

Gateacre Community Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104700
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	336350
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Leszek Iwaskow 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1370
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Brown
Headteacher	Mr Gerard Lonergan
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2007
School address	Grange Lane Gateacre Liverpool L25 4SD
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 47 lessons, observed 42 teachers and held meetings with staff, governors, students and the School Improvement Partner. They observed the school's work and looked at school policies and procedures, data and analysis about students' current and past performance, schemes of work, subject leaders' files, students' work, lesson plans, monitoring reports and 28 questionnaires returned from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- attainment and progress across a range of subjects to determine improvement since the last inspection
- the quality of learning to determine whether teaching has improved since the last inspection and whether it meets the needs of all students and enables them to succeed
- the effectiveness of leaders, including middle managers, in planning for and managing change and improvement
- the breadth and quality of the curriculum, particularly in the sixth form, to determine whether it is meeting the needs of all students
- what is being done to improve attendance.

Information about the school

Gateacre Community Comprehensive is much larger than an average-sized secondary school. Demographic changes have led to falling rolls since the previous inspection. The school currently serves a widespread and mixed community. Most students are of White British heritage and have English as their first language. Although the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is low, it is steadily growing. There are significantly more boys than girls. A high percentage of students are known to be entitled to free school meals. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also above the national average, although there is a lower than average number of students with a statement of special educational needs. The school is a local authority resourced base for a very small number of students with visual impairment. It was designated as a specialist school for combined arts and humanities in September 2005. Students are due to move into new purpose-built premises in September 2011.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Gateacre Comprehensive School provides a satisfactory but improving education for its students. The school has come through a difficult period of upheaval and changes in staffing. The leadership team is clearly focused and has provided a strong steer in driving through changes which have transformed the culture of the school. The atmosphere is more forward looking and teaching and the curriculum are being transformed to meet the needs of students better. The school is well managed and led and is in a strong position to make the best use of the new purpose-built facilities it will move into next year. The establishment of a strong leadership team and the restructuring of responsibilities have been central to the task of driving forward improvements. There is a clear vision linked to a good understanding of the areas where the school needs to improve. However, many of the current managers are new in post or relatively inexperienced. As a result, capacity for improvement is currently judged to be satisfactory. When reorganisation is finally completed later this year the school should be in an even stronger position to accelerate progress.

Attainment in 2009 GCSE examinations was low. However, there is increasingly strong evidence to show that the school has turned the corner; progress is clearly being made in many subjects and many areas and attainment is beginning to rise. Evidence from lessons and results from recently taken examinations clearly show that strategies aimed at improving outcomes for students are having an impact. Although weaknesses still remain in some areas, teaching is becoming increasingly effective in improving learning and driving up standards. The role of 'progress leaders' has been critical in identifying where support is needed and what form of support should be offered. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly well supported and make progress that is at least similar to their peers and is sometimes good. Progress of different groups of students shows no significant variation.

There is now greater accountability and more rigorous monitoring of both teaching and students' work. There remain some inconsistencies in teaching across the school but inspectors agree that an increasing proportion is good. Students have commented positively about the changes taking place. They are satisfied with the broadening range of courses offered at Key Stage 4, including vocational courses which better meet the needs of students. Increasing numbers are staying on at school post-16 or progress into further training. The school is successfully beginning to raise students' aspirations and make them more aware of the range of opportunities open to them if they work hard at their studies.

The school provides a close, caring community in which students feel safe and comfortable. They appreciate the high quality support that many of them receive. Many

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of the staff go out of their way to give time, advice and support where it is needed. Students enjoy taking responsibility and they talked with pride about what they had achieved in their local community. They expressed real hopes about their new school and what it would mean to them and the community. Attendance, while improving, is low and remains an issue. The school has been more successful in addressing this issue in the sixth form where students are motivated to come to school by the good quality education on offer. In the main school a small number of lessons are still disrupted by a small minority of students who are demotivated or challenging.

The school is now at a crossroads. There is a 'can do' culture developing and new subject leaders and managers are motivated to show what can be achieved. The governing body is supportive and involved. As one student commented about her future 'I can't wait to get into the new school – things are looking up!' – a clear reference to a potentially brighter future.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and increase the progress that students make by:
 - building on recent improvements in teaching and learning so that most lessons are consistently good or better
 - embedding the better practice evident in many examination classes more fully throughout the whole school
 - engaging and challenging students more fully to further minimise disruption in lessons
 - improving the consistency and accuracy of assessment, and make better use of assessment information, including marking, so that students are clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Improve attendance by:
 - building more productive partnerships with the parents and carers of those students most at risk
 - making coming to school for these harder to reach students a more rewarding, worthwhile and positive experience
 - employing greater rigour in challenging poor attendance.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Most students have a good attitude to school, enjoy the greater majority of their lessons and are positive about the improvements being made. In particular, they praised the increasing opportunities in many subjects of being able to work collaboratively and develop practical skills. Where teaching is less interesting, students are often too

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compliant, do not take part actively unless directed by the teacher and a small minority misbehave.

While inspectors agree with the school that attainment based on the past three years' data is low, the picture is more complex and there are strong indications that attainment is now improving. The impact of a range of strategies aimed at improving standards is beginning to influence outcomes positively. Lessons observed and students' work seen during the inspection clearly indicate that attainment is improving and is currently broadly average. This is reinforced by results from early entry to GCSE examinations as well as modules of work already completed in Years 10 and 11. Equally, attainment in Key Stage 3 is also improving and outcomes are now satisfactory and broadly in line with national expectations. The school is proud of the fact that a strong and successful emphasis is placed on ensuring that all students leave with evidence of external accreditation.

Students' attainment on entry is below average. Overall, learning and progress are satisfactory and improving due to specific intervention support, particularly in mathematics, but also for students across the full ability range. Those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall but for some it is good. Ongoing reorganisation of subject responsibilities is also beginning to have an impact on students' progress and attainment in an increasing number of subject areas. For example, in geography attainment has accelerated from 20% of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE in 2008 to 53% in 2009 and is confidently expected to rise above the national average this year.

Students understand the need stay healthy; many choose to do so and a majority also take part in regular extra-curricular sporting activities. Students reported that they feel safe in school and acknowledged that staff strive to act quickly to sort out disagreements. Poor attendance remains a priority for the school. It has rapidly improved in the sixth form, but progress is slower elsewhere because the school does not challenge poor attendance sufficiently. This limits opportunities for future employment for a small minority of students. The majority, however, benefit from the growing range of more personalised academic and vocational pathways to develop their workplace skills and most find work or choose to stay on in school post-16. Numbers of students who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) are low for the area. The school specialism promotes good links with the wider school community and students contribute to a wide range of activities, especially linked to art, music and drama. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also enhanced through a range of subjects, notably the humanities, religious education and personal, social and health education and citizenship (PSHCE). Students have a growing awareness of their own personal responsibilities and of the world around them through their studies of a range of ethical and cultural topics linked to diversity, interdependence, poverty, prejudice and relationships.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

While much good teaching was observed, overall teaching and learning are satisfactory. This is because, although there is an improving trend, there remain small pockets of poorer practice. The hard work and training which has been put into lesson planning is beginning to bear fruit. Where teaching is good, clear lesson plans support a variety of activities which inject pace into the lesson. Learning is often active and teachers make good use of resources such as information and communication technology to bring learning to life visually. There are clear links identified to specific learning outcomes and assessment is being used more effectively to inform students of what they specifically need to do to improve performance. In exceptional cases assessment invites comments from parents and carers to involve them directly in encouraging and supporting their children's progress. This is best developed in a few examination classes. In the weaker lessons observed mundane tasks often occupied students and did not engage or challenge. Work was often considered easy or irrelevant and led to poor attitudes to learning and in a small minority of cases to disruptive behaviour. Marking and feedback remains inconsistent across the school and work set does not always take into account students' differing learning needs.

The curriculum is still evolving but is of overall good quality. Apart from the experimental integrated studies course in Year 7, which focuses on developing personal learning and thinking skills, the curriculum is well matched to students' needs and

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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interests, and meets requirements. Although students enjoy aspects of the integrated course, the leisurely pace of the activities in lessons and the lack of depth to the eventual outcomes mean that these lessons are occupying rather than challenging students and are not the most effective use of classroom time. There is an increasingly flexible curriculum in place in Key Stage 4 which allows students to choose more academic or vocational pathways and even 'mix and match' courses. There is a wide range of option choices including BTEC and OCR vocational courses. Good partnerships have been established with the local authority and nearby schools to enable an increasing number of students to access off-site, alternative provision including young apprenticeships, college and work-based placements. There is a strong focus on communal partnership. Visually impaired students are fully integrated into the mainstream curriculum and good provision was observed during the inspection which fully supported their learning. As part of its inclusion commitment, the school subsidises many of the enrichment visits to ensure that as many students as possible benefit from these opportunities to visit theatres, institutions and places of interest both locally and further afield.

There is a clear pastoral structure which supports students well. The relationships with, and use of, external agencies to support students is also exceptionally good. Transition arrangements between years and across Key Stages are good and a vibrant induction programme gives students a positive start to Year 7. Good guidance for option choices and careers is appreciated by students, many of whom stay on into the sixth form. 'Learning zones' are being used effectively to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or specific behavioural or emotional needs. Students benefiting from this support were very positive about the care they have received. As one stated enthusiastically, 'The Learning Zone is great – you can work there if you can't work in lessons.' Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive particularly good care and attention and this has a significant impact on their well-being, confidence and self-esteem. The school is rightly proud of the fact that it retains many students in education. Progress leaders, particularly in Years 10 and 11, have a good overview of the students in their year groups and are starting to make better use of academic data and to link this to more effective support and pastoral guidance. This is becoming a key factor in the improving trend in students' progress and attainment.

Although the school knows the individual circumstances of why students do not attend school, strategies to work with these students and their families to raise attendance and punctuality are not robust enough.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership of teaching and learning has had significant impact, with the number of lessons which are now good having almost doubled in the last three years as middle managers have been empowered and taken greater responsibility to improve provision in their subjects.

There is a clear and shared ambitious vision for the future with a strong focus on inclusion and meeting the needs of the diverse student community. The school meets current requirements to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination. The role of middle managers is being developed with a clear emphasis on monitoring and evaluation reinforced by a clear system of line management. This is clearly focusing on improving teaching. The school sets challenging targets, including specialist targets, which are usually met. There is an extensive system for monitoring progress on a regular basis that takes into account the performance of significant groups. However, intervention strategies are better developed in examination classes. There has been good improvement in monitoring of teaching, improved capacity to make judgements and to support improvement. Training of staff in lesson planning has had an impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising achievement, although the strategies established have yet to have a full impact in some areas.

The governing body is well aware of organisational and staffing issues and the barriers to learning which have hampered progress in the past. Governors are fully supportive of the changes which are being initiated and are becoming more involved in strategic priorities such as curriculum and staffing reorganisation.

The school is committed to involving parents and carers in the education of their children but the strategies are yet to fully engage. Parents and carers receive regular reports on their children's progress which are linked to review days and a regular system of information evenings. However, this current dialogue is informative rather than engaging parents and carers to become more active partners in their children's learning.

Safeguarding is robust, with clear policies in place and comprehensive training for all staff which is regularly updated. The school is proactive in promoting safeguarding awareness for students, particularly e-safety. Safeguarding is also clearly built into the curriculum through the PSHCE curriculum and specific pastoral days which focus on raising awareness of a specific issue, for example knife crime. The school has well-established links with outside agencies to support students with regard to aspects such as mental health, drug or smoking addiction and support for young mothers.

