



Garstang High School: A Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119747
Local Authority Lancashire
Inspection number 294312
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector Jim Bennetts HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Bowgreave
School category	Community		Garstang, Preston
Age range of pupils	11–16		Lancashire, PR3 1YE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01995 603226
Number on roll (school)	756	Fax number	01995 601655
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Tom Ibison
		Headteacher	Mr Philip Birch
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	15–16 November 2006	294312

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

Garstang High School has 750 students aged 11 to 16, who come from the small town of Garstang, the surrounding rural area and the southern edge of Lancaster. Almost all are White British, and very few live in circumstances of financial hardship. The profile of standards at age 11 is a little above that found nationally. Though there are selective schools in the area, this school has at least as many high ability students as would be found in comprehensive schools across the country. A small percentage of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has enjoyed technology college status since 2002. Its other awards are: Investors in People, Sportsmark, Artsmark (silver) and Healthy School. Garstang High is an Extended School, with provision that goes beyond the normal school day.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Garstang High School is a satisfactory school, which is making rapid and relentless improvement. Much of its work is good. The school was inspected in October 2005 and found to be inadequate in some aspects of its work. It was given a Notice to Improve. The headteacher joined the school in the autumn of 2005. Under his dynamic leadership, the school has forged ahead with improvement in academic standards and in promoting better engagement of students. Examination results are now better, behaviour is better and students are positive about the school and their prospects. There is a palpable commitment to improvement at all levels in the school. Therefore, in accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Examination results at age 14 and GCSE are now on a par with what might be expected from the above average standards that students have already reached when they join the school. The proportion with five or more good GCSE results rose from 51% in 2005 to 67% in 2006. Convincing data on current students' progress suggest that the school's ambition to raise the figure to at least 80% by 2008 is realistic. Boys do less well than girls, but the school has imaginative initiatives underway to bolster boys' aspirations. Though there is stubborn underachievement at the top end of the ability range in GCSE, there are encouraging signs of increased high level success in tests at age 14. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for.

Teaching is generally good and sometimes outstanding. The profile of grades for lessons seen is at least as good as that found nationally. In the best lessons seen, students were challenged to take initiative and put information, ideas and skills together for themselves, under expert tutelage. Weaknesses tend to involve slow pace and occasional lack of challenge for some students within a class. Behaviour and attitudes are good, and much improved over the last year. Students enjoy a good curriculum, enriched by high quality extra-curricular activities. They contribute well to the life of the school and the surrounding community. They feel safe at school and learn good healthy living practices. They are well cared for and they receive good guidance and encouragement in their learning. Attendance is satisfactory and improving.

Senior staff have inspired a zeal for improvement in all aspects of the school's work amongst both staff and students. This dedication has largely taken hold at middle management level, with tangible benefits: teaching is better planned, evaluation is sharper and there is well focused intervention to get the most out of students who are underperforming. Senior staff have a shrewd appreciation of what has been accomplished and what remains to be done. The school has excellent capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of more able students.
- Improve teaching by ensuring that lessons challenge all students in each class and proceed with a brisk pace.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall, with some students showing good achievement on several courses. There has been rapid and impressive improvement in standards throughout the school during the last year. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good headway. In the great majority of lessons seen, students were making good progress.

Students join the school having achieved standards that are a little higher than usual for their age. By age 14, standards in the 2006 national tests were at least in line with what might be expected from students' starting points. Results were stronger in mathematics and English than in science. Nearly 40% of students achieved Level 7 or higher in mathematics compared with only about 25% nationally.

