

Garstang High School : A Community Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119747
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	339523
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Andrew Johnson 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 of pupils on the school roll	745
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tom Ibison
Headteacher	Mr Philip Birch
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2006
School address	Bowgreave Garstang Preston PR3 1YE
Telephone number	01995 603226
Fax number	01995 601655
Email address	pbirch@garstanghigh.lancs.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent the great majority of their time in lessons looking at teaching and learning. In total they visited 45 lessons, seeing around two thirds of the teaching staff. An assembly was also observed. Meetings were held with governors, staff and groups of students. A variety of documentation including samples of students' work and the school's self-evaluation and planning documents was examined. In addition 282 parental questionnaires, 144 student questionnaires and 70 staff questionnaires were scrutinised.

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

- whether the trend of improvement in achievement, identified at the previous inspection, has been maintained for individuals and various groups of students, with particular focus on English and mathematics
- if the school's assessment of the progress being made by students in lessons is accurate
- given the school's particular circumstances, how successful it is in promoting equality and developing community cohesion.

Information about the school

Garstang High School is a smaller than average community technology college. Students live in the small town of Garstang or the surrounding rural area on the southern edge of Lancaster. Almost all are White British. Though there are selective schools in the area, the school has as many higher ability students as would be found in most comprehensive schools. There is a smaller than average proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school offers a variety of extended activities to members of the local community. Significant building work is in progress to develop a new school sports hall that will be used in the wider community. The school has been recognised for its work in a variety of areas and holds the Sportsmark, Rural dimension award, Artsmark (silver), Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS) certificate, Healthy Schools and the Arkwright awards.

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

In the last five years this school has taken great strides in improving outcomes for students and the quality of its provision. It is a good school and is in a strong position to fulfil its ambition to become outstanding. The improvements have been driven by the excellent leadership of the headteacher and senior leadership team. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and staff morale is high. Students gain well above average grades in most subjects at GCSE and above average grades in English and mathematics. Their behaviour is mature and they enjoy coming to school.

Attendance is above average. Students are very well prepared for their future education or employment. Equality of opportunity is promoted well with students demonstrating respect for each other and their teachers. The school is an extremely inclusive community where all are valued and supported whatever their aptitudes or abilities.

Despite this extremely positive picture, the leaders of the school readily accept that there is still work to be done. Primarily, this involves ensuring that the trend of improvement across many aspects of the school's work is sustained consistently year on year. Middle managers are good at responding to the occasional drop in performance. However, they are not as effective in predicting where problems might occur and intervening before the impact on students becomes too significant. For example, in 2009 there was a decline in the attainment of students in mathematics. The reasons for this have now been identified and progress has been improved. Attendance, which has been generally high, fell slightly in 2009 and again this has been rectified.

In the majority of lessons students make good progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding. The school has accurately identified where the best learning takes place and plans to spread the outstanding practice seen in some subjects more widely. Teachers plan lessons well and usually set different targets for different groups of students. However, in some lessons they do not ensure that activities are varied according to students' ability. Therefore, in a small minority of lessons tasks do not challenge the most able or support those with additional learning needs. Students are very clear about their targets, levels of progress and what they need to do to improve. Marking is done frequently, although there is some variation in the impact this has on motivating students to take care with their handwriting, spelling, grammar and general presentation.

The curriculum provides an appropriate mix of academic and vocational subjects. The introduction of more vocational subjects has had a very positive impact on improving the levels of enjoyment and achievement of some groups of students. Specialist technology status ensures that the resources teachers use are good. Students gain high level technological skills which prepare them well for the world of work. Participation rates in

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extra-curricular activities at lunchtime and after school are very high. Students highlight this as a particular strength of the school. Literacy and numeracy skills are used in many lessons; however, the approaches teachers use to support students vary widely in their impact and because of this some students improve their skills and others do not.

Students are provided with excellent care, guidance and support and, as a result, they feel extremely safe and secure. The arrangements to ensure there is a smooth transition from primary schools and to colleges are very strong. Partnerships with local schools and colleges are excellent. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress both academically and in their personal development. They benefit from the support of a wide range of specialist agencies, although on occasions, the support they receive in lessons is not sufficiently focused on learning rather than on the social and emotional aspects of their development.

The self-evaluation process accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the recent decline in attainment in mathematics and English has been identified and quickly resolved. There is an extremely detailed development plan, which although addressing the correct priorities for improvement, is not sufficiently sharp or accessible to staff and governors. Governors are passionate about their role in supporting the school and have the ability to hold leaders to account where necessary. The school plays an important role in developing the community cohesion of its immediate neighbourhood and by its extended activities is valued by many community partners. However, some work does not yet allow students to have a wide enough experience of what it is like to live in a multicultural society and to gain a good awareness of race equality issues. The clear trend of improvement and track record of leaders clearly demonstrates that the school has a good capacity to improve and provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain the general trend of improvement in outcomes for students, and in particular in English and mathematics, by:
 - planning changes to the curriculum more carefully
 - developing a whole-school approach to teaching literacy and numeracy
 - making sure that the tasks students are given during lessons are more closely matched to their abilities.
- Realise its vision to become an outstanding school, by:
 - consolidating the improvements made to middle leadership
 - sharpening the school development plan
 - extending the range and number of activities that build students' understanding of life in multicultural Britain.

