors, have an over-optimistic view of the school's strengths. As a result, they have not brought about rapid enough improvements in teaching and achievement since the previous inspection.

The school has the following strengths

- The most able pupils in the school make good progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is good, both in lessons and at breaks and lunchtimes. They are happy, confident and feel safe in school.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes are good and enable students in the sixth form to achieve well.
- Achievement in science is consistently good, and progress in some other subjects, such as mathematics, is improving.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that achievement accelerates for all groups of pupils, particularly boys and the least able, by:
 - expecting high standards of presentation of work from all pupils
 - ensuring that all teachers have the skills to assess pupils' work accurately so that they can identify and support those who are underachieving.
- Analyse patterns in attendance information to increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the impact of senior and middle leaders in driving school improvement by:
 - ensuring that monitoring activities are very rigorous in checking for the impact of the school's work
 - ensuring that the processes for assessing pupils' progress are very robust and that the assessment data being entered into the school tracking system is accurate
 - making sure that judgements about the quality of teaching focus on the achievement of groups as well as all pupils generally
 - ensuring that all teachers follow the school's marking policy consistently, so that pupils have clear guidance about what to do to improve their work and are given time to improve it
 - making sure that all teachers check the quality of pupils' writing very closely and that the approach to correcting basic spelling, grammar and punctuation is consistent across subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher and senior leaders of the school do not have a sufficiently accurate view of how the school is performing. They have high aspirations for what pupils can achieve, and staff report that expectations of their roles have been significantly increased since the previous inspection. They say that they are now held to account much more strongly for the progress of pupils in their classes or areas of responsibility. However, this is not yet having rapid enough impact on all areas of the school's work.
- Assessment is overgenerous. Assessments are not always accurate, and staff have an overoptimistic view of how well pupils are achieving. In too many cases, the quality of work found in the pupils' books does not match the judgements that teachers are making. Consequently, judgements about the impact that teaching is having on pupils' learning are not always correct.
- Subject leaders collect regular information about how well pupils are progressing, and have regular one-to-one meetings with all teachers in their subject areas to hold them to account for progress in their classes. However, because assessment data is not always accurate, these meetings are not fully effective in identifying and providing support for all pupils who are underachieving.
- The success criteria against which senior and middle leaders measure impact are not always challenging enough. Monitoring processes are not consistently rigorous enough to ensure that leaders have an accurate and realistic view of the progress that pupils are making. For example, a number of strategies are in place to promote pupils' literacy skills, particularly for those pupils in Year 7 who are eligible for catch-up funding (additional money provided by the government to support pupils who start school with attainment below level 4 in English or mathematics). However, although data is collected about the literacy skills of those pupils, it is not evaluated thoroughly enough to check whether the additional support is making a difference to their literacy or not.
- There is a clear marking policy in place in the school which states that teachers should identify areas for improvement in pupils' work and that pupils should have time to address them. Teachers are not consistently following this marking policy.
- Leaders have increased the frequency with which pupils' work is assessed, and the outcomes are recorded onto a central whole-school progress tracking system. They have also done work with other schools in the South Lakes Federation (SLF) to ensure that the assessment of work is more accurate.
- Leaders now take into account a much broader range of evidence when judging the quality of teaching than they did previously. Leaders not only observe lessons but also consider the quality of pupils' work in their books and the information from assessments about how well pupils are doing.
- There are clear systems in place for middle leaders to check on the work in their subjects or areas of responsibility. For example, they regularly drop into lessons to observe teaching, scrutinise pupils' work and talk to them about their learning. Action plans set priorities which should enable the school to move forward.
- The curriculum is well designed to meet the needs of all pupils and to promote equal opportunities. The most able, for example, are offered a range of challenging academic subjects at GCSE which enable them to access university education in the future. The least able are provided with additional support for English and mathematics and with vocational qualifications such as the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) certificate of personal effectiveness. The curriculum is underpinned by a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, such as trips to Paris, Iceland and South Africa, as well as theatre visits and sporting opportunities. These opportunities make highly effective contributions to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, and to their understanding of life in modern Britain.
- The majority of parents who responded to questionnaires said they are very happy with the support that the school gives their child, and that they receive useful information about how well their child is progressing. However, a minority of parents expressed concerns about pupils' progress, particularly for the least able, and these views coincided with inspectors' findings.

■ The governance of the school

- Since the previous inspection, governors have taken a range of steps to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to support and challenge school leaders. They have undertaken an audit of the skills and experience of all governors to check that the governing body as a whole is able to conduct its work in a businesslike way. All governors have a link to a middle or senior leader with whom they meet regularly to discuss progress within the leader's area of responsibility. They have also commissioned support from the SLF to ensure that there are external checks on how well the school is doing.
- Governors have an overview of teachers' performance management targets and check that staff are receiving training to help them meet their targets and develop their teaching skills. They are supportive of teachers' links with colleagues in other SLF schools which enables them to share good practice. They also check that pay progression is closely linked to teachers' performance. However, although governors have an overview of the school's headline outcomes, they do not always look closely enough at the achievement of different groups, particularly the boys and the least able.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All necessary checks take place when staff are recruited. Teachers and governors all receive regular safeguarding training, including on protecting pupils from the risk of radicalisation. Leaders and governors ensure that pupils are taught to keep themselves safe through the life skills curriculum and through assemblies. The school works well with outside agencies and with parents when appropriate to ensure pupils' safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **requires improvement**