At GCSE, the proportion of students achieving five or more passes at grade C or above in 2006 was 67%: a notable improvement from 51% in 2005. This 2006 result was close to the target set for the school by the local authority and is consistent with the rate of progress nationally for students with similar starting points. The proportion of students gaining a grade C GCSE in each of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science rose by about 10%. A striking feature of the 2006 results was the very high success rate in vocational subjects such as health and social care and leisure and tourism. However, as in 2005 and earlier years, there were significantly fewer top grades (A and A*) than might have been expected across the range of subjects; there was some underachievement by higher ability students. Boys did less well than girls and the school is making strenuous efforts to raise boys' aspirations. There are suitably challenging targets for GCSE in 2007. By 2008, the school hopes that about 80% of students will achieve five good grades at GCSE or the equivalent; curricular arrangements and the track record of students currently in Year 10 make this a realistic probability.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. Students feel that their school has improved enormously over the last 18 months. They attribute this to the leadership of the new headteacher and improvements in the quality of teaching. They now enjoy the majority of lessons and feel very well informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The curriculum, including personal, social and health education, citizenship and careers education, prepares students well for the challenges ahead. As a result, students are confident and articulate with good social skills. They feel safe and secure and know that adults listen to them. They say that the school deals with any bullying incidents effectively but younger students expressed concerns about behaviour on the school buses. The great majority of students behave well and those with behavioural difficulties value the new system of discipline and the support they receive in the Inclusion Centre. Most students have a very positive attitude to learning, although in a few lessons older students do not apply themselves fully. Attendance has improved

and is now satisfactory. Relationships throughout the school are very good. The students' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Students are given opportunities to reflect and are encouraged to join the many additional activities, trips and visits, which enrich the life of the school. Cultural development is satisfactory but there are too few opportunities for students to gain first hand experience and understanding of cultural diversity in Britain. Healthy eating and keeping fit are actively encouraged, and many students take part in extra-curricular sport. Students make a positive contribution to their school and the wider community through the school council, work in partner primary schools and supporting a wide range of charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is generally good and sometimes outstanding; there has been a marked improvement since the last inspection. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teachers have good subject knowledge. In the best lessons, this is used to plan a range of stimulating activities with a real emphasis on independent learning. In such lessons, all students, including those with learning difficulties, make good progress because the work is pitched at a level suitable for their needs. Students understand the purpose of such lessons, and reflect on their learning as a lesson draws to a close. Target setting is robust and used to inform both students and teachers. Students clearly enjoy being at school and have good relationships with staff. One lesson promoted an infectious level of challenge and understanding that was outstanding: multimedia, peer review, group discussion, teacher input, and reference to examination mark schemes. A minority of lessons lack pace and challenge; students are overly dependent upon their teachers and either less willing to accept responsibility for their learning or too passive.

Marking and assessment of students' work is satisfactory. It is variable across the school, between and within departments. Many books have helpful comments and clear grades. This gives students a sense of achievement and progression and an understanding of how they can improve. But this good practice needs to be applied consistently across all departments. Teachers' professional development is important to the school's drive for improvement. Drawing on the support of several external agencies, including the local authority, it has been a key priority since the last inspection.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has a good curriculum and provides an impressive range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. The introduction of several vocational courses has already contributed to improved standards at GCSE in 2006, by providing students with learning opportunities that they enjoy and to which they give their best efforts. This has been further developed with the introduction of Business and Technology Education Council

(BTEC) rather than GCSE specifications in four subjects (for example, horticulture and performing arts). The school has benefited from productive links with Further Education Colleges. Sensible curricular 'pathways' for students aged 14 to 16 provide good alternatives, including the possibility of one, two or three GCSEs in science.

Rationalisation of provision for modern languages in Years 7 to 9 is well conceived. It is likely to establish greater confidence and a firmer base from which students might progress through to GCSE. Steps have been taken to ensure that students have a good grounding in information and communication technology through to age 16. The school makes satisfactory provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education, and for RE, but is seeking to refine the curricular arrangements for these areas. Students speak highly of the clubs and teams in which they can participate and the exciting range of trips and enrichment events that the school provides. The practising of an accomplished choir and the presence of eager students in PE kit characterise the school at lunch time. The Inclusion Centre provides welcome curricular and pastoral support for a handful of students in lesson time and more generally.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care guidance and support are good. Staff receive appropriate training in systems for managing students' behaviour and guiding their progress. Students understand these systems clearly, acknowledge their value and report significant improvement in these matters. The school is aware of occasional inconsistencies in the use of sanctions and is addressing this successfully. One of the foremost strengths of the Inclusion Centre is the integration of learning, emotional and behaviour support in one place. Entry to the centre is tightly controlled by the senior leadership team. The significant drop in exclusions is largely attributable to the success of this provision.

Throughout the school, students feel safe and secure and identify a range of adults to whom they can turn for support. Year 10 students help with Year 7 tutorials, and a peer counselling system is evolving. Primary schools, which send students to Garstang High School, speak highly of the close links that are established and which have been strengthened over the last year. There are productive links with Further Education Colleges and students are guided well about alternatives beyond age 16.

