

Marsden Heights Community College

Edge End Lane, Nelson, Lancashire BB9 0PR

Inspection dates

30–31 January and 21 March 2019

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Inadequate |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Progress since the previous inspection has been uneven. The marked improvements in some areas of the school are not reflected elsewhere. The delay in Marsden Heights moving to academy status has not served the school well.
- Governors have not made a sufficiently strong contribution to the school's improvement journey.
- The quality of middle leadership is mixed. This has led to variability in the quality of teaching and accounts for the inconsistent progress that current pupils make across different subjects.
- Weaknesses in the curriculum have prevented some pupils, especially the most able, from studying a broad suite of academic subjects.
- Some teachers have low expectations of what pupils can and should achieve.
- Some boys do not do as well as they could because teachers do not routinely plan activities that interest or inspire them.
- At times, some teachers do not use questions effectively to check on pupils' learning.
- Pupils' absence rates remain stubbornly above the national average. This is especially true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders' oversight of pupils' attendance and behaviour has not been strong enough.
- More pupils are permanently excluded at Marsden Heights than in other schools nationally.
- The presentation of work in pupils' books is patchy. Some pupils do not take pride in their work.
- Although pupils' progress is improving, their attainment in a range of subjects at the end of key stage 4 falls short when compared to national averages.
- Over time, disadvantaged pupils have not made the progress that they should. In the past, pupil premium funding has not been used well enough to support these pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has placed pupils' achievement and well-being firmly back at the heart of the school's work.
- School leaders have brought about positive change. Their work has ensured that pupils are no longer subject to poor-quality teaching.
- Pupils' progress has improved considerably. They make the same progress as other pupils nationally in English, mathematics and science.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed well.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the effective work of middle leaders in some subject areas is reflected across other departments
 - recent changes to the leadership of attendance and behaviour are embedded so that pupils' absence and permanent exclusions reduce
 - pupils have greater opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge in the humanities in key stage 3
 - the planned changes to the curriculum are implemented fully so that more pupils in key stage 4, especially the most able, have access to the full suite of academic qualifications
 - the governing body has the necessary skills and knowledge to make a stronger contribution to school improvement
 - the pupil premium funding is used more effectively to overcome remaining weaknesses in disadvantaged pupils' achievement and attendance.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so that pupils make good progress across a range of subjects and their attainment at the end of Year 11 matches that of other schools nationally, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have high expectations of what their pupils, especially boys and the most able, can and should achieve
 - use questioning effectively to check on pupils' learning and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - plan learning activities and resources that interest boys and inspire them to learn.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - reducing the proportion of pupils, especially boys, who do not engage well enough with their learning
 - insisting that pupils present their work clearly and neatly
 - improving pupils' attendance, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
 - reducing the high proportion of pupils who are permanently excluded from school.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to see how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school's journey out of special measures has been fraught with numerous challenges and uncertainty. In April 2017, Marsden Heights was directed, by the Department for Education, to become an academy, and a proposed sponsor was secured. Since then, the date for the school to transfer to academy status has constantly been deferred. This has hindered the school's road to recovery and contributed to the uneven pace of progress since the previous inspection.
- Support from the local authority, and more latterly from the proposed sponsor, has been forthcoming since the previous inspection. While leaders typically value and appreciate this support, it has sometimes been disjointed and insufficiently focused on some of the school's major weaknesses. At times, leaders have been without the necessary support and challenge to ensure a relentless focus on the most pressing issues. As a result, some of the major shortcomings identified in the previous inspection report have not been tackled with sufficient rigour. This partly explains why pupils' absence rates remain above the national average and governance continues to lack strength.
- The headteacher has enabled leaders and staff to withstand the considerable challenges that the school's faltering approach towards academy status has presented. Under her careful management, few leaders, staff or governors chose to leave the school. Pupils and their parents and carers have remained loyal. Furthermore, against a backdrop of uncertainty, the headteacher and other leaders have brought about many positive changes. Poor teaching has been eradicated and pupils' progress has improved markedly. Consequently, pupils at Marsden Heights now receive an acceptable standard of education. Pupils have resumed their rightful place at the core of the school's work. This is a far cry from the quality of provision noted by inspectors in 2016. Although there is much still to be done to ensure that different groups of pupils benefit from consistently good and better teaching, leaders have demonstrated the capacity to secure further improvement.
- Leaders have strengthened the quality of teaching by ensuring that staff access appropriate training. The opportunity for staff to work with in-school 'professional partners' and to observe teaching in other subject departments has raised expectations and shared good practice. The 'Marsden Heights Way' strategy has secured a more cohesive approach to teaching and learning within and across departments. This work has raised the quality of teaching overall. Nonetheless, it has not gone far enough in reducing the variability in teaching that some pupils experience in some subjects.
- Senior leaders have taken effective action to shore up the effectiveness of middle leadership. The previous system for grouping different subjects under one leader has been dismantled. Leaders for each subject have been empowered to develop teaching and learning in their departments. Many have embraced this new way of working. Recently, some subject leaders have benefited from the networking opportunities and subject-specific advice provided by the proposed sponsor. However, this positive development is not reflected in all departments. Some middle leaders do not have the skills or expertise to lead their subjects well.

