

Lancaster School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115445
Local Authority	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LA
Inspection number	311937
Inspection dates	9–10 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Declan McCarthy

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	63
6th form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Sharp
Headteacher	Mr Philip Rodbard
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2004
School address	Prittlewell Chase Westcliff-on-sea Essex SS0 0RT
Telephone number	01702342543
Fax number	01702352630

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Lancaster School is a community special school catering for students who have physical and neurological impairments, severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, complex medical conditions, including some students with challenging behaviour. Students come from a wide catchment area within Southend-on-Sea and surrounding areas of Essex. The school has recently been redesignated as a special school for up to 70 students aged between 14 and 19. All socio-economic backgrounds are represented with a broadly average proportion of students entitled to free school meals. Most students are from White British backgrounds and 15% are from minority ethnic groups. Fourteen per cent have English as an additional language. Given the severity and complexity of their needs, attainment on entry is low and many are at the very early stages of communication and language development. All students have a statement of special educational need. From time to time, the school also admits a few students for statutory assessments. The school works in close partnership with Southend Adult Community College, which provides training for 19-25 year-olds with profound and complex disabilities. Known as The Lancaster Centre, this separate provision is accommodated temporarily in the Lancaster School building until the new premises located within the grounds of Lancaster School, are completed. A recent Adult Learning inspection of the Lancaster Centre noted the outstanding partnership working between the school, Southend Adult Community College and the local authority. The school has a number of awards including Investors In People status, the Healthy Schools Award and Recognition of Achievement Awards for Careers Education and Work Related learning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Lancaster is a good school, which is highly valued by parents and students alike. One Parent wrote, 'Lancaster school is like an extended part of our family. My son has enjoyed the school since he started. He is very happy as he is learning so much and all the staff are wonderful.' This accurately reflects the warm and friendly ethos of the school and the excellent partnerships with parents, local schools and the community, established under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. All students say they love school, which is reflected in their good attendance and high levels of participation in school activities. Although standards are exceptionally low, because of the severity and complexity of students' learning difficulties, students make good progress and achieve well. This is because they are taught well by staff who endeavour to identify and meet individual needs through an effective curriculum. Students leave school with a range of accreditation and as a result of their good achievements, they all transferred to college placements at the end of the last academic year.

Students are well cared-for and benefit from effective support to meet their learning needs. Personal guidance is good and, as a result, students' personal development, including their spiritual moral social and cultural development, is good. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring students stay safe, choose healthy options and exercise. As a result, students thoroughly enjoy school. There are good systems in place for tracking students' progress which are used effectively by senior managers to identify priorities for school improvement. However, these are not used fully by teachers to record progress or to inform their planning. The school nurtures and maintains very high quality collaborative relationships with a wide range of agencies and professionals, which enables specialised support for students' particular needs. The excellent working partnership with Southend Adult Community College and the local authority has resulted in the successful joint capital investment bid from the Learning Skills Council of 1.3 million pounds for the development of the new 19-25 Lancaster Centre provision.

The school has made good improvements since the last inspection. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is supported effectively by the senior management team and the governing body. All staff and governors have a shared vision for improvement. However, subject leaders have not yet developed their monitoring role sufficiently. The school has a realistic view of what it does well and what it needs to do to improve further and its approach to self-evaluation is good. There is good capacity for further improvement and the school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The provision for students in the Further Education Centre is good. The head of sixth form provides good leadership and support for those teachers who are new in post. The students are very well motivated and relationships are good. The curriculum is highly relevant and matches the learners' needs and abilities well. The students are prepared effectively for transition into adulthood by mini-enterprise activities such as horticulture and growing and preparing produce for sale, which it is intended will develop into a team enterprise. The students develop work-related skills, such as following instructions and working as part of a team, from the very good opportunities for involvement in community-based activities. These include multi-gym, swimming, football training, bowling, hockey and athletics. They also have access to a ceramics course at an Adult Community College. All students, including those with more complex needs,

gain national accreditation through: the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) 'Working towards Independence' and Careers and Work Related Learning awards. However, the marking of students' work does not record levels of support received and therefore differing levels of achievement cannot always be accurately assessed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen the use of assessment systems by teachers to inform their planning, and to record students' attainment and progress.
- Develop the role of subject leaders so they all systematically and regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning, the use of assessment and pupil progress within their subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Nearly all students achieve one or more units of the ASDAN Working Towards Independence and Transition Challenge qualifications. They make good progress in their communication, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Students also make good progress in vocational skills through the well-structured work-related learning programme. In lessons, students made good progress overall, but this varies from satisfactory to outstanding, depending on the quality of teaching. Progress in some lessons is more limited because teachers do not always use assessment information to plan tasks appropriate to the diversity of needs. All students, including those at an early stage of learning English, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, students who are in care and those with more complex learning needs, make equally good progress toward their challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. All students say, and their parents agree, that they thoroughly enjoy school and very much appreciate their friendships. Consequently, attendance rates are high and behaviour is good. Students take advantage of opportunities to take responsibility and gain independence, for example by participating in residential school journeys. Representatives of the school council say that the school listens to their point of view and acts on their ideas quickly, for example by providing new playground equipment such as go-karts and tricycles. Students keep extremely healthy because they choose healthy food options and get plenty of exercise including swimming, multi-gym, football and horse-riding. Students grow increasingly confident through regular training sessions with Southend United Football Club. Students show that they feel happy and safe at school. Students are well regarded in the community and make a positive contribution by raising money for others on frequent occasions. Older students gain independence skills that help to prepare them well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning have improved and are now good. Although teaching is good in the further education unit, the proportion of satisfactory lessons seen was slightly higher than the rest of the school. The school has already begun to monitor and support these less experienced teachers in the further education unit. Teachers and support assistants work in effective partnerships to support students' learning well. High quality relationships are evident in all lessons resulting in students' very positive approaches to their learning. There is some inconsistency in the way teachers use assessment data to inform planning. As a result, occasionally, as seen in satisfactory lessons, work is not always matched sufficiently to different needs or abilities. In contrast, in an outstanding science lesson with Year 9 students, the teacher used assessment skilfully so that different work was precisely matched to the different learning needs of students. There is a strong emphasis on the development of communication in all lessons. Teachers use resources, including ICT, visual materials and signing very effectively to enable students to participate fully in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is highly relevant for the students' personal and academic needs. Personalised learning is being developed and aspects of the curriculum are being rewritten. Some students with more complex needs have an individualised curriculum that includes sensory activities and the therapeutic use of music. Music and drama enrich the curriculum. Community involvement, for example theatre trips and school productions, are very successful and the school has won a trophy for outstanding achievement at a local drama festival. Focused events take place throughout the school year such as modern foreign languages and art themed weeks. Each class has a plot at the allotment adjoining the school. Students have the opportunity to gain accreditation through ASDAN and other award schemes and this adds to their sense of achievement. The school has received quality awards for careers education and guidance and work-related learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Therapists and teachers work effectively together to provide appropriate care for all students. The school is working hard to obtain support from a speech and language therapist to work as part of the multi-disciplinary team. Extra assistants have been trained well by the school to provide additional physical support and positioning for some students. Those with challenging behaviour are consistently well-managed, supported by clear behaviour plans. The support provided by the school to raise students' individual achievements is at times affected by imprecise use of assessment. The school emphasises students being aware of ways to keep healthy and safe, for example with reminders posted up around the school. Procedures for

safeguarding students' interests are effective. Parents appreciate the information provided by the school about their children's work. Detailed transition information on students' physical and care needs is provided when students leave the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher's outstanding leadership has resulted in excellent partnerships with local schools and colleges and in the establishment of a strong family ethos where all students are valued. Since the last inspection, he has successfully steered the school through a period of significant transition to 14 -19 provision. He has worked very closely with Southend Adult Community College and the Local Authority in raising 1.3 million pounds for the development of on-site premises, known as the Lancaster Centre. He has also been instrumental in leading the project to develop a new 19-25 provision on site. The headteacher is supported well by his senior managers, who together systematically and regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observation. Although subject leadership has improved since the last inspection, subject leaders have not yet fully developed their monitoring roles. Governors provide good support for the school, monitoring and challenging its work effectively and they fulfil their statutory duties. The whole school community has a shared drive for improvement. The school uses its self-evaluation effectively to identify its strengths and areas of improvement. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and a strong commitment from the whole school to further improve.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	2	2
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	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	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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

11 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Lancaster School, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 0RT

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We really appreciated the time you spent talking to us and showing us around. This letter is to let you know what we thought about your school.

Your school is good and well led. Your headteacher and all the staff work very hard to make it a good place to learn. Your headteacher has made excellent links with other schools and colleges to help you with your learning. The staff have made teaching much more interesting especially when they use resources in lessons such as photographs and computers. You told us that you really like your teachers and greatly enjoy your lessons and the other activities on offer. You also said your teachers explain how well you are doing and help you to do even better. We feel that most of you are doing well in your work and are making good progress, particularly in learning to communicate more. We also feel that you are well prepared for leaving school. Your enjoyment of school is excellent and we saw this in your good attendance. You stay extremely safe and healthy in school too. Your behaviour is good and you are friendly and polite to everyone in school. We are sure that the staff will be pleased to know that you and your parents really appreciate your good school.

To make your school even better, we have asked your teachers to:

- Make sure that those of you who find learning easy or hard are always given work which you can do.
- Check how well you are doing in all your subjects.

We hope that you will continue to work hard and enjoy your learning. We wish you all the best in the future.

Declan McCarthy

Lead inspector