

Inspection of a good school: West Lancashire Community High School

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

Inspection dates:

12 and 13 March 2024

Outcome

West Lancashire Community High School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils arrive at school each morning with smiles, eager to start their learning. Staff are highly skilled at understanding pupils' individual needs. They build strong relationships with pupils to help them to feel happy and confident. Pupils strive to meet the school's high expectations of their academic and social success. Typically, they achieve well from their various starting points.

All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Preparation for adulthood is an important part of the school's curriculum. Pupils experience lessons that prepare them for their next steps and future lives. They develop the independence and necessary skills to be successful members of the community. These opportunities are tailored to prepare pupils for later life. For example, pupils learn how to go shopping, how to place an order in a café and how to travel on a bus.

The school's close-knit atmosphere makes a significant contribution to pupils' growing self-esteem and to their sense of belonging. Typically, classrooms are calm and purposeful. Staff spot the early signs that may suggest that pupils are struggling. They act swiftly to avoid pupils' frustrations from escalating.

Pupils enjoy valuable experiences that broaden their horizons beyond the classroom. For example, pupils talk enthusiastically about visits to the zoo and to the local fire station. For students in the sixth form, experiences include participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

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

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has designed an ambitious curriculum that is built on learning pathways that enable pupils, where appropriate, to pursue a range of vocational awards and recognised qualifications. Across most subjects, learning is carefully constructed to help pupils make small steps of progress towards their EHC plan objectives. However, in a small number of subjects,

curriculums are new. The school has not considered precisely enough what pupils should learn and by when. This means that, sometimes, teachers move on to new learning before pupils have fully grasped a deep understanding of new concepts and ideas. This hinders pupils from learning all that they could.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They select resources and activities that engage pupils in purposeful learning. For example, pupils use a range of communication aids and strategies to share their ideas, thoughts and feelings. In most subjects, teachers' use of assessment information is used to shape future teaching. This means that learning is focused on pupils' starting points and matched to their individual needs.

Across the school, pupils benefit from a range of initiatives and events that encourage a love of reading. This includes library visits, 'masked reader' competitions and the school's book vending machine. Typically, pupils who join the school are at the early stages of learning to read and have significant gaps in their reading knowledge. The school's phonics programme helps them to develop their early reading skills. Pupils read from books that are matched accurately to the sounds that they already know. Most pupils who find reading more difficult are given help to catch up. However, the school's systems to identify and support students who are weaker readers in key stage 5 are underdeveloped. This means that they do not receive the precise support that they need to become confident and fluent readers.

The school identifies the additional needs of pupils with SEND swiftly and accurately. Pupils' holistic needs are well understood by staff. They benefit from lessons that focus specifically on their EHC plans. Pupils are fully involved in the wider life of the school.

The school is skilful at supporting pupils' behaviour and emotional needs. On the occasions when pupils find it difficult to manage their own behaviour, staff respond sensitively and carefully to help them to regulate their feelings well. Pupils typically attend school regularly and on time.

Pupils' personal development is at the heart of the school's work. Pupils know that their voices matter and their opinions have influenced improvements around the school. They learn how to keep themselves safe in school, in the community and when online. Additionally, the school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to build interpersonal skills, self-esteem and confidence. The school provides extensive careers provision. From the start of Year 7 through to key stage 5, pupils have valuable encounters with local employers, colleges and training providers. Students in the sixth form benefit from work experience placements. Pupils, including those who enter adult social care, progress to positive destinations when they leave school.

Staff are well supported. They spoke about how the school engages positively with them to understand workload pressures. The school has taken tangible steps to make sure workload is reasonable, realistic and manageable. Governors are ambitious for the school. They carry out their duties effectively and ask challenging questions to help the school to continually improve.

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 small number of subjects, the school has not given sufficient thought to the subject-specific knowledge that pupils should learn and when this should happen. This means that, on occasions, teachers move on to new learning before pupils have developed a secure understanding of curriculum content. The school should clarify the knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn in these subjects and the order in which this should be taught.
- The school's systems to monitor and track students who are weaker readers in key stage 5 are underdeveloped. This means that some of the weakest readers do not receive the support that they need in a timely and effective way. This hinders their learning of the curriculum and prevents them from achieving as well as they could. The school should ensure that reading interventions are prioritised for students who need the most help.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2011.

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	131258
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10321390
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	138
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	49
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Joan Bill
Headteacher	Lee Fazackerley
Website	www.westlancs.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.
- The school does not use any alternative provision for pupils.
- The school provides education for pupils, aged 11 to 19, with moderate and severe learning difficulties, autism and other learning needs.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. Places are commissioned by local authorities.
- 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

- 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 met with the headteacher and with other leaders. The lead inspector also spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and a school improvement partner. She also reviewed correspondence from a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in communication, literacy and language; mathematics and my world (humanities). For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector discussed the curriculum in some other subjects with leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the SEND coordinators and reviewed samples of documentation relating to pupils with SEND.
- 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 took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Kate Bowker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Bather

Ofsted Inspector

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