



Ladybridge High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134646
Local Authority Bolton
Inspection number 294142
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector Eric Craven HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	New York
School category	Community		Junction Road, Deane
Age range of pupils	11–16		Bolton, Lancashire BL3 4NG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01204 333355
Number on roll (school)	785	Fax number	01204 333359
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr P Garner
		Headteacher	Ms J Gabler
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	15–16 November 2006	294142

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Ladybridge High was formed as a Fresh Start school in September 2004 following the closure of The Deane School, which had been in special measures from 2001. It operates in close collaboration with Rivington and Blackrod High School, sharing some staff and a governing body. It successfully achieved Specialist Sports College status in 2005. The school is smaller than average in size and serves the Deane and Ladybridge areas of Bolton. About a third of the students are entitled to free school meals, which is approximately twice the national average. Around a quarter have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is above average. About 60% are of White British heritage with the remaining students coming from a number of minority ethnic backgrounds, some of whom are from asylum seeker families: 40 languages are spoken within the school. A significant number of students join the school at times other than the beginning of the school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Ladybridge High School has improved markedly since it opened two years ago and overall it provides a satisfactory education with many good features. The education it provides is substantially better than the school Ladybridge was created to replace. The legacy of poor achievement inherited by the school is being tackled resolutely. Improvements have been tirelessly driven by the school's leaders and staff have risen to the challenges presented to them: together they share a vision for the school. The staff are buoyant and focused on school improvement. The students are making satisfactory progress and standards have risen so that attainment is broadly satisfactory. The great majority of parents have positive views about the school and recognise the improvements being made. One parent wrote, 'I have seen a dramatic change for the better as my son has gone through the school.' A small number of parents have contrary views about behaviour and communication.

A high priority has been given to improving the quality of teaching and learning and this has largely been successful. Teaching is satisfactory overall with an increasing proportion being good or better. However, even more needs to be good if the school is to press on in raising standards. As well as better teaching improvement is also down to students being generally well supported in their academic endeavours. One student said, 'We know our targets and the school helps us understand what we need to do to achieve them.' The positive and growing impact of the school's Specialist Sports College status is evident in the contribution it is making to students recognising the importance of being fit and healthy and through all students studying physical education at GCSE.

Ladybridge High is an increasingly inclusive school. Its students have very diverse needs and the school responds to these effectively. Students with English as an additional language are well inducted into the school and enabled to play a full part because they are effectively supported from there on in. The four study strands of the curriculum mean the school can match the curriculum to students' particular needs and aspirations. Personalisation of the curriculum for some students is enabling them to engage in education and to achieve in ways they have not been able to do previously. However, the school recognises the need to embed work related learning across the curriculum.

The students' personal development is good. The great majority behave well and have responded positively to the school's clear stance on acceptable behaviour. A student commented, 'behaviour has got so much better because the teachers don't accept poor behaviour like they used to.' They say how much better this school is than its predecessor: a view endorsed by long standing members of staff. The students generally enjoy school life, reflected in their regular attendance and good behaviour. They understand and appreciate the importance of eating healthily and large numbers take up the opportunities for extra-curricular sporting activities. The school's arrangements for safeguarding students are firmly embedded in practice.

Senior staff have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses because their self-review and evaluation arrangements are good. As a consequence a well considered programme for improvement is mapped out. This suitably prioritises the need to further improve teaching and learning in order to raise achievement and standards and to improve many students' generally weak literacy skills. Governance is good and benefits from experienced governors who are well informed by the school and offer appropriately robust challenge as well as strong and committed support. The substantial improvements the school has made, coupled with its rigorous self review procedures, mean that the school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in the core subjects in particular.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that more of it is good or better.
- Raise the students' literacy levels.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' standards on entry are below average with a significant minority being well below average. Many arrive with poor literacy skills and in addition large numbers join the school part way through their education. Legacies of weak progress also remain for those students who attended Ladybridge's predecessor school. The school works hard to overcome the negative impact of these factors and work seen during the inspection and the school's own data show that progress made by students is satisfactory overall. However, students of higher prior attainment do not always reach the standards they should in all subjects. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science are below average but results show a rising trend. Attainment in GCSE examinations is also below average. However, in the short time the school has been open GCSE results have improved from 32% attaining five or more A* to C GCSEs to 37%. The school met its target at Key Stage 4 in 2006. Equally, the proportion of students achieving lower grade GCSE results is improving although this remains too low. The pace of improvement is increasing because of the measures introduced by the effective leadership team, which have resulted in better teaching, closer monitoring of student progress and a curriculum that suitably meets the students' needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The quality of students' personal development and well-being is good. Good relationships are a strength of the school: most students are generally polite and respectful to each other and adults. The school has worked hard to improve behaviour and it is now good overall. 'Behaviour used to be awful but teachers don't accept bad behaviour now. We learn much better as a result.', was one older student's opinion. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good.

Students enjoy school. 'I enjoy it much more now because it's calmer and lessons are more interesting,' said one student. Following the appointment of a home-school liaison officer procedures for monitoring attendance have been tightened with the result that significantly more students now attend regularly. Unauthorised absence is above the national average, particularly in Years 10 and 11, but it being tackled rigorously and in 2005/2006 the number of unauthorised absences in Years 7, 8 and 9 was close to the national average.

