

Central Lancaster High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119770
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327126
Inspection date	22 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Brine HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr William Deller
Headteacher	Mr Jonathan Wright
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2006
School address	Crag Road Lancaster Lancashire LA1 3LS
Telephone number	01524 32636
Fax number	01524 849586

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- Whether the achievement of the students matches the school's self-evaluation of outstanding.
- The impact of the school's specialist visual and performing arts status and, specifically, how the school is evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum provision at Key Stage 4.
- The patterns of achievement in mathematics and the actions being taken to improve these.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included in the report.

Description of the school

Central Lancaster High is a smaller than average 11 to 16 comprehensive school which was awarded joint visual and performing arts specialist status in 2005. The school operates within a selective system and, as a result, the profile of prior attainment by the students is below average. The proportion eligible for free school meals is slightly above the national average. The percentage of students drawn from minority ethnic communities is below average, as are the numbers for whom English is a second language. The proportion with statements of special educational needs is well above the national average although the overall number with special educational needs is just below average. The school was re-awarded Investors in People in 2006 and received a national Artsmark Gold Award in 2002. It was designated as a Healthy School in 2006. In addition, it is a Full Service Extended School, is part of the Lancaster Excellence Cluster, and received International School status in 2007. The school also benefits from partnerships with a wide range of other local and national bodies.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Central Lancaster High school provides its students with an outstanding education. In the words of one parent: 'the school provides a real sense of community; my children feel valued, challenged and encouraged'.

Under the inspiring leadership of its headteacher, this very popular and harmonious school has built on the strengths reported at the time of its previous inspection when it was also judged to be outstanding. It has successfully addressed the issues raised in 2006 by ensuring a pattern of more consistent standards across the curriculum and by improving attendance to a level above the national average.

The success of the school is rooted in its very clear values and outstanding ethos. To repeat a phrase used by one of the students, this is a school in which 'every child matters'. Students speak warmly about the high level of commitment in the school to the success of every individual. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. Students cooperate well together and demonstrate maturity and high levels of responsibility towards their work and each other. The school is highly effective in promoting the wider aspects of personal development including the students' spiritual and moral awareness.

The achievement of students shows a pattern of sustained excellence and there is an upwards trend in results overall. Standards are now approaching and, in some cases, exceeding the national average. Key Stage 3 results in English in 2008 were particularly impressive and well above the predicted target. The percentage of students who gained five A* to C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) in 2008 also exceeded the challenging target set and was close to the national average reflecting the very positive overall achievement. The school is aware that it still needs to improve the percentage of students achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics and has developed its ESTEEM programme (Engaging Strategies to Target Excellence in English and Mathematics) to support this. A decline in the pattern of performance in mathematics in 2007 has been reversed and results rose in 2008 although there is still room for further improvement. The achievement of students in the school's specialist subject areas of visual and performing arts is impressive and is, in part, a reflection of the skilful decisions taken about the provision of more vocational courses in these areas.

The inspector agrees with the school's judgement that the quality of teaching across the school is outstanding. Students are well supported in lessons by their teachers who work tirelessly to provide them with the support they require to improve their performance. Lessons are well prepared; clear learning objectives are shared to ensure students understand the purpose and direction of the lesson. Strong emphasis is placed on developing the confidence of the students and encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning. As a result, it is commonplace to find students taking the initiative in asking questions and working together in groups. The best teaching is based on excellent subject knowledge translated into a wide range of active and engaging strategies designed to make learning both fun and relevant to the students' interests and needs. The highly effective use of the support staff in lessons is a strength of the school and reinforces the wider commitment to inclusion.

A key factor which has supported the improvements in results has been the development of the curriculum to ensure that the provision is well matched to the needs and interests of all students. The ASPIRE programme (Academic Systems and Practice to Raise Esteem) has introduced a new approach to setting arrangements which has helped reduce class sizes and

encouraged further improvement in the quality of students' learning. Courses on offer are very carefully monitored and adjustments are made to ensure the provision is refreshed to promote success for all. Initiatives, partly linked to the school's specialist visual and performing arts status, have extended the range of pathways available to the pupils through the introduction of more vocational courses. All students now complete such a vocational course in addition to studying a modern foreign language at Key Stage 4. This reflects the commitment to providing an education that is both broad and balanced for all. There is a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities and the school's specialist arts status has been used very effectively to promote both the breadth of students' cultural awareness and their overall sense of self-esteem.

The arrangements for the care, guidance and support of students are also outstanding. All statutory requirements in relation to child protection are met. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and, as a result, make similar progress to that of their peers. The arrangements for tracking the progress of individual students and for intervening to support and mentor any who show signs of under-achieving are impressive. Very effective action has been taken to improve attendance and behaviour, and students' safety has been enhanced through use of a 'Keep Kids Safe' service.

Underpinning the success of the school are the excellent leadership and management which take much of their inspiration from the outstanding headteacher. The senior leadership team has been extended since the last inspection in order to ensure the focus on raising standards is sustained and effective. The arrangements for evaluating the work of the school are impressive and highly effective; challenging targets are set to help drive improvement. The quality of strategic thinking is very high; initiatives are carefully considered, skilfully coordinated and closely monitored. This ensured, for example, that the reasons for the recent dip in performance in mathematics were quickly identified and addressed. The arrangements for coordinating development planning at all levels are well conceived and effective. For example, significant energy has been put into promoting high quality teaching and learning across the whole school and the school recognises there is now a need to bring its policy in this area into line with its best practice. Extensive training to develop the role of middle leaders has made an important contribution to the promotion of consistent high quality across the school. Recent changes to the governing body have extended their ability to work with the school as its critical friend, a role which they exercise effectively.

Through its status as a specialist college and an extended school, links with the local community have been enhanced and developed. As a result the school is highly effective in meeting the new requirement to promote community cohesion.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the current focus on raising standards in mathematics.
- Review the teaching for learning policy to ensure it reflects the best practice in the school.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 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

Leadership and management

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

23 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Central Lancaster High School, Lancashire, LA1 3LS

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with many of you. We also read carefully the questionnaires completed by your parents. These were very helpful to us.

Central Lancaster High is an outstanding school of which you are rightly proud. As one of your parents told us 'the school provides a real sense of community; my children feel valued, challenged and encouraged'. When we met with representatives from the student body they told us how well supported you are and how the school is committed to the success of every individual.

In thinking about why the school is so successful we picked a number of important things. The headteacher and senior staff provide inspiration and outstanding leadership; teachers plan lessons which encourage you to learn and make quick progress; the range of courses which are offered to you are really well matched to your needs and interests; and the arrangements to provide you with support and guidance are also excellent.

You are enormously important in all this. Your behaviour, attitudes and attendance really impressed us and you need to be congratulated for the way you are helping to make the school the success it is.

As a result of all these things, you are able to make excellent progress and achieve really well; but more than that, the school is fostering a love of learning and is promoting your confidence and sense of self-esteem.

We have asked the school to continue its good work to share the best practice and make further improvements to make sure that the standards continue to rise particularly in mathematics.

Thank you again for welcoming us to your school. We wish you well in the future.

Alan Brine

Her Majesty's Inspector