

Inspection of Marsden Heights Community College

Edge End Lane, Nelson, Lancashire BB9 0PR

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Alyson Littlewood. The school is part of the United Learning trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jon Coles, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Reena Keeble.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel happy and safe at this friendly and welcoming school. They spoke enthusiastically about how they champion the diversity of their school community. For example, pupils explained that various flags decorate learning spaces to reflect the different backgrounds and cultures of pupils. Pupils and staff are immensely proud of the improvements made to this school in recent years.

The school has high expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), benefit from learning the same ambitious curriculum. Pupils enjoy their lessons and work hard. They achieve well in many subjects.

Most pupils attend school regularly and engage with their learning enthusiastically. For example, pupils appreciate the opportunity to attend school on Saturdays for additional events, including revision classes and rehearsals for the school show.

Pupils enjoy the wider opportunities on offer to them, such as hill climbing in the local area. They take part in a range of clubs and activities. For example, pupils play in sports teams and get involved in a range of arts and crafts. Pupils and staff also work closely with the local community, including raising money for local charities.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

With the support of the trust, the school has designed an ambitious curriculum across all subject areas. Where subjects are firmly established, pupils achieve well. In a small number of subjects, the school's curriculum thinking is at an earlier stage. In these subjects, some pupils' outcomes do not reflect the more recent improvements made to the curriculum. This includes for a small number of subjects in the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects.

Teachers have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach, and they explain concepts clearly to pupils. Overall, teachers design appropriate activities to help pupils build and remember essential knowledge over time. The school has adopted effective routines that teachers use consistently. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them, and learning time is used efficiently.

In many subjects, teachers skilfully check what pupils know and remember. In these subjects, pupils' misconceptions are identified and remedied quickly. In subjects where teachers are in the process of defining the essential knowledge that they want pupils to learn, the school's approaches to assessment are underdeveloped. Occasionally, teachers are not clear enough about where pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

The school prioritises reading for all pupils. Teachers read regularly with their classes, and they are trained well in the reading strategies that they model. Pupils said that these reading strategies help them to access the ambitious texts that

teachers have selected for them. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy reading. For example, they visit the school library often, and many pupils read regularly in their own time.

Skilled staff are quick to identify those pupils who find reading more difficult. Staff use their expertise to provide timely and appropriate support so that these pupils can catch up with their peers.

The school identifies pupils with SEND swiftly and accurately. Teachers are furnished with the information and training that they need to support pupils with SEND well. However, in a small number of subjects, some teachers do not adapt their delivery of the curriculum as effectively as they could to meet pupils' additional needs. Occasionally, some pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they should in these subjects.

Pupils readily meet the school's high expectations of their behaviour. In lessons and around the school site, pupils are courteous, and they treat each other with respect. Disruption to learning is rare, and pupils are proud of the rewards that they receive for behaving well.

Many pupils are positive about the experiences that the school provides to enhance their wider personal development, and they recognise the importance of this learning. For example, pupils have learned about a range of topics that suitably prepare them for life in modern Britain and help them to consider future careers. However, some aspects of the school's careers education are less well thought out. Some pupils told inspectors that they do not receive sufficient information about post-16 choices until late into key stage 4. From time to time, this hinders some pupils from making informed decisions about their next steps.

Governors and trustees work together closely and understand the school's priorities for further improvement well. Staff value the professional development opportunities that the trust provides. The school, with the support of the trust, seeks the views of staff before making changes or introducing new initiatives. Staff are appreciative of this support for their well-being and workload.

Parents and carers appreciate the strong communication that they have with the school. For example, parents told inspectors that they feel fully informed about how well their children are learning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, the school is finalising the knowledge that it wants pupils to learn. This sometimes hinders teachers in checking how well pupils have secured the knowledge that they require for subsequent learning. The school should ensure that, as these curriculums are finalised, teachers are equipped to identify and address pupils' misconceptions before they move on to new learning.
- The school does not ensure that some pupils receive timely enough information about their next steps. This hinders some pupils from being fully informed about the extent of opportunities available to them when making post-16 choices. The school should ensure that the programme of careers education is designed to prepare pupils sufficiently well to make considered decisions about the next stage of their education, employment or training.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146276
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10290342
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,040
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Reena Keeble
CEO of the trust	Jon Coles
Headteacher	Alyson Littlewood
Website	marsdenheights.co.uk

Information about this school

- The school is part of the United Learning multi-academy trust.
- The school makes use of two registered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history, geography, design and technology, and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector met with the chair of the local governing body and representatives of the trust.
- The lead inspector spoke with a regional director of the multi-academy trust and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils from Years 7 to 11 about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Eleanor Overland, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Beard	Ofsted Inspector
Phill Walmsley	Ofsted Inspector

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