The school has effective procedures to set targets for students' future attainment. Students' progress is monitored closely and there are good intervention strategies to support those who are not doing as well as they should. Students know their targets and understand the nature of the next steps they must take to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features. The incisive management and leadership of the headteacher and his senior leadership team have secured enormous improvement in academic standards throughout the school during the last 12 months. Hand in hand with this, the school's ethos has been given fresh

impetus. Since joining the school in 2005, the headteacher has engendered a staunch commitment to school improvement that is shared by staff and students alike. Clear procedures for managing behaviour have greatly improved the atmosphere in lessons and about the school, and raised morale. There has been a consequent sharp reduction in exclusions.

Management and leadership within subject departments have largely been revitalised. Sometimes this has been facilitated by staff changes or adroit realignment of responsibilities. Some departments, such as mathematics, have made great strides forward over the last half year, with a sharper focus on issues like pace in lessons and the match of work to the needs of students of differing ability. In some areas, vigorous intentions are yet to pay dividends in consistent outcomes.

The school has made the most of opportunities provided by its technology college status, and other specific funding, to enhance provision within the school and to share technology related benefits with its partner schools and the wider community. For example, a feeder school describes as 'superb' the initiative to encourage boys' engagement for learning through the media of PE, drama, science and technology, which has involved 'excellent' staff and Y10 boys as role models.

There is a vibrant culture of self-evaluation at all levels. The school improvement plan is an effective tool for implementing change. The school is systematic in seeking and analysing the views of students and parents. Senior staff have a convincing diagnosis of how things stand and what remains to be done. Governance is strong; governors have given painstaking and well directed support to the headteacher's thrust for improvement. Their work is well organised through an effective network of sub-committees. The local authority has given high quality professional support to the evaluation and development that has been set in train since the inspection of October 2005. The school now gives sound value for money. Leaders have the energy and vision to take the school yet further in improvement; they can depend on the loyalty and commitment of staff, students and parents in this endeavour.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

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

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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	2

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	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?	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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

Garstang High School: A Community Technology College

Bowgreave

Garstang

Preston

Lancashire

PR3 1YE

16 November 2006

Dear Students

It was a pleasure to visit your school. We really enjoyed talking with you and your teachers.

We think your school is satisfactory, with a great many good features. It is improving at a tremendous rate. The great improvements that have been achieved over the last year owe much to the enormous efforts of the headteacher and staff. You students have also played a big part in getting things better.

The results for Year 9 and GCSE in the summer of 2006 were a vast improvement on the previous year. Sixty seven percent of students achieved five good GCSEs. This is about what we would generally expect for students who already have good standards when they start secondary school. In lessons, we found that progress was usually good and often excellent. The school's target for 2008 is over 80% with five or more good GCSEs; we think this ambitious target is realistic.

We saw 30 lessons; none were unsatisfactory, three quarters were at least good and nearly a quarter were outstanding. Staff have worked hard to make sure that lessons usually go well. The headteacher and senior staff have done a lot to improve lesson planning.

This is a vibrant school. You enjoy school life, and you contribute well to the life of the school. You take a pride in yourselves and in your school. Behaviour is good. You are keen to participate in the extra activities that are available. In discussions with us and in many lessons, you often expressed your ideas cogently. You are well looked after. There is good guidance about the targets you should aim for. Those of you who sometimes find it hard to make headway are supported well. You have a wide choice of subjects in Years 10 and 11, and the vocational courses are popular and successful.

The school is well led and managed. We think the headteacher's leadership is outstanding. The great improvements of the last year speak for themselves. You and your parents give the school your full support. The governors and the local authority have been very busy behind the scenes making sure that things go right.

We have asked the school to focus on two things as part of the agenda for further improvement:

- improve achievement for those who have a chance of the very top grades at GCSE
- make sure that all lessons have the features that we found in the best.

Continuing school improvement ultimately depends on you. Aim high. For example, if there is any word in this letter that you are not familiar with, use a dictionary, do not let it pass. And boys, the new rugby kit is really smart; but what about the shirt tails as you go around school? And, we know it can be boring on the buses, but do behave properly all the time.

You are lucky to be at such a vibrant and improving school. We wish you all well in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Bennetts

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools