

Carnforth High School

Kellet Road, Carnforth, Lancashire, LA5 9LS

Inspection dates

30 April–1 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher's inspirational leadership has created a culture of high expectations in the school community, underpinning strong improvement in students' achievement.
- Leaders at all levels are positive role models who enthusiastically and effectively drive improvement.
- The new sixth form is of good quality and is highly valued by the students.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strongly promoted through a vibrant curriculum, excellent extra-curricular opportunities and strong, supportive relationships with staff.
- Students' excellent behaviour and highly positive attitudes make the school a safe, friendly and harmonious place.
- Teaching is good and there is significant outstanding practice across subjects which teachers willingly share.
- Skilled, experienced governors provide rigorous challenge and effective support to the school's leaders.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' progress from their starting points to the end of Key Stage 4 is not significantly better than that of students nationally, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The sixth form is at an early stage and there is insufficient evidence to evaluate achievement in comparison with national standards.
- Although some teaching is outstanding, the majority is good. Some teachers do not provide enough guidance to students through marking to help them improve literacy skills and do not insist that students follow up on their feedback or present their work neatly. Some teachers do not fully challenge students of different abilities. Insufficient use is made of exemplar work in some classrooms. On occasions, too much explanation is provided by teachers rather than by students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, taught by 41 different teachers. Two of these observations were conducted with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also visited an assembly, several tutorial sessions and a workshop for Year 6 students from local primary schools.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, heads of department, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. They also spoke to a representative from the local authority, a consultant who has worked alongside the school's senior leaders, the headteacher of a local primary school and a parent.
- Inspectors held meetings with five groups of students and spoke to others informally. One inspector toured the school with two students. Inspectors listened to a number of students reading during lessons and heard one student perform a poem that had recently been published.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including the school's improvement planning, monitoring records, analysis of students' achievement, performance management information, behaviour logs and safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors considered 84 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and took account of the school's survey of parents' views. They also read five letters submitted by parents who wished to comment in detail on the school's work. They analysed 53 completed staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Shirley Gornall, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gary Kirkley

Additional Inspector

Christine Addison

Additional Inspector

Michael Blakey

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average sized secondary school. Student numbers are steadily growing.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those whose parents are in the Armed Services) is average and increasing.
- Most students are White British and virtually all speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students registered as disabled or with a statement of special educational needs and those supported at school action plus is average. The proportion of students supported at school action is below average.
- The proportion of students joining or leaving the school at other than the usual times is broadly average.
- A small number of students are educated at ACERS, which is alternative local authority provision for students with medical or behavioural needs.
- The school's performance meets the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school opened a sixth form in September 2011. A partnership arrangement exists with Heysham High School, Central Lancashire High School and Our Lady's Catholic High School, Lancaster that enables students to move between sites where appropriate to receive specialist subject teaching. Some Key Stage 4 students from partner schools attend hairdressing courses in the new salon at Carnforth High School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the proportions of students exceeding expected progress from their relative starting points are consistently higher than those found nationally.
- Continue to build on the school's best practice to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently provide sufficient challenge for students of different abilities
 - encouraging all students to present their work as neatly as possible
 - ensuring that teachers' marking develops students' literacy skills and that students routinely act upon their teachers' feedback
 - increasing the sharing of exemplar work by improving classroom displays
 - ensuring that students have opportunities to discuss their thinking.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the school with standards that are below average overall, with variability between year groups. Since the previous inspection students' attainment has improved strongly. Virtually all students reach five good GCSE grades, with many making exceptional progress from their starting points. The proportion who attain five good grades including English and mathematics is in line with the national figure. Achievement is particularly strong in science, geography, art and design, and vocational courses. The proportions of students making expected progress in English and mathematics are similar to those found nationally.
- The attainment of students supported by the pupil premium is lower than that of their peers but the progress they make from their starting points is better than the national rate. The school's well targeted use of pupil premium funding, and of additional funding to support students who join the school with low attainment, is closing attainment gaps by supporting the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make the same good progress as their peers. This is because teachers and support staff treat every student as an individual, have a very clear understanding of their skills, consult with students and their parents exceptionally well and regularly monitor their progress thoroughly.
- Students' reading skills are improving quickly as a result of a strong drive to encourage reading for meaning and reading for pleasure. A new, intensive reading programme is having a positive impact on students' reading at Key Stage 3. Precise support helps to develop the skills of students who have specific literacy difficulties. Reading is actively promoted across the curriculum.
- Students write regularly for different purposes and audiences. Teachers in all subjects encourage students to use ambitious vocabulary which improves the quality of their writing. Standards of handwriting and presentation are too variable and sometimes students lack strategies to improve their spelling and sentence structure.
- Most students speak confidently and are keen to express their ideas in class. They listen actively to each other and their teachers.
- Some students are entered early for GCSE mathematics. This helps to motivate them. They are re-entered if their results fall below their target grades. The school reviews the impact of its entry policy closely.
- Progress of the small number of students who are educated away from the school because of their individual circumstances is monitored carefully. They make good progress towards their individual targets both academically and in their personal development.
- Achievement of students in the school's new sixth form is good. Leaders have reviewed the school's first set of AS results and adjustments have been made to ensure that students meet their target grades.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The overwhelming majority of teaching is good or better and only a small amount requires improvement. Teachers plan lively lessons including a range of activities that maintain students' interest and build their learning securely. Relationships between teachers and students are consistently excellent.
- Teachers expect that some students will meet stretching, 'killer' objectives while others will achieve at a slightly lower level, but this isn't always successfully managed. Consequently, in a few lessons levels of challenge for students of different abilities are not well pitched and progress is not as strong as it could be, particularly for higher-attaining students.
- In the best lessons teachers ask probing questions and encourage students to discuss their

ideas, speculate and hypothesise. This was seen in a very effective mathematics lesson in which students actively investigated square numbers. In an equally successful drama lesson students made excellent progress in developing physical theatre techniques through the detailed discussion of how facial features, gait and gesture could be adapted to convey meaning. In a few lessons teachers provide too much explanation themselves rather than allowing students to develop their ideas verbally.

