

Upper Wharfedale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121690
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	340002
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Wendy Ripley 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	284
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Shelagh Marshall
Headteacher	Mrs Rosalyn Rees
Date of previous school inspection	5 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors, one of whom reviewed the safeguarding procedures in the school. The inspectors visited 15 lessons and held discussions with governors, senior and middle leaders, and teachers and support staff who work in the school as well as staff from partner organisations. They reviewed a number of case files that illustrated how the school works in partnership with parents and other agencies to support vulnerable students. Inspectors also spoke with the students in lessons and around the school, in addition to holding three more formal meetings with students representing different age groups. The inspectors looked at 78 parents and carers' questionnaires, 23 staff and 97 student questionnaires. A range of school documentation was read, including details relating to safeguarding procedures in place at the school.

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

- current standards and progress of students across the school
- the impact of teaching and the curriculum on students' learning and progress
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in driving school improvement
- the extent to which the school promotes community cohesion and equality of opportunity.

Information about the school

Upper Wharfedale is a very popular and oversubscribed non-selective school within an area that operates a selective system. It is a much smaller than the average 11 to 16 secondary school, with a higher proportion of boys than is usually found. Nearly all students are of White British heritage. Students are drawn from generally socially advantaged areas although there are pockets of rural deprivation. The catchment area for the school is around 400 square miles and some students travel up to 20 miles from remote Dales farms and villages. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who hold a statement of special educational needs, is above the national average and rising. The school has Global School, Fairtrade and Healthy Schools status, and has achieved local authority quality marks for careers and guidance and inclusion.

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

Upper Wharfedale is a good school with a number of outstanding features. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and have great faith in it because it is, as reflected in this typical comment, 'very friendly, welcoming and caring with approachable, capable staff who genuinely desire nothing but the best for the students'. The vast majority of students are confident, courteous and thoroughly enjoy learning. They are fiercely proud of their achievements and their school. Their determination to succeed and make the most of all that the school provides is evident in the sense of purpose they exude, their exemplary behaviour and outstanding attendance levels.

A determined focus on raising standards has had a positive impact on students' attainment. Standards have risen and show a strong pattern of sustained improvement in almost all subjects over the past three years. In science, however, standards have dipped recently and are lower than those in English and mathematics. School leaders have robust plans in place to tackle this. Provisional examination results for 2009 show that the school met its target for the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grade A* to C including English and mathematics. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C increased to 75% and a record number of students achieved three or more A* and A grades at GCSE level. In the school's sports specialism there was a 100% success rate with 70% of passes at A* and A grade. These results represent students' above average attainment and good progress given their starting points.

The quality of teaching also shows an improving trend year on year. It is good or better in the large majority of lessons. Consequently, most students including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress by the end of Year 11, although the progress made by a small number of students, particularly the more able, could be increased further. Particular strengths of the teaching include the way that students are active and engaged participants in their learning and the skilful use of questioning techniques which very effectively encourage students to make full and considered responses and to ask questions of each other. This extends their thinking and understanding as well as their self-confidence. Additional learning support in the classroom is not as effective as it could be because teaching assistants are not fully involved in planning and monitoring the impact of the support they provide. Assessment information is used effectively to plan classroom activities but it is not always used confidently and accurately enough to ensure that lessons are pitched at the right levels of challenge for particular groups. The use and quality of marking to help students know how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve their work is variable.

