

Westleigh High School - A College of Technology

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106524
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	287535
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Jim Kidd

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	782
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Holland
Headteacher	Mr John Banks
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003
School address	Westleigh Lane Leigh Lancashire WN7 5NL
Telephone number	01942 202580
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves a former mining community and many of its students come from areas of significant social disadvantage. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is twice the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average, as is the number with statements of special educational need. Most students are of White British heritage and there are very few who are new to learning English. The school has been a technology college since 1999, was awarded Artsmark Gold in both 2003 and 2007, and holds Healthy School status. Parental preferences for admission to Westleigh High have increased for the third consecutive year and the school has been oversubscribed since 2005.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, in which outstanding leadership and management have brought about marked improvements in both academic standards and students' personal development since the previous inspection. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of what the school does and believe that it is exceptionally well led, with, in their words, 'highly motivated staff who are clearly dedicated to maintaining high standards.'

Students enjoy school, are very proud of it and feel safe. The great majority behave very well in lessons and around school. They also have a keen awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and take full part in the many sporting activities organised by their teachers. They are so impressed with how the school helps them to gain in confidence that many cannot get enough of it and even attend on Saturday mornings and after school for extra lessons. Students are also concerned to support their classmates and those who find things difficult. The school council and those involved in EAR4U ensure that the views of students are promoted and that anyone experiencing difficulty is supported. The committed team of teaching assistants, learning mentors and counsellors work hard to ensure that students of all ability levels are encouraged to reach both their personal and academic targets. The excellent nurture groups are just one example of the outstanding care and guidance which all adults provide for their students.

Students make good progress in their lessons and standards are rising. In 2007, for example, the proportion of students reaching five or more higher grades in their GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was just below the national average and there was a higher percentage of grades A* and A than ever before. Furthermore, the school's strategies to address the achievement of lower-ability boys have borne fruit and there were very few students who left the school last year without a qualification. Students arrive in Year 7 with low communication skills and, although satisfactory, their progress in English, particularly speaking, lags behind the good progress they make in mathematics and science.

Teachers and teaching assistants have the highest regard for their students and work hard to raise their self-esteem and to give them every opportunity to succeed. In many lessons, questioning and challenge are of a high order but these are not sustained in all subjects. In a number of lessons, students are not encouraged to make extended comments to questions and they therefore find it difficult to justify their answers.

The rich range of technology and vocational provision is a hallmark of the excellent curriculum, particularly in Key Stage 4. Under the auspices of technology status, the school has developed an outstanding range of enterprise activities that provides a very good preparation for students' economic well-being. Technology status facilitates strong community links and additional activities for students and adult learners through clubs and weekend classes.

The headteacher and senior team drive improvement in all aspects of the school's provision and they are supported fully by the staff, irrespective of their levels of responsibility or experience. Senior leaders have introduced new initiatives into Key Stage 3 to address progress in English. Teachers speak positively of the support they receive and of the high level training which is open to them. As they say, 'our leaders are approachable, supportive and make us all feel valuable.'

This careful development of staff, resources and outside partnerships demonstrates that the school provides excellent value for money and that it has an outstanding capacity to improve.

Without doubt, Westleigh is an inclusive school where staff and students work and learn together in harmony.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate students' achievement in English in Key Stage 3.
- Share the good practice already evident in teachers' questioning in order that students become more skilled at giving extended and well-reasoned answers in all their subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' standards on entry to the school are below average in mathematics and science and well below average in English. Students consistently respond positively to the challenging targets set for them and have a keen understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. As a result, standards have improved year on year since the previous inspection. The percentage of students now attaining five or more passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is approaching the national average. In 2007 there were more students reaching grades A* and A in English and mathematics than ever before. Similarly, standards in Key Stage 3 have shown a marked improvement, particularly in mathematics and science, and students make good progress in these subjects. Students' performance in English is beginning to improve too, but achievement in this area is only satisfactory.

Students of all levels of ability make good progress across the school. This is due to the high quality of academic guidance they receive and because of the ongoing modification of the curriculum to meet their needs, interest and aspirations more closely. Moreover, the talented team of teaching assistants, learning mentors and other support staff play a vital role in ensuring that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same progress as their peers. Technology college status continues to have a positive effect on students' performance, for example in the opportunities they have to use computers as a tool for both research and for the presentation of their work in many curriculum areas.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students are keen to come to school and they enjoy learning. There has been a significant improvement in attendance, which is now just above the national average and well above what is typical in similar schools. Behaviour around school and in all but a handful of lessons where there is insufficient challenge is excellent. As Year 11 students comment, 'the school has just got better and better. It's great being in a small school because we all know each other and get on really well together.' Students wear their uniform with pride and demonstrate the highest respect for one another and for the school environment.

The school is a healthy school in the widest sense. Healthy School status and the Sportsmark award recognise the extensive range of physical and other opportunities on offer during the school week, at weekends and in holiday periods. In addition, there are no vending machines, and crisps and fizzy drinks are not on sale. The very well planned programme of personal, social and health education reinforces students' understanding of what is healthy and what is not.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Links with an African school and support for a range of local, national and global charities demonstrate that students are

becoming increasingly aware of cultures different to their own. The school code of conduct, established in consultation with the school council, works very effectively; students feel safe and bullying is rare. When students experience problems, their peers who manage the EAR4U initiative are always on hand to listen and offer advice.