Partnerships with charities, schools, higher education institutions and business are well established. Links with contrasting schools are at an early stage of development and, despite some good opportunities through the curriculum to promote community cohesion, the school understands that further work is required to promote students' understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form is much improved, is growing in popularity and outcomes for the greater majority of students are good. Since the previous inspection there has been a radical overhaul of management and the curriculum which has resulted in a transformation of provision. New leadership has had a very strong impact on changing the culture of the sixth form into a 'learning' culture. There is an awareness of weaknesses and a relentless drive to improve outcomes. Although there is some variation across subjects, weaknesses are being tackled and over 80% of subjects are showing good progress. Weaker performance in science is being tackled and improvements are predicted.

Rates of attendance are high and improving. Monitoring of attendance encourages students to remain on site and study periods are registered. Students comment very positively about routines, discipline and rewards for positive attitude. They consider that the atmosphere is more 'workmanlike'. Students make a strong, positive contribution to the life of the school, acting as mentors and sports leaders, and they are actively involved in charity work as well as work in the wider community. The curriculum is good and inclusive and encourages students who might not normally stay on at school to participate in a range of courses such as hospitality or media which better meet their individual needs. A broad range of academic and vocational courses are offered. Students are very positive about the quality of provision and support that they receive. The noticeable changes that have been initiated over the last two years, the improved progress of students and the strong sense of community that has evolved show that, despite some areas which are less strong, there is good capacity for further improvement.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

There were very few returned questionnaires from parents and carers. Most of those who responded were positive about the care the school provided and were generally supportive. A very few raised individual concerns about lack of homework and behaviour. Inspectors identified that poor behaviour was an issue in a minority of lessons.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Gateacre Community Comprehensive School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 28 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1370 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	43	15	54	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	36	18	64	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	11	39	15	54	1	4	1	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	39	16	57	0	0	1	4
The teaching is good at this school	10	36	17	61	0	0	1	4
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	36	14	50	2	7	1	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	6	21	21	75	1	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	9	32	18	64	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	32	16	57	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	7	25	13	46	7	25	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	32	16	57	3	11	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	36	18	64	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	54	12	43	1	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



27 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Gateacre Community Comprehensive School, Liverpool, L25 4SD

Thank you for making me and the other inspectors welcome in your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your experiences in lessons, what you enjoyed and how you were treated and looked after. You frequently asked us what we thought about your school and this letter is our reply to tell you what we have found. We observed lessons in many of your classes and looked at a lot of your work. This led us to the conclusion that your school is improving and currently provides you with a satisfactory education. Although your school does many things well, there are other aspects which still need to be improved in order to make your stay in the school a much more rewarding experience.

You identified that you were pleased with the changes that are taking place in your school. You are enjoying many more of your lessons and feel that you get a good range of options to choose from at both GCSE and in the sixth form. You are rightly proud of your achievements, but results in examinations could be even better, particularly at GCSE. In order to improve examination results, we have asked your teachers to focus on making your lessons more challenging and even more engaging. They are also going to ensure that they provide you with clearer information when marking your work to inform you better of what you must do to improve. You also need to play your part by ensuring that you concentrate in lessons, make a greater effort to improve your work and do not let the small minority of disruptive students spoil your life chances.

In speaking with you we found that a large number of you have real ambitions to do well. Many of you stay on in the sixth form or go onto other training. However, attendance at school remains an issue and is particularly poor for a small number of you. If you don't come to lessons you will find it particularly hard to do well in your examinations. We have asked the school to make attendance a priority and be more rigorous in tackling absentees. You enjoy challenges and we are sure that you will respond positively to ensure that your school continues to improve. We are sure you will give your teachers all the help and support they need to build on the strong foundations that are being established by Mr Lonergan and his team.

Yours sincerely

Mr Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector

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