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The range of subjects and qualifications on offer has expanded enormously. This has been achieved through links with other education providers and the local business and enterprise partnership, carefully planned staff changes and effective staff development. The curriculum makes an outstanding contribution to the students' enjoyment and towards the raising of achievement. It provides excellent opportunities for students to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the wider world and enriches their skills for the world of work. Global school activities add an exciting international dimension. Students value the range of extra-curricular activities and these are well attended. The rapid pace of change and the small number of staff in the school means that some curriculum planning is not yet as comprehensive as it could be and there is scope to develop the links between subjects further. The school's status for specialism in sports has an outstanding impact on the work of the school in the local community and students' achievements. Specialist subject targets are consistently met or exceeded. The school has improved significantly since the last inspection because of the headteacher's relentless drive to raise expectations and ensure the school's provision closely matches the aspirations and skills of all of the students. The headteacher has been very ably supported in this task by the senior leadership team and governors. This has resulted in a very clear vision and ambitious plans for the school which are communicated effectively to staff and students. The ways in which the school promotes equality of opportunity and community cohesion through the curriculum and all of its activities are outstanding. The school's relationships with its partners are second to none, extending and enriching provision and the opportunities available to students. The local authority has provided good and well targeted support for the school, especially in relation to securing additional funding for the school through a 'small schools grant'. Taking all of these factors into account the school has good capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the assessment of students' work is used consistently and well across the school so that:
 - this information is always used in lesson planning to tailor learning activities and success criteria to meet the full range of students' needs
 - there is greater challenge for the more able students
 - marking always informs students of what they have to do to improve their work further and ensures they are clear about their next steps
 - students understand what their targets mean and how to reach them.
- Improve the effectiveness of learning support by ensuring teaching assistants are fully involved in planning and monitoring the quality and impact of the support they provide in the classroom.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

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Students respond very well to the good teaching and excellent care they receive. As a result, they are keen and active learners who look forward to coming to school and work with sustained concentration and commitment. As one student expressing the views of many explained, 'I think this school is great. There is not a single day when I don't love coming to school.' Students' outstanding behaviour and attendance bears witness to this. Inspection evidence and the school's own lesson observations show that students' attainment in lessons is above average and they make good progress in their learning. Students have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Their physical, social and emotional well-being is promoted extremely well. Students appreciate how the wider range of subjects and qualifications, extra-curricular activities and residential trips and visits enhances their learning and their personal development and well-being. They talked articulately to inspectors about how activities such as the recent 'what is Britishness debate, links with schools in Bradford and Africa, and trips to Auschwitz and Fairtrade events make an outstanding contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Students know that they matter as individuals and that their opinions are heard and acted on, through the school council and curriculum review focus groups for example. Consequently, they feel very safe and secure and develop into well rounded young people who are extremely polite and respect one another. Students make very positive contributions to the school and the wider community through peer mentoring and enterprise activities, for instance. They have an excellent understanding of the routes open to them when choosing options or making career and post-16 course decisions. The stimulus, positive experiences and opportunities they are provided with prepare students well for the next phase of their education and makes an outstanding contribution to their future economic well-being.

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
Pupils' behaviour	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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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	1
	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have high expectations of students. Relationships between students and adults are strong and productive. Lessons are well planned with a clear structure. Teachers' skilful questioning and strong subject knowledge enthuses and includes all students. Students respond particularly well to the many opportunities they are given to work independently and in groups to formulate and discuss their own ideas and this results in lively and stimulating lessons. Learning objectives and success criteria for lessons are routinely shared with students and these are used well to monitor understanding as the lesson progresses. However, learning activities and success criteria are not always tailored sharply enough to match the different abilities in class and consequently some students do not always make the progress they are capable of.

Students are provided with good opportunities during lessons to assess their own and each other's progress and what they have learnt, demonstrating their sensitivity and respect for each other in the process. Students know their individual learning targets and what level they are working at, but are less clear about what these mean. Teachers mark students' work regularly, but the quality and usefulness of written feedback is variable. Where feedback does explain to students how they can improve their work, there is little evidence that they have been given the opportunity to do so.

The curriculum is good and improving. The introduction of Diploma courses such as engineering, construction and business studies and additional GCSEs in art, textiles and physical education after school, provide students with an outstanding range of options given the size of the school. 'Off-timetable' days spent on special topics are effective in concentrating students' thoughts on important issues and enable the school to use the expertise of visitors who have specialist knowledge.

