

Dowdales School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 112383 |
| Local Authority | Cumbria |
| Inspection number | 310873 |
| Inspection date | 12 December 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Andrew Johnson HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1067 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Craig Bland |
| Headteacher | Mrs Liz Moffatt |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 April 2005 |
| School address | Nelson Street Dalton-in-Furness Cumbria LA15 8AH |
| Telephone number | 01229 897911 |
| Fax number | 01229 897913 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; pupils' personal development and well-being; quality of provision; the impact of the school's specialism and the school's use of self-evaluation. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; a range of school documentation; observation of the school at work; discussions with staff and pupils; and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but there is no evidence to suggest that the school's own evaluations, as given in its SEF, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Dowdales School is situated in the small town of Dalton-in-Furness. It draws most of its pupils from Dalton and surrounding villages. Numbers have steadily increased in recent years and the school is now oversubscribed. Though mixed, the area is broadly one of social disadvantage. Only a tiny proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and all pupils have English as their first language.

The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average although relatively few have statements of special educational need. The school is a specialist school for the Performing Arts and an Ambassador School for Gifted and Talented pupils. The school has Leading Edge status and plays a leading role in promoting improvement in other local schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Its success comes as a result of the excellent leadership provided by the headteacher and senior management team. Many of the staff have been in post for a long time, and have retained their energy and enthusiasm for teaching. There is an unrelenting focus on improving standards and a passion to ensure students make the very best progress. Staff share the vision, that at this school, all students will reach their full potential. At the previous inspection in 2005 the school was judged to be very good; since that time it has gone from strength to strength. Students' standards and levels of enjoyment have increased significantly. The school has proved it has an outstanding capacity to improve. Dowdales is a happy, caring and vibrant community where students thrive.

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly average, but by the end of Year 11 they achieve GCSE results are well above the national average. Results across the full range of subjects are very high and have improved year-on-year. Students get off to a very good start in Year 7 and achieve well in their first three years at school. Their progress accelerates even further as they move through the school, and by the time they reach Year 10 and 11 their progress is exceptional. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress, as do other vulnerable children.

Students' personal development is outstanding in all respects. Their positive attitude to learning shines through both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. Incidents of bullying are very rare and are dealt with effectively. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary and attendance is well above average. Students develop an excellent understanding of different cultures because of the many links they have developed with other schools in this country and abroad. Teachers provide excellent opportunities for quiet reflection and discussion of different beliefs. The school's performing arts specialism is a very significant strength and enables students to develop confidence, take part in community activities and go on to higher education and employment. Students are very loyal to the school and many say how proud they are to be part of the Dowdales community.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. The energy and enthusiasm shown by teachers is infectious, inspiring students to work very hard and achieve high standards. Students say that lessons are very enjoyable and they trust and respect their teachers. Marking is completed meticulously and is closely linked to targets and progress. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well integrated into lessons, and the close support they receive ensures they make the best possible progress.

Students are provided with an outstanding curriculum that includes a useful range of vocational options. This has involved successful collaborative work with local colleges. The school is particularly successful at providing challenging, extended activities for their gifted and talented students. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities in which many students participate and excel.

The school has outstanding leadership at all levels. Self-evaluation works very well and the school draws from a wide variety of evidence to reach accurate conclusions about the strengths of the school. Where areas for improvement are identified these are acted upon quickly and successfully. For example, an improved cross-school literacy policy is to be introduced in the near future. The school recognises that due to its locality, it sometimes has difficulty recruiting staff but once appointed most of them stay and thrive.

Managers at all levels set high standards and are clear about what needs to be done to maintain excellence. The monitoring of students' progress is seen as the responsibility of all staff, and considerable time is invested in ensuring that everyone is aware of targets and progress. The lesson observation system is accurate, and subject leaders expect teaching to be at least good in all lessons. Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of students. The arrangements to induct newly qualified teachers are thorough but the school could act more quickly to provide support, where necessary, to ensure the high proportion of good and outstanding teaching is maintained. The governors provide excellent support and hold senior managers to account effectively. Parents are very supportive of the work of the school, and are correct in their belief that this school provides an exceptional quality of education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Be more timely in the management of support for newly qualified teachers.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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|---|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| 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? | 1 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 1 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 1 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 1 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 1 |
| 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

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| 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 | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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

13 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Dowdales School, Cumbria, LA15 8AH

We really enjoyed coming to your school and would like to thank you for welcoming us and expressing your opinions about the strengths of the school. We were delighted to see how much you enjoy school life. We agree with your comments and the views of your parents that Dowdales is an outstanding school. You should be proud of how you conduct yourselves and the contribution you make to the school's success.

Many of your lessons are outstanding as a result of the enthusiasm and hard work of your teachers. The staff are very committed to ensuring that everyone reaches their full potential. We found only one area for improvement; we would like to see your school intervene even more quickly to ensure new teachers are as effective as the experienced staff. We were particularly impressed by the excellent relationships you have with your teachers and the respect you show to each other. The care and support you receive from other specialist staff are very good, and enable everyone to be included and make very good progress.

The specialist performing arts status is a real strength of the school and we were particularly impressed by the standard of your work throughout the school. The links that you have developed with other schools are very useful and give you a better understanding of the wider world.

We would like to give particular praise to the headteacher and the senior leadership team. They are an outstanding group, and are one of the main reasons for the school's high standards and success.

It was a real pleasure to visit your school and we wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty's Inspector