- The curriculum on offer is typically broad and meets the needs of most pupils. However, there are some notable weaknesses. Leaders' unsuccessful attempts to appoint geography specialists have led to some dilution of the humanities curriculum in key stage 3. This means that some younger pupils are not sufficiently well equipped to study geography and history for GCSE options.
- Until very recently, the option pathways in key stage 4 hindered some pupils, especially the most able, from studying the full suite of subjects that lead to success in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). Curriculum restrictions meant that some pupils were unable to study a modern foreign language. While leaders put in additional after-school provision to make up for this shortfall, it made too little difference. The proportion of pupils being entered for and achieving the EBacc by the end of Year 11 has declined over time. In 2018 it was very low. This will also be true for the current Year 11. A revised approach to the key stage 4 curriculum is now in place. This means that current Year 9 pupils, including those who wish to follow an academic pathway, are able to benefit from a full range of option choices.
- A wide range of experiences support pupils in developing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. This helps to prepare them for life in modern Britain. There is a well-planned approach that weaves together form-tutor activities and a personal development programme. Inspectors observed an inspiring assembly on 'forgiveness', linking the themes of taking responsibility, the Holocaust and caring for others.
- Over time, the pupil premium funding has not been used to best effect. As a result, it has had too little impact on the achievement or attendance of disadvantaged pupils. This group compares poorly with other pupils nationally. Following an external review of the pupil premium, leaders spent time detangling this funding from other aspects of the school's budget. This means that the funding is beginning to be targeted at eligible pupils. Improvements to disadvantaged pupils' achievement are evident in the school. These pupils do as well as their peers in school in almost every year group. However, this funding has had too little impact on the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is led well. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works closely with pupils and their parents to ensure that the support that they receive meets their needs. As a result, this group of pupils makes progress that is similar to, and sometimes better than, that of others in the school. However, the SENCo and her team do not work closely enough with heads of year to improve the attendance of these pupils.
- Leaders know their pupils well and understand the complexities of the school community. An ever-growing proportion of pupils enter Marsden Heights part-way through their school career. The population who attend the school has become increasingly diverse. New arrivals are welcomed and settle quickly into the vibrant environment. In particular, those pupils who arrive at school at the earliest stages of speaking English as an additional language are supported effectively and achieve well.
- Leaders are aware of some of the tensions that exist beyond the school gates and the impact that this can have on pupils' safety and well-being. They have taken steps in their revised behaviour policy to influence pupils' behaviour when they are outside of the school's care. This approach has led to an increase in the proportion of pupils who are permanently excluded from school. That said, many of the strategies in place to support pupils who are at risk of sanctions due to their poor behaviour are successful

for many. However, there are still some pupils who do not conform to leaders' expectations. In the Ofsted online questionnaire, some staff expressed the view that behaviour is not always managed consistently well. This view was supported by pupils. Pupils shared their view that incidents of poor behaviour happen more often when teaching is weak.

- Oversight of pupils' absence from school has not been good enough in the past. While many strategies are in place to encourage good attendance, leadership of this area has not been tenacious enough in ensuring that more pupils, especially pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged, attend school regularly and on time.

Governance of the school

- The delay in converting to an academy has had a detrimental impact on the governance of the school. It has prevented the governing body from making any real headway with the recommendations from the external review of governance completed after the previous inspection. This is partly because the governing body has been constantly poised for a change to its role, which in turn has limited its ability to appoint new governors. This has placed more demands on those who are still governors and who continue to work in support of the school. Governors' meetings intended to discuss important matters, for example pupils' outcomes, have been cancelled because there are not enough governors to attend. This has slowed down the decision-making process. Governors' contribution to the school's improvement has not been good enough.
- A lack of effective support and challenge to the governing body has compounded the weaknesses in governance. Following some early training on understanding data, governors have attempted to ask more challenging questions of leaders. However, they have not been supported well enough to understand their role in checking how well additional funding is used to help pupils to catch up in their learning or to attend school regularly.
- Members of the governing body are committed to the school. They are working more closely with local community groups to forge positive relationships between home and school. They have also supported improvements in the provision of careers education. For example, some governors offer their time to provide mock interviews for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Governors know their responsibilities in relation to keeping pupils safe.
- However, they have failed to ensure that the school's website is compliant. A number of policies on the website are out of date and information about the school's curriculum is inaccurate. The impact statement for Year 7 catch-up funding has not been published.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff receive regular safeguarding training and are aware of issues that may affect pupils in school. The training that they receive on the 'Prevent' duty raises their

awareness of how to protect vulnerable pupils.

- Leaders work well with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils about whom they have concerns receive appropriate support.
- Leaders follow appropriate and secure processes when checking adults before they begin to work or volunteer at the school.
- Leaders keep secure safeguarding records and follow up pupils' absences to check whether they are safe when they are not in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the previous inspection. However, it remains variable across and within year groups and subjects. Teaching does not enable different groups of pupils to make good progress by the end of Year 11.
- Teachers in a range of subjects, including in science and technology, set tasks that meet the needs of their pupils. In these subjects, the most able pupils receive work that is challenging, while the least able and pupils with SEND receive effective support. However, in other subjects, teachers' expectations are sometimes too low, particularly of the most able pupils and boys.
- Some teachers use questioning well to check pupils' understanding and/or explore their ideas more deeply. This has been a major focus for improvement in the school. This often happens in English, science, history, textiles and computer science. However, there are inconsistencies within and across subjects. Some teachers do not use questioning effectively to address pupils' misconceptions or to deepen their learning.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally positive. Most teachers have strong subject knowledge, which they use to plan activities that interest most pupils. However, this is not true for some pupils, and especially for boys. They sometimes show little interest in their learning. This often happens when teachers fail to plan learning activities and/or use resources that appeal to boys' interests or inspire them to learn.
- Teachers have improved the accuracy of their formal end-of-topic assessment information. This information is being used increasingly well by teachers to identify pupils who need additional support.
- A range of extra support is being provided for current Years 10 and 11 pupils to address the gaps in their knowledge caused by previously weaker teaching.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported. Leaders have developed some creative approaches to helping these pupils develop their English language skills. For example, some pupils work in different age but similar ability groups to facilitate their learning of mathematical terminology. Pupils enjoy these lessons and say that they find them both helpful and enjoyable.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The majority of pupils adopt positive attitudes to learning and enjoy school. They respect their peers and trust their teachers. They take pride in their school, their appearance and their work. However, a few pupils are less inclined to do their best. They switch off in some lessons and they do not present their work with sufficient care.
- Pupils take on leadership responsibilities; for example, Year 11 pupils carry out duties at lunchtimes, and older pupils mentor pupils in younger year groups to help them gain confidence.
- Pupils are taught about issues such as online safety, mental health awareness and bullying through the personal development programme and in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons. They learn about issues such as what it is like to be a citizen in modern Britain and how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.
- Leaders provide pupils with independent advice and guidance in relation to careers. Work experience is currently being trialled with a small number of Year 10 pupils. The proportion of pupils who are not in employment, education or training at the end of Year 11 has been slightly above the national average for the past two years.
- Pupils know how to stay safe online and understand different types of bullying. The majority of pupils and staff say that incidents of bullying are not common in the school and that, if bullying does take place, pupils are confident that an adult will quickly resolve the issue.
- The majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, said that their children are safe, happy and well looked after at the school. However, not all parents share these positive views. School leaders are continuing to work closely with parents to address parental concerns.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Published attendance information for Marsden Heights is a cause for concern. This shows that too many pupils miss school and that there is little sign of improvement over time. However, the high proportion of school days that are lost due to families taking pupils on extended holidays does have a bearing on the overarching data. In part, this accounts for a large number of the recorded absences.
- Recent action by school leaders has started to have an impact on the prevalence of extended holidays during term time. The numbers are falling, which in turn means that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent, although still above the national average, has reduced. Furthermore, school records indicate that the attendance of

younger pupils is improving over time. Nonetheless, pupils' attendance is not good enough. This is especially the case for those pupils with SEND and for disadvantaged pupils.

