



Dallam School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112432
Local Authority Cumbria
Inspection number 289285
Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006
Reporting inspector Ruth James HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Haverflatts Lane
School category	Foundation		Milnthorpe, Cumbria
Age range of pupils	11–19		LA7 7DD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01539 565165
Number on roll (school)	986	Fax number	01539 565175
Number on roll (6th form)	190		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr John Watson
		Headteacher	Mr Steven Holdup
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	6–7 December 2006	289285

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Dallam School is a comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 taking students from Milnthorpe and the surrounding villages in the South Lakes and North Lancashire. It is a specialist language college and is about average size. The proportion of students who receive free school meals is low. The school is situated on two sites, with the sixth form and physical education provision mainly delivered in Heversham, about a mile from the main school. Very few students aged 11–16 have a first language other than English and the majority are of White British heritage. A slightly lower than average number of students has learning difficulties and disabilities. The school has boarding provision, which caters for the needs of overseas students, mainly in the sixth form. Around 15% of sixth form students are from overseas and have a first language other than English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Dallam is now a good school. Students enter the school with attainment which is above average. After a few years when GCSE results were about average, they have now improved to above average, which means that students are making satisfactory progress between the ages of 11 and 16. In 2006, 70% of students achieved five or more A*-C grades, although boy's results were significantly lower than those for girls. Students also make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3, to reach above average standards.

Parents are generally positive in their support for the school, although a few have some concerns, for example about occasional incidents of bullying.

Students' personal development is good. Most students attend regularly and behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Students' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding.

Teaching and learning are good overall, and there is very little unsatisfactory teaching. In many lessons, teachers' effective planning ensures that activities are varied and well paced. Although there are examples of good practice, assessment and marking are not consistent either across or within departments and some students are not given enough guidance on how to improve their work.

The school provides a balanced curriculum in Key Stage 3, which includes the study of two languages in keeping with specialist status. There is a good range of options, including a small number of vocational options, in Key Stage 4. Extra-curricular opportunities are excellent and the high level of participation in sports encourages students to have healthy lifestyles. The care, guidance and support the school provides are good.

Specialist status in languages has been used very effectively in many ways including support to local primary schools in language teaching, which helps prepare students for study at secondary level. The school has a strong international dimension. As well as overseas boarders, there are links with several other countries, which bring benefits to the cultural development of students.

Leadership and management are now good. Monitoring of departments by the senior team has recently become more rigorous and the use of data has improved. Over the last year the pace of improvement has increased and the school has good capacity to improve.

Overall, the school has made good progress since the last inspection, but it was slow to make the necessary changes to ensure that all students receive their information and communication technology entitlement at Key Stage 4.

Governors fulfill their obligations well and hold the school to account for its results.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

GCE A-level results are satisfactory. A large proportion of those completing A-levels progress to higher education. Overall, the GCE A level grades achieved are broadly in line with expectations on the basis of students' GCSE grades. Retention rates are satisfactory overall. Some overseas students leave after one year so they do not complete the full GCE A level course. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and some lessons are good. Extra curricular provision is excellent with particularly good participation in sports. Sixth formers take on a range of responsibilities, such as assisting with language lessons in the lower school. They also organise events to raise funds for different charities. Students are well cared for and much effective guidance is provided for university applications. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Students speak positively about their experiences in the sixth form and the support they receive from their teachers. Despite the poor quality of some accommodation, they value being on a separate site and the increased independence it affords.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to raise standards and improve achievement, especially of boys.
- Strengthen and refine systems for assessment, marking students' work and tracking students' progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching in the sixth form so that more of it is good or better.
- Improve the quality of some unsatisfactory accommodation at the Heversham site.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with attainment which is above average. At Key Stage 3, the proportions of students who achieve the expected standard by the end of Year 9 are above the national figures. The proportions of students who reach Level 6 are similarly high. Value added measures, which take account of contextual factors show that in 2005 students made satisfactory progress in English and science, but progress in mathematics was unsatisfactory.

Between 2002 and 2005, the percentage of students gaining five or more A*-C grades was around the national average. However, value added measures show that students were not making as much progress as they might taking into account their starting points. In 2006, overall progress was satisfactory and the percentage of students gaining five or more A*-C grades improved to 70%. However, this marked improvement is attributable to better outcomes for girls; boys did no better than in 2005. In 2006, 82% of girls gained at least 5 or more A*-C grades and only 57% of boys did so. High

proportions of students get five or more A*-G grades. Very few students complete their compulsory education without gaining at least one GCSE.

Achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory. The overall GCE A level pass rate is around 95%, which is slightly below the national figure of 98%. Progression to university is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being display very good features. Students' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding. Attendance is good and students behave very well in lessons and around the school. Most are confident, polite, and friendly. Relationships are good and are built on mutual respect, which is the norm in this well ordered school. Students report that incidents of low level bullying are rare and are usually dealt with quickly and effectively. Many students speak proudly of their school and the work of the school council knowing that it can help bring about change. Students understand the benefits of healthy eating and a great many benefit from and enjoy the many opportunities to take regular exercise. Most students are enjoying their education. Many are confident in discussing moral and social issues and can be reflective. They benefit very well culturally through language studies and a wide variety of visits at home and abroad.

