

Ulverston Victoria High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112385
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	331083
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Pat Kime 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1097
Sixth form	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Wilkinson
Headteacher	Mr Denis Fay (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	31 October 2007
School address	Springfield Road Ulverston Cumbria LA12 0BE
Telephone number	01229 894140
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Introduction

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

When the school was inspected in October 2007, it was found to require special measures because it was failing to provide an acceptable standard of education. Since then inspectors have visited the school regularly to check on its progress.

Description of the school

Ulverston Victoria High School is a larger than the average secondary school which serves a relatively advantaged area. It is housed in old buildings which include several detached blocks. Parts of the buildings are in a poor condition.

Students come mainly from the town but the school also attracts a significant number from further afield, for instance the wider Furness Peninsula. Students join the sixth form from several local schools. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing.

The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average and a lower than average proportion of students has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A small number of students, mostly Polish, speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils are in public care.

The school holds the Investors in People award, the first level of the Excellence Marque and the Princess Diana Anti-Bullying Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Ulverston Victoria High School has improved rapidly under the sure-footed leadership of the acting headteacher. It is now a satisfactory school and has many good features. There is a positive ethos among staff and students, evident in a keenness to contribute to realising high ambitions for the school. Students, parents, staff, governors and members of the local community recognise that the school has changed for the better.

Since the inspection in October 2007, the senior team has effected significant improvements in the school's provision and carried staff at all levels with them. Improvement is evident in the quality of teaching and learning; care, guidance and support, particularly academic guidance and support; and in leadership and management, all of which are now good. Standards have risen and at GCSE in 2008 they were securely above average on several measures, notably the percentage of students who obtained five good passes, including English and mathematics. Given students' starting points and capabilities, standards overall represent satisfactory achievement. This is evidence of the impact of improved teaching but the legacy of several years' underachievement is not yet fully overcome. Furthermore, there are a few subjects in which GCSE results indicate that students do not do well enough. Senior staff know this and are working closely with the relevant subject leaders to improve matters.

Inspectors' observations of lessons showed that, in most instances, the school's own evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning are accurate. Staff have benefited from additional training. Some of the training mounted for all teachers has used in-house expertise and, additionally, senior staff have provided bespoke packages of support for some teachers. As a result, teaching is now good overall. Some is of an outstanding quality but some, however, is rarely, if ever, better than satisfactory and a small amount of inadequate teaching remains.

Assessment of students' attainment and their progress has developed considerably. It is good overall, is used well and contributes to students' improving achievement. Robust systems ensure that staff have a clear picture of the extent to which students are on track to meet their targets. Arrangements to promote good behaviour and attitudes to learning and the links between pastoral and academic guidance and support have been clarified and strengthened. However, they are not yet implemented consistently at all levels in the school. Nonetheless, students know where they stand and this contributes to their increasing ambition and pride in their achievements. Underachievement is spotted promptly and packages of appropriate academic and personal support are put in place to help students get back on track. Day-to-day marking is of inconsistent quality. The school has a policy of using 'yellow stickers' which give students grades for their work and effort and indicate how they might improve their work. Students, particularly in the lower school, find this helpful. However, not all teachers use the 'yellow stickers' effectively to provide feedback to students.

The curriculum is good, with a range of enrichment activities and many extra-curricular activities, particularly in music and sport. It makes a strong contribution to pupils' good personal development, for example, in their knowledge and understanding of how to stay healthy and safe and in their development of the key skills and attributes they will need for the future.

The mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) departments undertake outreach work with primary schools and/or the local community. However, the school's specialism

is much stronger in mathematics than computing. The mathematics department had made a considerable contribution to the drive to improve the quality of teaching across the school. Furthermore, it is a successful subject in which a high proportion of pupils obtain a good pass at GCSE and a significant number opt for mathematics in the sixth form. By contrast, in ICT, though standards have begun to pick up, the 2008 GCSE results were lower than they should have been. ICT is not an integral part of teaching and learning throughout the school, partly because of shortages of resources such as interactive whiteboards.

The extent of improvements effected in a short time, the strength of the senior leadership team, and the commitment of staff at all levels show the school is well placed to continue improving.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision in the sixth form is good and students do well across the range of subjects and courses on offer. Standards have risen since the last inspection and are now above average. In 2008 the number of passes at higher grades rose significantly. Over the last three years, students have been particularly successful in mathematics, English literature and music. There are good systems for keeping track of students' progress and students receive good guidance and support to improve.

The main focus is on traditional academic courses but there is, nevertheless, an adequate range, including vocational courses, to meet students' needs and aspirations. Retention rates are high. The curriculum is enhanced by a good number and range of additional activities, for instance in music, drama and sports and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Students' views are canvassed frequently and acted on. Consequently students feel that they have a stake in the school and their views are valued.

Students' personal development is good. They willingly take on responsibilities in the school and wider community, for example, supporting younger students and pupils in local primary schools. They use unsupervised study time well, thus developing good independent work habits which prepare them well for higher education and the world of work. The school has strong links with universities and these have a positive effect on students' aspirations and choices for their futures.

The sixth form is led and managed well. It has improved since the last inspection and is expanding year-on-year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further strengthen the quality of teaching and learning so that students' achievement becomes good. In particular:
- eliminate inadequate teaching and improve the quality of satisfactory teaching so that most of it becomes good
- improve teachers' skill at providing activities that are well tailored to students' different abilities so all are challenged and make good progress

- ensure that the systems for day-to-day feedback to students are implemented consistently and that teachers tell students where they have succeeded as well as what they need to do to improve.
- In subjects that are underperforming, raise students' achievement and improve leadership and management.
- Ensure that policies and procedures that have been introduced recently are fully and consistently implemented throughout the school.
- Increase the contribution of ICT to the school's specialism.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The results of tests and examinations in 2008 show that standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 had improved from the previous year. At GCSE, overall standards were a little above the national average. The standards reached on the key measures of the proportion of students obtaining five or more good passes and those for whom these passes included English and mathematics, improved significantly and were securely above average. However, on some other measures at GCSE, for instance the percentage of students gaining five passes at any level, the school's performance was average. The school keeps close track of students' performance. It is confident that its targets will be met this year, probably exceeded by a small margin, and early indications from modular courses are promising. The school has understandably concentrated on improving key skills and on raising standards in English and mathematics. However, comparisons between subjects show that, in some, too few of the students entered obtain a good GCSE pass.

In 2008 underachievement was concentrated among the less able students. Since then a special educational needs coordinator has been appointed and the arrangements to support these pupils have improved considerably.

Taken overall, the standards reached represent satisfactory achievement when students' capabilities and above average starting points are taken into account. The 2008 leavers made much better progress in their final year than earlier in the school but the legacy of underachievement is not yet overcome in all years. Additional support in small teaching groups, especially for borderline students, has contributed to the rise in standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students see the improvement in their school, particularly in teaching and learning and in the ethos of increased commitment to achievement. They want their school to be successful and to be part of the improvement. In the main, they have positive attitudes to school life and learning and are keen to achieve. Attendance rates have improved and are now broadly average. In particular, both the proportion of students with poor attendance and the number of exclusions have reduced. Students are motivated by well taught lessons, knowing their targets, and good feedback on their progress towards meeting them. Participation rates in extra-curricular activities and school and community life are good and the take up of sports shows that students are adopting healthy lifestyles.

Students develop a good degree of maturity and responsibility and they acquire the personal attributes and social skills needed for higher education and working life. Through much of the curriculum, including personal, social and health education and, for example, support for

charitable causes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development progresses well. Students are usually well behaved, though when lessons are mundane, standards of behaviour slip for a few students. Students appreciate and respond well to the increasing opportunities to express their views about school and have constructive ideas about how to improve their life in school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

In the vast majority of cases, inspectors' observations of lessons confirmed the school's evaluations of the effectiveness of teaching. The quality of teaching and learning is much better than at the last inspection and is now good overall. In some lessons teaching and learning are outstanding but some teaching remains no better than satisfactory and the school knows that a small amount is inadequate. Improvement is the result of: additional training about up-to-date teaching methods; a strong focus on what students are learning in lessons; agreed procedures for planning lessons and marking students' work; and individually tailored support for staff where improvement is required. Many heads of departments provide a good model of effective teaching.

There are some features of teaching that were strengths in most of the lessons seen.

- Relationships between teachers and students are good.
- Teachers have secure, often very good, knowledge of their subjects.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is generally good. They work well in pairs and small groups and rise to teachers' high expectations.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well.

In the most effective lessons teachers presented challenging new work in imaginative ways that captured students' interest and enthusiasm. They made clear to students exactly what they were to learn and how they would be able to measure their success, and they conducted lessons at a brisk pace. In such lessons students have good opportunities for learning by doing and they are encouraged to think independently. In less effective lessons these good features were less evident.

Three shortcomings in particular undermine the effectiveness of some lessons. First, work is not always matched sufficiently closely to students' varied abilities and levels of attainment. This is particularly the case for more able students who are not always challenged in class lessons. Second, in some lessons teachers talk too much. As a result, question and answer sessions tend to be superficial and students do not have enough opportunity to consolidate their learning through discussion and practical work, or to develop skills of independent learning. Third, not enough use is made of ICT to extend and enhance learning.

All students receive regular feedback on how well they are meeting their targets. This is particularly effective when the school's 'yellow sticker' system is used well. However, the marking of students' work is of variable quality. Some is very helpful but often it is not clear what students have achieved and some teachers do not always follow the school's marking policy.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It covers all that is required and meets the needs of students of all abilities. For instance there is a sufficient range of vocational options and extra, challenging activities for those who are gifted or talented. Attention to the key skills of literacy and numeracy is good but the ICT curriculum has lagged behind.

The curriculum is enhanced with a good range of educational visits. There is a good number and variety of extra-curricular clubs and in music the range is especially good. The school participates in programmes to encourage more students to aspire to participation in higher education. Where students spend some of their time off-site, for example, on young apprenticeships, the timetable is coordinated effectively so they do not miss out.

The provision to promote students' physical and mental health is good and well attuned to local needs. For example, health professionals have worked with school staff to raise students' awareness of the risks of binge drinking and students are alerted to the potential pitfalls of social networking internet sites. However, the school is in the early stages of planning its overall provision for personal development. The daily time allocated for form tutors to work with students is not used well.

The school has begun to evaluate the impact of its curriculum on different groups of students. It has made some adjustments to the organisation of the curriculum and the use of time, with the aim of supporting the drive to raise standards. Further well considered changes are planned for introduction next school year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Both pastoral care and academic guidance and support are good and all requirements for safeguarding students are met. There is a strong commitment to students' achievement and well-being and staff keep a close eye on academic progress and attitudes to learning. The good assessment systems mean that any underachievement is spotted and prompt action taken to tackle it. Links between academic and pastoral support are developing well so issues underlying a student's underperformance are addressed. That said, though the role of form tutors has been enhanced, it is not fully developed or implemented consistently.

The level and coherence of support for vulnerable students, such as those with low self-esteem, the disaffected, underachievers and those with behavioural difficulties, are very good. The school's records show it has a good measure of success and several of these pupils get back on track following short term intervention programmes. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Liaison between the special educational needs coordinator and subject departments is developing well so teachers are properly aware of these students' needs.

The school is sensitive to the needs of students who are learning English as an additional language. For example, all staff have received relevant training and a member of staff has specific responsibility for these students' welfare.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher provides extremely good leadership and the school has improved rapidly under his guidance. He has set a clear direction for the school, raised expectations of pupils and staff, and released and nurtured the leadership capacity of the senior team, whose effectiveness has improved greatly. He has supported purposeful teamwork throughout the school and established a culture of ambition for the school. Roles and responsibilities are now clearly defined, morale is high and the school has a positive ethos. Staff at every level know where the school is going and they understand and accept their part in its journey of continuous improvement.

The senior leadership team has met the challenges that faced the school well, with determination and enthusiasm. Its members have responded very positively to the changes introduced by the acting headteacher and the opportunities to contribute to the school's development. This is now a cohesive and effective team, supporting the acting headteacher. Each member has clearly defined areas of responsibility for aspects of the school's work, such as developing teaching and learning, and for managing other staff with leadership and management responsibilities. They fulfil these well. The establishment of an extended leadership team has drawn a wider group of staff into the planning for future development and their contribution is developing well. The work of middle leaders has improved. In many subjects leadership and management are good and in some they are excellent. However, in a few they are not effective enough and students are underachieving. In these cases bespoke support packages are provided by senior staff. Such support has already proved successful in some cases.

Self-evaluation is rigorous and senior staff face up honestly to the areas where further improvement is needed. The inspectors found the school's performance for the most part accurately reflected its own evaluation. Leaders and managers at all levels keep a close eye on how well the school is doing, for instance by tracking students' progress, looking at their exercise books, and checking teachers' lesson plans. They take effective steps to deal with shortcomings. Equally, they are aware that there is more to do, for instance to improve aspects of teaching and to ensure that all staff implement recently introduced policies and procedures consistently.

There are several strengths in the school's contribution to community cohesion, mainly within the school and the local community and the school has a range of international links. Nonetheless, there is scope to enhance the opportunities for all pupils to meet and work with people from diverse backgrounds.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors have undertaken training and since the last inspection they have become more aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and more closely involved in monitoring its performance and progress against its improvement plan.

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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	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?	3	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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 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

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 eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	3	
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	

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

13 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Ulverston Victoria High School, LA12 0EB

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team. Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to your school. We learned a lot about the school's effectiveness from observing lessons and talking to students. We are particularly grateful to those students who gave up their break to meet with us.

I am very pleased to tell you that your school no longer needs special measures. It has improved a lot in a short time. Everyone told us that Mr Fay has made a world of difference to the school and is behind the changes for the better; we agree. Of course you, the students; the staff, particularly the senior leadership team; and the governors have all worked hard and played a part in improving the school. We judge UVHS to be a satisfactory school now. This is because the standards that you reach in most subjects are as they should be, given how well you did at primary school. You do particularly well in English and mathematics but in a few subjects standards are not high enough. We have asked the school to raise achievement in these subjects. The school has many strengths and we know that everyone wants it to become even better. We believe it is well set to do so.

You are developing into mature and responsible young people. We were impressed that you want to be part of the drive to improve the school. You can do this by contributing your views about how the school is doing and how it could be better. We were pleased to see good take up of sporting activities and improved attendance.

Teaching has improved a lot and is now good overall. The senior staff know that a number of lessons are not yet good but quite a few are outstanding. We have asked the school to make sure that, in all lessons, work is tailored to meet the range of students' abilities and to make sure that teachers use the 'yellow stickers' consistently. The school has improved the way it keeps track of your progress and uses the information to decide who needs a bit of extra help. On the whole the guidance you get to help you do well is good and so is the personal support.

You will know that UVHS has specialist status in mathematics and computing. We found that the mathematics aspect is a lot stronger than computing. So we have asked the school to strengthen ICT.

Your school is very well led and managed and the senior staff are full of ideas about how to build on what has been achieved in the last two terms. There have been a lot of changes for the staff to adjust to. They were necessary but the senior staff now need to make sure that everyone is implementing all the new policies and procedures fully and consistently.

For you, the challenge now is to keep working hard so you meet your targets and to contribute your ideas about how the school might improve.

You all have my very best wishes for a successful future.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime

Her Majesty's Inspector