

Cockermouth School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112381
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	395610
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2012
Lead inspector	Gillian Salter-Smith

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	Not Applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,417
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	325
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Len Cockcroft MBE
Headteacher	Geoff Walker
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors spent more than half their time in the school observing lessons. They observed 61 part lessons taught by as many teachers, of whom a few were supply teachers. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students representing all year groups, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and the documentation scrutinised included the self-evaluation, the school development plan, data on students' progress, minutes of governing body meetings, records and policies relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Inspectors scrutinised students' written work. Four hundred and ninety questionnaires received from parents and carers were analysed, in addition to those received from students and staff.

Information about the school

The school is much larger than the average sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Most students are of White British heritage and a very small number speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled students and those supported at school action is well below the national average; the proportion with a statement of special educational needs or supported by school action plus is below the national average. The school meets the current floor standards which are the minimum standards for students' progress and attainment expected by the government.

The school has specialist status for mathematics, computing and modern foreign languages. There is local authority resourced provision for up to 30 students on the autistic spectrum. A new headteacher was appointed in January 2010.

The school has gained the following status and/or awards: High Performing Specialist School, Eco Ambassador and Green Flag.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because teaching and achievement are good rather than outstanding. Leaders have been successful in making improvements in previously weaker subjects, for example, in English. The school is aware that, although improving, some inconsistency in achievement between a few subjects remains.
- Attainment is above average for students aged 16. Achievement in the English Baccalaureate is much better than the national average. More-able students achieve well. Disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those supported by the resourced provision, make good progress. Well-targeted additional support for students at risk of underachieving is helping to accelerate students' progress.
- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding. Relationships between staff and students are positive and supportive. Teachers have good subject knowledge. In most lessons, the pace of learning is rapid. Students work independently and take an active part in learning. Where teaching is satisfactory, the pace of learning is slower, students are passive learners, marking is not helpful enough, expectations of presentation are too low and tasks do not always match students' needs.
- Students' behaviour is typically good. Most are committed to learning and work well collaboratively. Attendance is high. Students know how to keep themselves safe. They are aware of different types of bullying and say that, on the rare occasions it occurs, staff help to resolve issues quickly.
- Leaders and managers are successful in raising achievement and improving teaching. Students' and staff performance are monitored rigorously. Some inconsistencies between subjects remain because the implementation and monitoring of key policies are not always robust enough.
- The sixth form is good. Attainment is above average. Students are taught well and make good progress. Improvements in teaching and progress are being managed well. Students are very well prepared for higher education. Sixth form students are good role models to younger students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding lessons and eliminate satisfactory teaching by:
 - increasing the pace of learning in every lesson so that students are more active, independent learners
 - improving the match of tasks to students' interests and abilities, particularly for lower attaining boys, in art and design, business studies and physical education
 - improving teachers' marking so that it identifies how well students are doing and what they need to do to improve consistently across and within subjects
 - raising teachers' expectations of the way students present their work
 - providing more opportunities for good or better practice in teaching and learning to be shared within and across departments.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders in bringing greater consistency to students' achievement across subjects by:
 - providing clearer whole-school policies and guidance for teaching, learning and use of assessment
 - ensuring greater consistency in implementing school policies, such as those for the deployment of supply staff and the 'Reading In Class' programme.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students are committed learners who enjoy working collaboratively to explore ideas. They communicate articulately in discussion. In modern foreign language lessons, students speak in the language learned with confidence and work well on conversation tasks. Most students have secure literacy skills and use them to write extensively across subjects. However, students do not always present their written work well and teachers' marking does not often identify this or point out spelling errors. Occasionally in lessons, students' interest wanes when teaching is less demanding or does not engage them fully; consequently progress slows.

Students make good progress from above average starting points in Year 7. By the end of Year 11, attainment is consistently above average and is on a securely rising trend. The proportion of students gaining five A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has been consistently above average over the past three years, as has the average points score for their best eight subjects. In 2011, achievement in the English Baccalaureate was strong for both boys and girls. Achievement in English, art and design, business studies and physical education was relatively weaker. Rigorous action taken by leaders has resulted in significant improvement so that achievement in English is now good and attainment is rising in other subjects.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those supported by the resourced provision for students on the autistic spectrum, make good progress. Support staff know these students' needs very well indeed and provide a secure learning environment in which they are challenged. More-able students achieve well. Gaps between students known to be eligible for free school meals and the national average are closing,

and they achieve better than similar students nationally. In 2011, girls' achievement was stronger than boys. Inspection evidence shows that most boys are equally committed to learning as girls and the gap between their respective performances is closing securely. However, a small number of lower attaining boys do not make as much progress in some lessons, despite the extensive support offered by pastoral staff.

Sixth form students are highly committed to their studies and work well independently. They make good progress in both AS and A level. Attainment is above average for both males and females and is on an upward trend. In a very small number of subjects where achievement has not been as strong, leaders have taken action quickly and school data shows that progress has accelerated.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is mostly good with some that is outstanding and none that is inadequate. In most lessons, teachers have positive relationships with students so that students develop into confident learners. Most teaching sets high expectations for students' progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge that enables them to give clear explanations and use questioning well to develop understanding. Homework is used effectively to support learning and students appreciate the school's interactive website, whereby students and teachers access homework. In the best lessons, the pace of learning is rapid and students are fully challenged to work independently. Activities are well structured to enable at least good progress. Communication skills are developed well and students are fully involved in assessing their own and each other's progress. In an outstanding combined history and French lesson based on life on board a ship in the 16th century, students interacted confidently in the target language of French and transferred skills between the subjects. They were encouraged to take risks and challenge their own learning. Frequent feedback and ongoing assessment ensured that students were fully aware of the progress they made and what they needed to do to improve. Teaching encourages students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and is especially strong in English and religious education.

Teaching in the sixth form is most often good and sometimes outstanding. Students often take part in productive discussion led by knowledgeable staff. Progress is checked effectively and students are guided well towards improvement. Relationships are positive and students are diligent.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well taught in most lessons, particularly those students on the autistic spectrum who are supported by the resourced provision. Individual educational plans are used well to target the support provided from teaching assistants and teachers in most subjects, particularly in English.

Where teaching could improve, the pace of learning is slower because students are passive learners and not required to work independently. Tasks are not always matched well to students' interests and abilities, particularly for lower attaining boys. Teachers' marking does not always identify clearly enough how well students are doing and what they need to do to improve. Teachers' expectations of the way in which students present their work are inconsistent. Parents and carers consider that teaching is good. A few are right to comment that teachers' marking and students' presentation in books could be better.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour is typically good. Most students are keen and self-assured learners. Most lessons are calm and settled. Parents, carers and students consider that behaviour is good most of the time but are right to recognise that there are a few occasions when behaviour is less settled in lessons and sometimes students do not take learning seriously enough. Students display mature and responsible behaviour around the school. This was especially evident during the inspection when poor weather meant that students spent their break and lunchtimes indoors in accommodation much of which is not built for the purpose of indoor leisure time. Exclusions are low and have reduced over time. At over 95% for the current academic year, students' attendance is high and has improved on the previous year.

Students know how to stay safe in a wide variety of situations because the curriculum and teaching prepares them well. Students feel secure in school and say bullying is rare. They understand that there are different types of bullying and they are confident that staff will deal with their concerns. Parents and carers are happy that their children are safe in school and say the occasional instances of bullying are taken seriously by staff and resolved quickly.

Students' views are well represented through the 'Student Voice' group. Students are highly active in raising funds for charitable organisations.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers at all levels, including in the sixth form, are well focused and successful in raising achievement and improving teaching and learning. Since the previous inspection, the school has maintained good achievement and students' attainment is rising. Achievement in English has improved significantly and achievement in other relatively weaker subjects is also improving. This demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve further.

Rigorous tracking of students' progress enables well targeted support and interventions by pastoral and academic staff. Consequently, gaps between the performance of different groups and national averages are closing securely demonstrating that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed. Performance management systems are robust and ensure that staff at all levels are held closely to account for the progress of students. Rigorous monitoring of teaching by senior and middle leaders informs plans for professional development and support for individual staff. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving. Professional development led by the school's specialist areas of mathematics, modern foreign languages and computing makes a strong contribution to improving teaching and learning across the school. However, best practice in teaching and learning is not always shared extensively enough within and across departments. Professional development is well focused on school priorities. For example, it has recently focused on improvements to feedback to students, marking and target setting. However, these key elements of teaching, learning and assessment are not fully underpinned by clear whole-school policies and guidelines. As a result, there are inconsistencies. Some school policies, such as the effective deployment of supply staff and the implementation of the 'Reading in Class' programme designed to encourage students to enjoy reading, are not monitored closely enough and inconsistencies remain.

The governing body ensures that arrangements for child protection and the safeguarding of students meet requirements. Whilst highly supportive of the school's work, the governing body is also rigorous in holding leaders to account and is well informed on the school's performance. Members of the governing body bring a wide range of relevant professional skills and experience and have a strong strategic role in the development of the school.

The curriculum meets most students' different needs. The focus on academic achievement prepares students effectively for the next stage of education and sixth form students in particular are well prepared for higher education. An excellent range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities provides a wealth of cultural and social experiences. Well planned programmes of personal and social and health education support students' good moral and social development and ensure that any discrimination is tackled robustly. Links with schools in Europe and across the world contribute effectively to students' awareness of cultures different to their own.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



14 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Cockermouth School, Cockermouth CA13 9HF

On behalf of the inspection team I thank you all for the welcome extended to us. A special thanks goes to those of you who spent time talking with us about your experiences in school.

Cockermouth is a good school. It is improving because your headteacher, other leaders and managers and the governing body are effective in ensuring that you all achieve your best. You are taught well and make good progress. Your attainment at age 16 and at the end of sixth form is above average and for most of you your achievement is good. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well cared for and supported and achieve well. You conduct yourselves maturely most of the time and lessons are usually calm and orderly. Sixth form students are good role models for younger students and they are well prepared for higher education. In subjects where you were achieving less well, the school has worked hard to make improvements and in English, for example, you are now achieving well.

In order to help you to achieve even better standards, we have asked leaders to make improvements to:

- the consistency in the quality of lessons so that all are at least good and more are outstanding
- the consistency of provision between a few subjects so that achievement is at least good across all of them.

Please keep up your excellent rate of attendance. Do continue to work hard and remain proud ambassadors for your school.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Salter-Smith
Lead inspector

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