Technology college status and the many enterprise activities in both key stages boost students' understanding of the world of work. Their good progress in mathematics and information and communication technology in particular prepares them well for life after formal education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good and there are examples of outstanding practice in both key stages. Teachers and teaching assistants treat their students with respect and dignity and classroom management is of a high order. Common strengths are students taking responsibility for their own learning, being fully engaged in activities, and working maturely together in pairs and groups. In an outstanding Year 8 music lesson, for example, students were enthralled by the tasks and resources and were able to match music to characters with real confidence. Similarly, lower-attaining students in Year 11 rose to the high levels of challenge to use mathematical terminology accurately and in context. In all lessons there is a strong emphasis on increasing students' self-esteem and teachers plan comprehensively to facilitate the progress of students of all levels of ability. On occasions, and particularly in Key Stage 3, teachers' questioning does not require students to think deeply about the subject matter in order that they can offer extended comments to justify their answers. In these lessons, one-word answers are the norm and students are not required to develop their arguments.

Marking is good and teachers offer their students detailed comments on how to improve their work. As a result, students are fully aware of what is needed if they are to reach higher standards.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and the school's status as a specialist college of technology provides many imaginative and highly effective opportunities for the development of vocational and enterprise education. The exciting and motivating range of courses and activities has a major impact on students' outstanding personal development and on their high levels of enjoyment of all aspects of school life. Courses provide very good opportunities for students of all levels of ability. Higher attaining students enter external examinations at an earlier age than is the norm. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from an increasingly wide variety of modules which reinforces their learning and encourages mature behaviour. The school is now introducing extra classes into Key Stage 3 in order to enhance progress in English.

The range of vocational courses, involving learning both on and off the school site, is quite superb and these courses are highly effective in boosting both achievement and attendance. The school provides learners in all years with many first-rate opportunities to develop their enterprise skills both in lessons and through special events. This initiative has now been extended to primary schools and students support their younger counterparts with skill and verve. As a result, the vast majority of students leave school well-equipped for the next stage of their education or training. For the small numbers who leave Year 11 requiring additional help, the

school provides a bespoke course that offers them the chance to return to school and gain recognised qualifications.

Students revel in the vast range of enrichment activities on offer. Again the impact of technology is clear: activities such as the robotics club are, in the words of parents, 'keeping engineering alive.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding and adults who work in the school demonstrate the highest level of commitment to helping students of all backgrounds and abilities to succeed. In the words of parents, 'this is a school which can be trusted to bring the very best out of all children, so that they make good progress and grow in confidence.'

Procedures for improving attendance are robust and effective. The support for vulnerable students including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in public care is exceptionally strong. The talented and committed team of learning mentors does much to raise students' self-esteem and to prepare them fully for the next stages in their education. Procedures for ensuring students' safety are secure and there are very good processes in place, including partnerships with a wide range of agencies, to support their physical and emotional well-being.

The tracking of the performance of different groups of students is rigorous and leads to early identification of possible underachievement and effective action to restore progress. Such data has highlighted the satisfactory progress in English in Key Stage 3 and the school has introduced more teaching time to address this issue. Academic guidance is strong and on-going feedback to students makes sure they know their targets and how well they are progressing towards them. The school's comprehensive guidance systems ensure that students make suitable decisions about their course selections in Key Stage 4 and when they leave school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Rising standards, good achievement and the outstanding personal development of students are evidence of excellent leadership and management which are focused on providing the very best for the students in the school. The inspirational headteacher, ably supported by his two talented deputy headteachers and a very strong senior leadership team, provides a clear vision for development and a strong focus on improvement. The high quality monitoring of school performance together with honest and accurate self-evaluation at all levels enables the school to accurately identify the areas for improvement; for example, the slower progress in English in Key Stage 3. They also ensure that leaders are able to choose relevant initiatives which challenge staff and students to promote high standards in all areas. Middle leaders are equally impressive in their roles. They support the monitoring and evaluation process and work closely with the leadership team to ensure consistency across the school. Pastoral and academic heads combine very effectively to ensure that all students are able to achieve in everything they undertake.

A specialist team leads the provision of the technology college and their management is very impressive, ensuring that students benefit to the full from specialist status. Governors are very

supportive of the school and are fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses. They undertake regular training which enables them to be informed partners in the school evaluation process.

Resources, including high quality computer and software equipment provided by technology college status, are deployed very effectively and have a powerful impact on learning and on raising standards and achievement. The senior team has ensured that middle leaders are trained to a high level and has also established strong business and community links which enrich the curriculum and prepare students well for their future lives.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Westleigh High School - A College of Technology, Leigh, WN7 5NL

Thank you for your warm welcome and your kindness when the inspection team visited your school last week. We all enjoyed our time with you, your teachers and teaching assistants, and I would like to tell you what we think about your school.

Westleigh High School is a good school and some aspects of it are outstanding. I know that you enjoy attending the school. Your behaviour and attitudes are outstanding and you treat visitors, other students and adults with respect. Most of you work hard and make good progress in your work and your examination results are improving. With your help results can get even better. Your headteacher and the leadership team are outstanding. They know what to do to make school a really good place where you can do well and prepare yourself for adult life. Teaching is good and all the staff in school work hard to help you to achieve your best. The curriculum is outstanding and you have many opportunities to learn a range of subjects in an interesting and exciting way. The vocational courses are very good and the inspection team particularly enjoyed visiting the catering class and tasting the food they prepared! The relationship that Westleigh High has with other local schools, the community and local businesses is outstanding.

We have now asked your teachers to try hard to improve your progress in English in Years 7, 8 and 9. We also think that many of you would benefit from more opportunities to develop your speaking and thinking skills in all your subjects. This will help you to develop your confidence in speaking and encourage you to provide more detailed answers to questions. I think you can now expect your teachers to start asking you more questions that will make you think!

Thank you once again for your contribution to the inspection. The team really enjoyed watching you learn.