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When students join the school their levels of attainment are broadly average. They make good progress in Key Stage 3. When they leave school the proportion who gain five A* to C grades at GCSE is well above average and has improved steadily since the last inspection. When English and mathematics are included the results remain above average, but not by such a large margin and with a less consistent pattern of improvement. Standards are above average in most subjects and progress is good in most lessons because students are allowed to learn at their own pace. Students develop the best skills, deeper understanding and greater knowledge in lessons where more challenging and varied tasks are set. This is particularly the case for the most able learners when it enables them to reach their full potential and enjoy their work. Students' learning was satisfactory rather than good in lessons where staff overly controlled the pace of activities and levels of enthusiasm were markedly lower. All groups of students make good progress over time although girls tend to gain higher standards than boys in most subjects. The school is aware of this issue and the gap is beginning to close. The small proportion of students who are eligible for a free school meal tend to be less successful in examinations than their peers, although once again the school is making a significant impact in closing this gap. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same good progress as their peers. Students feel extremely safe and are very confident in the ability of adults to deal with any concerns they have. They are aware that any form of bullying will not be tolerated and such incidents are very rare. Students have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and most participate enthusiastically in physical activities. They know the benefits of a healthy diet although some cannot resist choosing less healthy food options. Students readily volunteer for responsible roles, for example, as prefects or mentors to younger students. Over recent years the school has been highly successful in reducing the number of students who leave and do not go on to further education, employment or training to almost zero.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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	1

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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Pupils' behaviour	2
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 Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school has a high proportion of good teachers who enable students to make good progress and reach their potential. Relationships with students are based upon a mutual respect and there are very few examples of disruptive behaviour. Students are given very clear guidance about what their targets are, their current levels and what they need to do to improve. Books are well marked, although in some subjects less care is taken to ensure that students' good work is recognised and rewarded. Lesson plans clearly identify what is expected of different groups of students and often contain higher aspirations for the more-able. However, on a few occasions inspectors saw lessons where despite this, most students learnt the same thing and were not allowed to go at their own pace by the teacher. Teaching assistants provide good support for students. On a few occasions, inspectors observed situations where support was not provided in a more subtle way or where it might have been reduced to test out the ability of individuals to cope more independently.

The curriculum contributes well to outcomes for students. For example, the newly introduced vocational programmes are very effective in supporting the development of students' workplace skills. Courses are carefully matched to the different needs and aptitudes of students. The school specialism makes a significant contribution to enhancing the provision. Participation in out-of-hours activities are high. Despite these strengths, some aspects of the curriculum, such as a whole-school approach to the development of literacy and numeracy, are less well developed.

Excellent pastoral support leads to good behaviour and a very positive and welcoming atmosphere within the school. The levels of exclusions from school and from lessons have been reduced and are very low. When students are removed from mainstream lessons they receive excellent support in small groups or on a one-to-one basis in the 'Greenhouse' inclusion centre. Very effective guidance on future career options results in almost no students leaving the school without going onto further education or employment. Systems to monitor and ensure regular attendance have been improved and ensure that current levels of attendance are high and the proportion of students who are persistently absent is very low.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He has an ambitious long-term vision for the school and is given strong support by his senior leadership team. Middle leaders have also played a pivotal role in raising standards and driving the school forward, although on occasions they have not been consistently successful in maintaining improvements from year to year. Governors provide the right balance of support and challenge to the headteacher and staff.

Senior leaders know the school very well and monitor and evaluate all aspects of its work very effectively. Challenging targets are set and the system used for monitoring groups of students' progress is robust and well used. There is an effective system for lesson observation that ensures teachers are clear about the strengths and areas for development in lessons. High-quality professional development has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching and learning across the school, although there is still a little inconsistency between departments.

Garstang High makes a good contribution to community cohesion. The school community is drawn from a rather narrow range of backgrounds but efforts have been made to expand students' horizons. There is a particularly successful inter-generational project. An initial analysis of the community has led to an outline plan to develop the school's response to community cohesion and analysis of this initiative is planned for the end of the year. In the meantime, the school continues to respond well to the promotion of equality and diversity whilst recognising that even more could be done to develop students' awareness of the implications of cultural diversity.

Procedures to ensure safeguarding are good and follow all current government guidance. Site safety is under review as a result of the expansion of the sports facilities and thorough risk assessments are planned before the new centre opens.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<p>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning</p>	2
	2
<p>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</p>	2

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The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Inspectors received questionnaire responses from almost half of the parents and carers and the overwhelming majority were entirely positive about their views of the school. Very few parents and carers made negative comments. The main concerns were the support parents and carers were given to help their children to learn and the response of the school in ensuring children led healthy lifestyles. Inspectors found that the schools' response to all aspects of these issues was good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Garstang High School : A Community Technology College 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 282 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 745 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	115	41	159	56	7	2	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	135	48	142	50	3	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	119	42	149	53	14	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	122	43	141	50	17	6	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	104	37	165	59	8	3	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	80	28	164	58	23	8	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	74	26	181	64	18	6	1	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)	105	37	147	52	7	2	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	109	39	154	55	13	5	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	126	45	137	49	13	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	68	24	181	64	16	6	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	143	51	122	43	6	2	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	138	49	128	45	10	4	2	1

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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:	<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.



5 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Garstang High School: A Community Technology College, Preston PR3 1YE

Thank you for welcoming us during the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views. Thank you also to those of you who completed the questionnaires to share your opinions. You told us that almost all of you enjoy school, particularly the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities that are available, and that you feel extremely safe and well cared for.

Inspectors agreed with the school that most of you are making good progress because teaching is good and there is a good choice of subjects to meet your needs. We think the guidance and support you get is outstanding and this is reflected in your good behaviour and high levels of attendance.

The headteacher is doing a great job in moving the school forward and there are already plans in place for further improvements. The school has come a very long way in the last five years. We have tried to help by making some suggestions; we think the school plans could be improved by:

- ensuring all teachers are aware of your need to develop literacy and numeracy skills, particularly when devising work and marking books
- making sure that all tasks in lessons are tailored to meet your individual needs
- further developing your awareness of the different cultures and communities within the United Kingdom.

We are sure you will continue to make a good positive contribution to the school and will want to support this improvement.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Johnson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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