The school prides itself on the outstanding levels of care, guidance and support offered to students. Staff know each individual student very well and every effort is taken to enable students to make the most of their time at school. As well as the strong pastoral support provided, good actions are taken to celebrate success. Students report that the introduction of the student support manager role coupled with the new rewards and behaviour management system is 'great and works really well'. The recently introduced 'isolation unit' provides a temporary haven for those students with significant learning or behavioural needs. This enables these students to access their curriculum and to build their confidence to return to whole-class lessons. As a result the school's exclusion rate

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is very low.

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?

School leaders' shrewd and carefully considered actions have resulted in significant improvements in all aspects of the school's work. The staff form a strong and cohesive team, benefit from a good range of professional development and training opportunities, and are eager to develop their skills and abilities further. Planning for further improvement is well considered and carefully implemented. Actions are regularly monitored and evaluated. Management information is being used increasingly well throughout the school because it is well-organised and readily understood. Governors fulfil their statutory duties effectively and give generously of their time and expertise. Resources are effectively deployed.

Effective work to promote equalities is illustrated by the way students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included in the life of the school and the good progress they make as a result. The safety and well-being of students are paramount and good safeguarding procedures are in place. There are strong and clear management responsibilities regarding child protection and students are certain that they know who to approach if they have a concern or a complaint.

Students have an exceptionally thorough understanding of their local community, and their understanding of the more diverse communities across Britain and in the world is very well developed. Parents' and carers' responses to school and the inspection questionnaires indicate partnerships with parents are good and the vast majority are positive about the school's work.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
	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	2

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were positive about the quality of education and care their children receive, and inspectors agree. Discussions with students, and their questionnaire responses confirm that they feel very safe and enjoy school. Parents may wish to know that there were no particular trends in the small number of very constructive criticisms received from parents, students and those staff who also completed questionnaires. However, while maintaining confidentiality, the inspector discussed these with the headteacher in order that she may address them and report back to parents, students and staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Upper Wharfedale 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 78 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 284 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	54	29	37	2	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	38	49	39	50	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	37	43	55	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	32	45	58	4	5	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	27	35	43	55	4	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	24	50	64	8	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	26	51	65	4	5	2	3
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)	24	31	44	56	4	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	33	46	59	5	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	31	44	56	3	4	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	23	45	58	8	10	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	29	37	44	56	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	45	38	49	1	1	1	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.



4 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Upper Wharfedale School, Skipton, BD23 5BS

Thank you for your warm welcome when we came to inspect your school. It was a pleasure to talk to you about your learning and life at school. We agree with you that Upper Wharfedale is a good school with several outstanding features and it is getting even better. We were very impressed by your positive attitudes, outstanding behaviour and exemplary attendance. You stoically undertake lengthy journeys to school and to other education providers, and stay on after school to take additional subjects and qualifications. This shows you fully understand the importance of going the 'extra mile' and working hard to secure your future well-being. You appreciate all the extra time and effort the staff put in. It was very clear from your words and actions that you have a lot of respect and affection for them and each other.

You are taught well and enjoy your lessons. This ensures that most of you make good progress so that the standards you reach in national tests at the end of Year 11 are above average. The curriculum meets your needs and interests very well. You have a strong voice in how the school develops. The care, guidance and support you receive are outstanding and you think that the system of rewards and sanctions is fair. The leadership and management of your school is good. Everybody knows what they need to do to improve things for you and they work closely together to achieve this. The way that partnerships with other schools and colleges have been developed to create opportunities for you is first rate.

In order to help the school to improve further we have asked school leaders to do the following.

Improve how your work is assessed so that:

- learning activities and measures of success are tailored more carefully to match all of your needs so that each of you makes as much progress as you possibly can
- marking always tells you what you have to do to improve your work further and you are given opportunities to act on the feedback you have been given
- you understand what your targets mean and are clear about the next steps to reach them.

Make sure teaching assistants are involved in planning and monitoring their work so that

they can ensure the support they provide for you in the classroom is helping you to learn.

We know that you will continue to do well and will find ways to help the staff make the school even better. We wish you all very happy and successful futures.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley

Her Majesty's Inspector

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