Students feel safe in the school's caring and welcoming environment. They play an active roll in the school community by acting as prefects and peer mentors. There is an active school council which has brought about improvements such as better playground facilities. Students are involved in the wider community, raising money for a number of charities. Preparation for their future economic well-being is improving but is still hampered by weak literacy skills and a work based learning programme in need of further development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with a little under half being good or better. Pockets of outstanding teaching were seen during this inspection. In the best lessons students are fully involved as the teacher moves them on at pace by setting challenging time limits for activities that are varied and appealing. Notably, they have the confidence to stand back and let students take charge of their own learning whenever possible. Such methods, coupled with excellent relationships, create a very productive atmosphere where students enjoy their learning. Less effective lessons do not give students enough opportunities to show their understanding either orally or in writing. They often lack pace and students are not sufficiently motivated to maintain their interest. Occasionally, teachers are not able to consistently keep students on task, sometimes because of the disruptive behaviour of a minority, which means that students make less progress than they should.

The school has put in a lot of effort to ensure all students know their target level. In good lessons teachers use a wide range of assessment techniques and students develop a good understanding of what is required to improve. However, in some lessons students know their target but a modest use of assessment and inconsistent marking means they are not shown how they can achieve it.

The school has a rigorous system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and has developed a strong programme of professional development, led by the school's best teachers, that is enabling teachers and classroom assistants to become increasingly effective.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and provides a broad and balanced range of learning opportunities. It has undergone significant development in the last year to ensure that it is flexible enough to meet the needs of a diverse group of students. A good example of this is the extended range of language courses available to students at GCSE level. Many arrive at the school with weak basic skills, especially in literacy. The school has responded by providing more time for mathematics and English in Years 7 and 8 and by creating specialist teaching groups in Year 7 that have begun to improve the basic skills and self-confidence of students new to the school. At the end of Year 9 students have an impressive range of vocational and academic courses from which to choose. This choice is possible because the school is an active member of the Bolton West partnership of schools which enables the partners to share resources and offer a broader curriculum than would otherwise be possible. As students move through the school they receive timely advice on the opportunities available to them at the next stage of their education or training.

All students have the opportunity to undertake a work experience placement and some gain accreditation as a result. There are good links with local employers for students on vocational courses and the school offers a range of enterprise learning activities in partnership with local business organisations. The school is aware that work-related learning does not yet feature sufficiently within all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good and contribute strongly to students' enjoyment and well-being. Students say they feel confident about approaching adults and know problems will be dealt with effectively. All procedures for safeguarding students are in place, reviewed regularly and understood by the staff. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of adults working in the school. Effective procedures ease transition from primary to secondary school and from Year 11 to further education or the workplace. The school has established good links with a wide range of outside agencies to support and safeguard the needs of the most vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The large number who join the school throughout the year, often with limited English, are supported very effectively and integrated smoothly. Support and guidance for students' academic progress is good. They know their targets and most know what they need to do to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school benefits from the good leadership and management of the executive principal and school principal. Senior staff, with able support from middle managers, have acted with determination to shift from the weak position they inherited to put

this school on the right track. Although there is still much to do they have taken big strides forward and the school is in a good position to build on what it has achieved so far. There have been substantial benefits from collaboration with its successful partner school and increasingly the school is profitably engaging with its local and wider community. Day to day the school operates smoothly because systems are understood, roles and responsibilities are clear and communication is effective. There are effective arrangements for seeking the views of staff, parents and students and incorporating these into the school's review processes.

Monitoring is a key feature of the school and this makes a positive difference. Data are analysed so that underperformance is identified. Lessons are observed with regularity and points for development are accommodated in planned professional development for staff. There is a very strong commitment to equality of opportunity and the arrangements the school makes to match its provision to the needs of the students are good. Governors are linked with departments and frequent communication ensures they are well informed and able to contribute to the developments in their associated departments. The recently established governors' scrutiny and planning groups hold much promise in furthering their strategic role. A suitable plan has been agreed with the local authority for the school to reduce its budget deficit. The school offers 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
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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
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

Thank you for being so welcoming when we inspected your school recently. A particular thank you also to members of the school council and other students who gave us their views on the school.

We think your school is satisfactory overall with many good features. Most of you attend school regularly which is helping you make progress. The behaviour of most students is good and we were pleased to be greeted by students who were polite and courteous. We agree with you that behaviour has improved because, in the main, staff take a firmer stance in dealing with disruptions. We think the school is well run and the systems employed mean that day to day it operates smoothly. The school has taken good steps forward since it replaced The Deane School. The quality of teaching has improved and although we think it is satisfactory overall there is an increasing amount that is good or better. As a consequence of better teaching and because the curriculum is more varied and suited to a wide range of students' needs, you are achieving more and standards are rising.

We were pleased to see the fact that the school has become a Specialist Sports College is having a positive impact on your understanding of keeping fit and healthy and is giving you more opportunities to undertake sports activities both in and out of school hours. The arrangements the school makes to ensure that you are safe and secure are good and you yourselves tell us that you feel safe and that the occasional instances of bullying are dealt with effectively by staff. We think the school is well led and managed and that senior staff have a good understanding of its' strengths and weaknesses because they have good systems for checking how well it is doing. Importantly, these include asking yourselves and your parents and carers views as well, although we did note that a very small number of parents didn't agree with this last point.

Of course, there are things the school needs to do to ensure that at the next inspection it is seen as a good school overall. Standards and achievement need to improve further and some students' literacy skills need to be raised so these can be used to help them make more progress. The quality of teaching and learning needs to improve further as well so that more of it is good or better.

Because the school has a record of improvement and because it knows what needs to be done to get better we think the school is in a good position to improve even further.

Thanks you once again for your contributions to the inspection and I wish you all the best for the future.