- Pupils are not always on time for school or prompt to their lessons. School leaders have made this a priority area to address and punctuality has started to improve this term.
- The majority of pupils are well behaved. They typically move around school in a well-ordered manner, despite some of the difficulties with the school building, particularly the width of the staircases. During the inspection, pupils left the building in a sensible manner during a fire drill. They followed instructions from staff to exit the building in a timely and calm manner.
- There can be some boisterous behaviour at breaks and during lunchtimes. This is usually related to the large numbers of pupils moving around. A few pupils said that they are occasionally concerned about the behaviour of other pupils in lessons and around the school.
- The proportion of pupils who are excluded from school for a short period of time is typically lower than the national average. In contrast, permanent exclusion rates are high and increasing over time. This is mostly due to the implementation of a new behaviour system. This policy is beginning to have a positive impact on younger pupils, who have not fallen into bad habits. Exclusion rates are far less prevalent in key stage 3 than in key stage 4.
- Pupils who complete courses with alternative providers attend and behave well. There are links between the school and the providers to check on pupils' progress, learning and safety.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science has improved considerably since the previous inspection. It is now in line with the national averages for each of these subjects. However, for many pupils, the progress that they make during their time at Marsden Heights does not enable them to overcome the disadvantage of entering the school with lower-than-average attainment. As a result, standards at the end of Year 11, while improving over time, remain below average.
- The progress of current pupils indicates that improvements over the two previous years are being sustained. However, inconsistencies remain within and between subjects. For example, in key stage 3, pupils are making better progress in English, mathematics and science than they are in some other subjects, such as history and geography. The school's current arrangements for the teaching of these subjects is contributing to pupils' weaker achievement in these areas. Pupils are not able to build their skills and secure their knowledge in readiness for the next phase of their learning.
- In 2018, the most able pupils did not achieve as well as their peers in other schools in some subjects. This was because not all teachers expected enough of them and the key stage 4 curriculum had not been tailored to their needs. As a result, these pupils were not able to follow fully academic pathways.
- By the end of Year 11, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils have been weak compared to those of other pupils nationally. In part this is because their

attendance has been well below that of other pupils nationally. Furthermore, the plans the school previously had in place to give them extra support have been ineffective. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making better progress than their counterparts in previous years. The support that they now receive is improving as teachers' planning takes more careful consideration of the needs of this group of pupils. Nonetheless, the weaker attendance of this group continues to get in the way of these pupils being fully prepared for the next stage of their education.

- Pupils with SEND make the same, and sometimes better, progress than others in the school. This is the result of accurate assessment of their needs and the positive support that they receive.
- Over the past three years, the difference in the rate of progress between boys and girls has narrowed. However, boys still do not make as much progress as girls in some subjects and year groups. This is because boys are more likely to lose concentration in lessons when teaching fails to engage them. Teachers' lower expectations of what boys should and can achieve is another contributory factor to their weaker performance.
- On arrival at the school, pupils' standards of literacy are lower than those of pupils in other schools. There are also high proportions of pupils who speak English as an additional language. There has been a strong focus on developing pupils' speaking skills as well as encouraging pupils to write and speak in full sentences. This is helping these pupils to express themselves more clearly and to succeed in a range of subjects.
- The proportion of pupils who progress to meaningful next steps is increasing. However, it is still slightly lower for disadvantaged pupils than others in school.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 134990 |
| Local authority | Lancashire |
| Inspection number | 10057901 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 959 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Canon Ed Saville |
| Headteacher | Alyson Littlewood |
| Telephone number | 01282 683060 |
| Website | http://mhcc.co/ |
| Email address | admin@marsdenheights.lancs.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 6–7 December 2016 |

Information about this school

- Marsden Heights Community College is an above-average-sized 11 to 16 school.
- Since the previous inspection, in April 2017, the school has been issued with a directive academy order by the Department for Education. It has been supported by the United Learning Academies Trust, the proposed sponsor. The date for transfer to academy status has constantly been deferred. The date for conversion at the time of the inspection is 1 April 2019.
- The school website is not compliant. A number of policies on the website are out of date and information about the school's curriculum is inaccurate. The impact statement for Year 7 catch-up finding has not been published. A new website is currently under construction but is intended to be used when Marsden Heights becomes an academy.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible to receive support from the pupil premium funding is well above the national average.

- The majority of pupils are not from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is high.
- The proportion of students who receive special educational needs support or who have an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who arrive at the school mid-year is very high in comparison with many other schools.
- A very small number of pupils follow courses with alternative providers, including Coal Clough and the Alternative School.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' conduct in lessons. Several of these observations were undertaken jointly with school leaders.
- The behaviour of pupils was observed throughout the school day.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, a group of teachers and other members of staff and three groups of pupils. They also had informal conversations with a large number of pupils.
- An inspector met with a group of governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of governors.
- An inspector met with the executive principal of the local group of United Learning academies and had a telephone conversation with the regional director of the United Learning Academies Trust.
- An inspector met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the 14 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, a letter received from a parent during the inspection and the 54 responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors examined school policies and other documentation provided by the school. Records, including those relating to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, were also reviewed.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of pupils' work.
- Four inspectors visited the school on 30–31 January. A further visit was made to the school by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors on 21 March 2019 to gather additional evidence.

Inspection team

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
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| Philip Wood | Ofsted Inspector |
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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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