- Teaching over time is not yet consistently good enough to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress from their starting points. Although there are strengths in teaching, these are not embedded across the school.
- Teachers' assessment practice is not always accurate. Teachers tend to be overgenerous in their view of how well pupils are progressing and the quality of their work.
- It is evident from pupils' books that too many teachers do not have high enough expectations of how pupils should present their work. Handwriting, particularly for boys, is very untidy and much of the work is incomplete. Literacy errors and basic spelling, grammar and punctuation errors go uncorrected in a lot of subjects, and pupils continue to repeat very basic mistakes. In some cases, as a result, literacy becomes a barrier to pupils' progress because they cannot express their views well enough in writing.
- Where teaching promotes good pupil progress, it is clear that teachers know pupils well and have a good understanding of their social, emotional and learning needs. They make good use of this knowledge to set work which matches these needs. In such cases, teachers' monitoring of pupils' learning in lessons is rigorous and they are quick to spot where pupils are getting stuck and help them. Expectations of behaviour are clear and routines are well established.
- Some teachers provide interesting activities which engage pupils and hook them into their learning. In art, for example, teachers are aware that boys in particular are interested in animals. This is a strong focus of work set in key stage 3. Teaching in art also takes opportunities to promote cross-curricular links, for example with mathematics. Pupils are confident in drawing and painting to different scales.
- There is evidence of probing questioning which challenges pupils and makes them think. Some teachers also provide pupils with clear examples of what success looks like and how they can improve their work. This was particularly evident where Year 11 pupils were revising for exams and there was clear emphasis on exam-marking criteria.
- Some teaching assistants are very effective in supporting the pupils with whom they are working. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils with special educational needs or disability were supported by a teaching assistant who had good subject knowledge. She was able to make the curriculum accessible to them through a good range of interesting and practical resources. In other cases though, teaching support staff were less effective. Sometimes they are too positive in their praise for pupils rather than helping them to improve, or in some cases they do the work for them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are very confident in talking to visitors and are open and articulate in expressing their views. They are extremely welcoming, very polite and have exceptionally good manners. All pupils greet adults and visitors in the corridors, hold doors open for both adults and their peers, smile and are very positive. They have good relationships with all adults on site and treat them all with equal respect. Lunchtime supervisors and canteen staff report that behaviour is good and pupils are always pleasant.
- Pupils say that they enjoy school and that staff are supportive, caring and look after them well. As a result, they feel very safe on site. Bullying is said to be extremely rare. All pupils are confident that if it happens they will know what to do to get help and that staff will stop it very quickly.
- Pupils value diversity. They have a respect for other cultures, and school staff work hard to ensure that they have access to different cultures through visits abroad. They say that prejudice is very rare, that homophobia in particular is unacceptable, and that any homophobic language, although rare, will be dealt with immediately.
- Pupils take pride in their appearance and their school. They show respect for the school site and there is very little evidence of litter, for example in the canteen after break time, because the vast majority of pupils are quick to clear up after themselves.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of what is expected of them and how they should behave. Behaviour is therefore good most of the time both in lessons and in unsupervised time. Pupils move round the corridors purposefully, and behaviour at break times is calm because pupils use the time well to socialise and catch up with their friends.
- Pupils say that behaviour is typically good but that a few lessons are disrupted by silly behaviour. Any such incidents which arise are dealt with quickly.
- Staff confirm that pupils' behaviour is good and, as a result, although a clear behaviour management system is in place, there is little need to use it. Exclusion rates are low.
- The majority of pupils attend school regularly and attendance overall is average. However, absence rates are high for the very small minority of disadvantaged pupils, so that approximately half of them are persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- There are variations in the achievement of particular groups of pupils. In 2015, there was a very wide gap between the achievement of boys and girls. Although the school's data systems say that this is improving, the work in pupils' books does not support this. Work in boys' books, particularly for middle- and lower-ability pupils, is typically more untidy, less detailed and less accurate than girls'. Teachers are aware that this is an issue, but strategies to address it are not having rapid enough impact.
- Lower-ability pupils who are not on the special educational needs or disability register do not make the progress of which they are capable. This is because teachers do not provide them with clear enough structure and guidance for how to tackle their work, and therefore they are often unable to confidently start their work. Expectations for what they can achieve are not high enough, and feedback on their work is not precise enough.
- In most subjects, pupils are given plenty of opportunities to read. They say that they enjoy reading. The school has bought a reading programme for pupils in key stage 3 which has contributed well to their enjoyment. However, leaders do not have a clear view about whether it is actually improving the quality of pupils' reading. Pupils' writing skills, even in English lessons, are not as strong as their reading skills. Where pupils are below age-related expectations in writing, they are given extra literacy lessons, but there is insufficient focus on securing accuracy in basic writing skills. Other subjects across the curriculum do not have clear expectations about, for example, writing in full sentences. Spelling of subject-specific vocabulary, such as technical and scientific words, is frequently inaccurate.