Work related learning opportunities, enterprise activities, and basic skills tuition enable students to develop the qualities needed for employment and the knowledge to make informed decisions about their future. Sixth form students enthusiastically participate in enrichment activities, sports leadership programmes, supporting younger students and leading school charity events.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning in the main school are good. In most lessons, teachers use a variety of teaching styles, the pace of learning is brisk and students are challenged appropriately. Activities are well matched to abilities and those with learning difficulties are well catered for. Good levels of independent and collaborative working are in evidence and in the better lessons assessment for learning is used effectively to promote understanding. Planning is generally of a high standard. In one outstanding lesson, activities included pair and individual work, peer assessment, mapwork, student presentation and animated teaching. As a result, students developed an impressive understanding of rural and urban distinctions. The use of teaching assistants is good, matching the particular skills of staff to curriculum areas. In satisfactory lessons,

learning is less secure and expectations less demanding. More able students are not stretched enough.

Students generally understand their targets and some subjects use assessment prompt sheets in the front of students' books to good effect. In these cases, students are clear on what they have to do to make further progress. Use of prior attainment data in planning and matching work to students' needs is variable across subjects. The school is working towards greater consistency and effectiveness. Assessment of student work is also variable across and within subjects and this affects learning. Particularly good practice is found in English.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are satisfactory overall, and some lessons are good. The better lessons feature more varied teaching methods and more active learning. Other lessons are over directed by teachers, lack sufficient challenge, and do not engage students enough in independent thought.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good throughout the school and sixth form. It offers opportunities well tailored to students' needs and aspirations, and promotes enjoyment. All students study two languages during Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is broad and offers a balanced choice of GCSE courses, with a limited range of vocational courses. In keeping with the school's specialist status, all students are expected to study a modern foreign language. All students follow a short course in religious education. For a minority of students, including those who are not suited to the more academic curriculum, have learning difficulties or are at risk of exclusion, the school offers a more personalised curriculum. Some have the opportunity to take up college placements. There is an excellent range of extra curricular and enrichment activities, and many visits within the UK and abroad. These promote cultural understanding and cross curricular links that extend the students' learning, and particularly involve languages, history, business studies and English. Basic skills, personal, social and health education and citizenship have a high profile in the school. The school is developing very good relationships with external agencies to enhance and develop a good quality work related learning and enterprise programme. The sixth form offers an appropriate range of GCE AS and A levels and a few vocational courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of care provided by the school for its students is good, making it a popular choice for parents. All requirements for child protection are firmly in place and staff are alert to any symptoms of distress. The good quality arrangements for the school to deal with the rare incidents of bullying or harassment contribute strongly to the

generally calm and harmonious atmosphere. The role of form teachers is highly valued within the school, and plays a key part in the education and care arrangements.

The school provides good support for students with learning difficulties through the use of teaching assistants in the classroom. The careful recording of individuals' progress, and other information regarding students, is shared and built upon through the very good relationships with parents.

The school is not complacent and continues to build upon its many good arrangements for guiding and supporting students so that they improve their achievement. Older students have good opportunities to support younger students, for example, through the extensive links with primary schools. Well-developed programmes for helping students to choose optional subjects and make career choices are firmly in place. The extensive range of contacts with local industry underpins successful work experience. Sixth form students receive particularly effective support for their university applications.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school is well led and managed. An unquestionable commitment to improving the school drives the work of the senior leadership team. Leaders have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. A range of initiatives has helped the school to improve in a number of significant areas over recent years, most significantly in the steep rise in the proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades in 2006.

The school's current priorities are being translated systematically into challenging targets for improvement. Leaders recognise that more can be done to consolidate achievement and to iron out inconsistencies in the way the performance of teaching departments is checked. Teachers have undergone professional development. Overall, the school overestimates the amount of high quality teaching and learning, mainly because some aspects of the assessment of learning are inconsistent. The monitoring of lessons is limited in scope and does not feed consistently into the professional development of staff and the ways in which they might challenge students more effectively.

Governors are hard-working and have a firm grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and this leads them to challenge the school. Most of the issues identified as needing improvement at the last inspection have been tackled successfully. Improvements to the buildings on the main site and the recruitment of good new teachers, have added to the improved ethos of the school. Now most students achieve as well as would be expected, and resources are deployed efficiently. The school provides good value for money.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Dallam School
Haverflatts Lane
Milnthorpe
Cumbria
LA7 7DD

8 December 2006

Dear Students

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We are grateful to you for all the help you gave us in our meetings with you in classrooms and as we went around the school. We also looked at questionnaires sent in by your parents. They are mainly supportive of the school. We found that Dallam School provides a good education. GCSE results were much better in 2006 than in previous years and this shows what you are capable of. The teaching in your school is good, and your teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and enjoyable so that you can learn as much as possible.

We were particularly impressed by your enthusiastic participation in sports activities, the range of visits available to you, and the contribution you make to the school and local community. The school uses its specialist language status well, and helps you develop understanding of other cultures.

Your attendance is good and you behave very well most of the time, in lessons and around school. You are generally well looked after. You have a good choice of courses and subjects, both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

We have asked your headteacher to make sure that when teachers assess and mark your work they give you feedback that will help you to improve. On the Heversham site, some of the accommodation is drab and in poor condition. We have asked the school to improve the quality of this accommodation.

In 2006, boys' GCSE results were not as good as girls. We have asked the school to look at ways of helping boys to do better. Boys have their part to play in this. We would like all of you to work hard and do the very best that you can, so that you get very good qualifications - as good as, or even better than the girls.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector