Lord Lawson of Beamish Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108403
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	337067
Inspection dates	5–6 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Hancock 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	1534
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	282
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Albert Leaf
Headteacher	Mr David Grigg
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Birtley Lane Birtley County Durham DH3 2LP
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 36 lessons and held meetings with governors and staff. They met and talked with students in lessons and around the school. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at questionnaires completed by parents, students and staff. Students' work and school documentation such as safeguarding information and records of students' progress were examined.

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

- achievement in English and mathematics
- learning and progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels.
- the quality of marking and assessment practice.

Information about the school

Lord Lawson is larger than similar schools and has specialist status for the arts and applied learning. It recently moved into new buildings. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and those who do not speak English as their first language is below average. Many students come from average social and economic circumstances. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that normally found.

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?	**2**
The school's capacity for sustained improvement	**2**

Main findings

Lord Lawson is a good school with an outstanding sixth form. Students are proud of their school and feel safe and well cared for. It is held in high regard by parents and as one wrote, 'I am extremely impressed with the variety of education available and the incentive to do well in all subjects'. The performance of the school has fluctuated since the last inspection during a time of high staff turnover and a move to new buildings. Attainment in English and mathematics fell in 2007 and 2008. Results improved in 2009 as a result of action taken by the school. Attainment is now above average and students make good progress from average starting points.

Achievement is good. The quality of learning is good and students enjoy their lessons. The school has identified raising achievement in English and mathematics as a top priority and is implementing a rigorous programme for improvement. The effects of this can clearly be seen in the better progress of current students, for example, the progress of more-able boys. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn well and make good progress as a result of the good individual support they receive.

The school's specialist status has made a significant contribution to the good curriculum. The scope of the work-related learning programme is wider and many Year 10 and Year 11 students spend one day per week on work-related courses, including local placements. The quality of teaching is good overall and particularly successful where teachers plan for a variety of activities that engage and interest their students. When the quality of teaching is not as high, work is not always regularly marked and students do not know how to improve their work.

Behaviour is good and students are keen to learn. Attendance is above average. The school's strategy to promote community cohesion at local, national and international levels is satisfactory. The care guidance and support for students are outstanding. Another outstanding feature is the contribution made by students to the school and the community.

The school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its work are not sufficiently effective to ensure accountability at all levels for the outcomes achieved by students. Governance is satisfactory. However, senior leaders are making sure the school continues to improve and standards and achievement are rising. Strong leadership has steered the school through the disruption associated with the move into a new school building. Senior leaders now have a more accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Hence, capacity for further improvement is good. Links with a range of communities make a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. Resources are effectively deployed and value for money is good.

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The sixth form is outstanding as it was at the time of the last inspection. Leadership and management are outstanding and students make excellent progress. Teaching and learning is consistently good and a significant proportion is outstanding. The curriculum meets the needs of students exceptionally well and the care taken of the students ensure they are well prepared for the challenges they face after leaving school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement in English and mathematics by:
  - raising the percentage of students gaining 5 or more A* to C including English and mathematics to 70% by 2011.
- Improve the quality teaching by ensuring that:
  - all work is regularly marked
  - the school's assessment strategies are consistently applied
  - all students know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Ensure accountability at all levels for the outcomes achieved by students by:
  - monitoring outcomes more rigorously and holding all leaders to account.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils 2

Achievement is good and students do very well in the arts, sciences, and vocational subjects. Attainment is above average. Students start at the school with standards that are broadly average. They make good progress particularly in Year 10 and Year 11. Achievement and results in English and mathematics are lower.

There has been a significant improvement in 2009. Challenging targets were met and exceeded with 85% of students gaining five or more GCSE A*to C results. Fifty three per cent of students gained five or more higher grades in GCSE, including in English and mathematics. The school is taking effective action to raise achievement in both subjects. The school's strongly inclusive ethos results in different groups of students, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds or with special educational needs and/or disabilities, making good progress.

Students enjoy their learning and are eager to do well in lessons especially when they are actively involved. Students respond particularly well when they see a practical application to what they are learning. Behaviour is good and students feel safe in school. They have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet and lifestyle. The proportion regularly taking part in physical and sporting activities is high. The curriculum makes a good contribution to students' future economic well-being, although students' literacy and numeracy skills are weaker.

Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community through their charitable activities and extensive links with the local community. For example, Year 12 students mentor Year 7 students and help them with their work. Attendance is good. Student responses through the arts and collective worship show

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that their spiritual and cultural development is very well developed. They have a highly developed sense of social and moral responsibility.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a common system when planning lessons. The good relationships which teachers have with their students create a positive learning environment. However, there is a lack of consistency in assessment practice which limits quality and achievement from being higher.

The most successful teaching uses a range of activities which include practical work and independent research which is challenging to students of all abilities. The teaching is less successful when teachers do not use information on performance to plan for the diverse needs of students. The marking of students' work is inconsistent and sometimes not regular enough. Assessment procedures are not always consistently applied to make sure all students know what they need to do to improve their work.

The curriculum is well designed and personalised to meet the needs of individuals 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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groups of students. The work-related curriculum is a particular strength and is enhanced by the partnerships and support which arise from the school's specialist status. Outstanding care, guidance and support help students to make the best of the opportunities the school offers. The school involves other agencies very successfully to ensure students' diverse needs are met.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	**2** 3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	**2**
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	**1**

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels have a shared vision and an understanding of the key priorities for the school. The senior team is providing the capacity to focus more effectively on improving teaching and learning, especially in the weaker subjects, such as English and mathematics. The school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its work are not always sufficiently robust to ensure accountability at all levels for the outcomes achieved by students. Part of the school's evaluation of its performance was accurate, although some aspects of the school's evaluation were too positive.

All forms of discrimination and barriers to learning are effectively tackled and the school's promotion of equality of opportunity is good. Community cohesion is effectively encouraged within the school and local community. The school acknowledges there is work to be done, for example, completing an audit and fully evaluating the effectiveness with which it promotes community cohesion.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and as a result students feel safe. Staff work closely with a range of agencies to ensure the safety of more vulnerable children.

The governing body fulfills its statutory requirements and has constructive relationships with staff. Governors are not fully and systematically involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the school. Resources have been well used to develop the learning environment in the new building and value for money is good.

Partnerships to promote learning and well-being are good. The engagement of the school with parents and carers is outstanding. Their views are fully taken into account and high quality information is provided in order to involve parents and carers in decisions about students' individual learning, well-being and development.

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	**3**
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	**1**
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	**2**
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	**2**
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	**2**

Sixth form

The sixth form provides an outstanding education where students achieve highly and make excellent progress. Students frequently attain examination results that are excellent, given their starting points in Year 12. They are exceptionally well taught in lessons where teachers use their subject knowledge to involve students in discussion and making rapid gains in their own thoughts and ideas. Lessons are well structured to ensure progress is rigorously assessed to give an accurate picture of how well they are doing.

The excellent curriculum meets the needs of students through a wide range of vocational and academic courses. The outstanding care and support enjoyed by students is highly valued. They act as mentors to younger students and are involved in challenging activities out of school through their community service. Outstanding leadership of the sixth form makes a significant impact on improving outcomes. Robust tracking procedures inform teaching, learning and assessment very effectively. Communication between parents and carers is excellent and students find the strong links very supportive.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	**1**
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

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Views of parents and carers

The response from the vast majority of parents and carers agreed that they were happy with their child's experience at the school. There were no particular trends in the small number of criticisms received. Parents see the school as very caring and supportive which is well led and managed. Parents said that the school keeps their children safe.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Lord Lawson of Beamish Community 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 200 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,534 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	68	34	125	63	4	2	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	101	51	94	47	4	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	81	41	102	51	10	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	79	40	102	51	6	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	78	39	115	58	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	69	35	112	56	9	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	29	127	64	12	6	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)	78	39	104	52	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	34	123	62	5	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	77	39	98	49	13	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	57	29	118	59	7	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	95	48	98	49	4	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	110	55	89	45	1	1	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 oustanding 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	**Outstanding**	**Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Inadequate**
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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:	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. ■ 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.

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9 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Lord Lawson of Beamish Community School, Birtley, DH3 2LP

Thank you for all your help when I inspected the school with my colleagues. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- Lord Lawson is a good school with an outstanding sixth form.
- You make good progress and your results are above average.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- You feel safe and the care, guidance, and support you receive are outstanding.
- Strong leadership has steered the school through the disruption associated with the building of and move into a new school.

Your teachers and the staff want to make the school even better. To help them do this, I have asked if they would:

- further improve achievement in English and mathematics
- ensure you always know what to do to improve your work
- monitor the school's performance more rigorously
- ensure that the school's assessment strategies are consistently applied.

I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hancock HMI

Lead inspector

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