- Achievement has improved in mathematics since the previous inspection. There is considerable emphasis in the curriculum on the teaching of number, but fewer opportunities for problem solving and mathematical reasoning. Although progress accelerates in mathematics at key stage 4, progress at key stage 3 is slower, especially for pupils who are taught by non-specialist teachers. In these cases, pupils' conceptual understanding of key mathematical points is not always secure.
- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of pupils who leave the school with five good GCSEs has risen and is now average. In 2015, the proportion of pupils who made and exceeded expected progress in English was average and in mathematics was above. For a number of years, pupils have consistently achieved well in science.
- Leaders have focused on the progress of the most able pupils and they now achieve well. In mathematics, for example, they are able to tackle some challenging work with confidence and enjoyment.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved the highest grades at GCSE increased in 2015 in a number of subjects, including art and design, geography, French, information technology and science. This is because expectations of what they can achieve are high. They receive challenging work, are expected to write in detail and their work is carefully corrected. By the end of Year 11, pupils can write fluently and communicate well.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is beginning to accelerate. This is because leaders have done work to ensure that provision for these pupils, particularly at key stage 3, is well structured, and this is improving progress as pupils move through the school.
- Progress for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3 is also beginning to accelerate. Gaps are closing with others because leaders are targeting the pupil premium funding lower down the school to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have the opportunity to secure basic skills early. Pupils taking an engineering qualification at the Appleby Heritage Centre achieve well.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The sixth-form provision within the school is very small, but vibrant. It reflects leaders' determination and commitment to providing quality provision within the local community so that students do not have to travel long distances. Curriculum provision ensures that a wide range of subjects are on offer, some with very low numbers of students, but work with partners has ensured that this is viable. Some courses are therefore taught at Kirkby Stephen Grammar School. In other cases, leaders make creative links with other establishments, such as Lancaster University, which supports the delivery of further mathematics. This ensures that courses meet students' needs and that a high proportion of students stay on to complete their study programmes. Leadership is good and has secured improvements in teaching and achievement.
- The school's current tracking data, as well as data from last year's A- and AS-level results, indicates that students make good progress in the majority of subjects from their starting points. Assessment information is collected four times a year and shows that progress accelerates as students move through their courses. Assessments of how well students are learning have been much more accurate post-16 than they have been in the main school, and show that students are currently on track to achieve well.
- Students who start the sixth form without a GCSE grade C in English or mathematics are all placed on a study programme which is appropriate in moving them towards a GCSE qualification. This has been successful in securing positive outcomes. In 2015 for example, all pupils who joined with a grade D in mathematics achieved a grade C, with the majority of similar students in English also achieving a grade C.
- Teaching on post-16 study programmes is good. The small sixth form ensures that teachers have good knowledge of the students and are able to establish very positive relationships which enable them to develop confidence and to flourish. Students are encouraged to work collaboratively and to share and develop their ideas with others. Teachers model good practice and make it clear to students what they need to do to succeed. By the end of Year 13 therefore, the majority of students are able to communicate very articulately, and in literacy-based subjects can write using a range of sophisticated language.
- Students have an extremely positive view of their post-16 experience. They feel that there are ample enrichment opportunities and that these are closely linked to their study programmes, such as working with primary schools, becoming sports coaches and taking part in Young Enterprise. They say that careers advice and guidance are strong, and that they are all guided to pursue further education or work based on their skills and interests. There is a range of links with, and visits to, universities to promote aspiration. A development programme has been devised with Durham University to support progression.

The school equips students to attend Russell group universities, including Cambridge.

School details

Unique reference number	137251
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10002267

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	516
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Stephenson
Headteacher	Andrew Lund
Telephone number	01768 351580
Website	www.appleby.cumbria.sch.uk
Email address	admin@appleby.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 November 2013

Information about this school

- Appleby Grammar School is a smaller than -average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is well below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after.
- The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- The school makes use of alternative provision for a small number of pupils taking engineering courses in key stage 4 at the Appleby Heritage Centre. Some post-16 courses are delivered in conjunction with Kirkby Stephen Grammar School.
- The school receives external support from its membership of the SLF, including support from a national leader in education.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum national expectations for attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 28 lessons. Some of these sessions were observed jointly with a member of the leadership team.
- Samples of pupils' work in books were scrutinised during lessons. In addition, jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, inspectors reviewed work in science, humanities, mathematics, English and modern foreign languages books from both key stages.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including minutes of meetings, information provided to governors, action plans, examples of anonymised performance management targets and records of leaders' monitoring activities.
- Inspectors spoke formally with senior and middle leaders, as well as with the six members of the governing body and an improvement partner from the SLF. They also held formal meetings with groups of pupils from all key stages as well as talking to them informally at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors took into account 35 responses to a staff survey, 71 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 67 text responses from parents.

Inspection team

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Lisa Crausby	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Wood	Ofsted Inspector

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