- Teachers are effective in broadening students' vocabulary by helping them identify more sophisticated 'tier 2' words. Students are encouraged to read various types of text and teachers continually check on comprehension skills. English teachers ensure that students are taught how to write for different purposes and audiences, and emphasise appropriate sentence structures very well. This was seen in a highly effective lesson in which students paid close attention to embedding quotations when writing critically about characters in *An Inspector Calls*.
- Teachers encourage students to explore ethical and moral issues sensitively. In a powerful religious education lesson students considered attitudes to capital punishment in a reflective way, in response to well chosen resources and thought-provoking questions.
- Many teachers insist on a high quality of presentation in exercise books; students' mathematics work is particularly neat and this helps their systematic learning. Some of their other books are less tidily maintained, making revision more difficult.
- Art rooms provide vibrant celebrations of students' learning but there is comparatively little students' work displayed in classrooms around the school. Opportunities to use exemplar work to inform students' work are missed as a result.
- Students are aware of the levels at which they are working and understand the targets to which they aspire. They assess their own and each other's work accurately in varied contexts. In art students' understanding of the characteristics of an effective three-dimensional mask enabled them to review each other's homework constructively.
- Students' work is marked regularly and in many cases teachers provide an effective balance of praise and challenge in their written comments. Literacy errors are not always identified in marking and it is not always clear how students should act on feedback; consequently, some errors and misconceptions persist unnecessarily.
- Homework tasks are imaginative and are used effectively to deepen students' thinking. Students appreciate the school's new approach to homework and a parent commented, 'It truly enhances their learning experience and gives them a chance to produce work of which they can be really proud'.

Behaviour and safety

are outstanding

- The school's values of 'community, achievement, respect, responsibility and effort' are consistently demonstrated by students of all ages. They behave extremely well in lessons and around school, work hard and seize opportunities to make a positive difference to the lives of others, including through supporting local and international charities.
- Parents believe that the school manages behaviour well and that their children are safe; students confirm this view. They state that incidents of bullying are extremely rare and that they have confidence in the school's response systems. Students understand the various forms of bullying, know how to keep themselves safe and actively promote safe behaviour. Exclusion from school is very rare.
- Students are friendly and cooperative. Their team working skills are exemplary, as evidenced by their enthusiastic participation in lessons and also by their extra-curricular success in sports, music, drama, science and technology.
- Students' maturely expressed views influence school improvement. One student commented, 'Staff are great at listening to our ideas and taking them on board.....we know that we are trusted to make the school even better.' The school's house system has been developed in response to student feedback, along with improvements to the school environment.

- Attendance is above average and improving. Very few students are persistently absent to school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- 'The school is open to new ideas. The children are great and the village atmosphere makes it a successful and pleasant learning environment.' This comment, made by a teacher in response to the staff questionnaire, sums up the high morale that is palpable at Carnforth High. All staff agree that the school is very well led and managed.
- The headteacher is dynamic, creative and principled. He is an energetic presence around the school and nothing escapes him. He has recognised and encouraged the talents of leaders and teachers through coaching, shared teaching and linking good practitioners. His colleagues value the role he has played in their professional development.
- The capacity of the wider leadership team is strong. Senior leaders, subject leaders and pastoral leaders work closely together; communication channels and lines of accountability are clear. The school's programme for developing aspiring leaders enables fresh ideas to be discussed and new initiatives to be introduced within a climate of trust so that individuals' talents are nurtured and good practice shared.
- The leadership of teaching is excellent. There is an agreed set of criteria that underpins teachers' planning and establishes expectations for students' engagement and pace of learning. Key priorities for improving teaching are identified at whole-school, departmental and individual levels and link to teachers' performance management. Leaders ensure that all staff are fully briefed on new school initiatives so that consistency is developed.
- Leaders challenge underperformance with rigour and humanity. The profile of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. New teachers value the professional mentoring they receive.
- Spending decisions are well considered. Summer schools enabled by pupil premium and catch-up funding build the self-esteem and literacy skills of students as they enter the school. Intervention programmes meet the needs of individual students and the appointment of additional staff in core subjects allows smaller classes to run. There is strong, wrap-around care for students experiencing personal difficulties that may jeopardise their achievement.
- The school is outward-facing. Leaders research best practice beyond the school and consider its potential application carefully. They have also provided effective support to another school in the county at the request of the local authority. Relationships with local primary schools are strong; joint working eases the transition into secondary education for Year 6 pupils.
- Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. Collaborative arrangements with partner schools have broadened the curriculum. Sixth-form students value the high-quality teaching, guidance and support they receive.
- Equality of opportunity is strongly promoted in all aspects of the school's work. There is zero tolerance of discrimination and harassment in any form.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are experienced and insightful, bringing a range of professional and personal skills to their roles. Their focused evaluation, support and challenge are key factors in the school's development. Governors are clear that teaching which falls short of the mark is not rewarded inappropriately. Decisions about teachers' pay are taken after a careful analysis of their performance. Safeguarding checks are rigorous and regular. Policies and practice meet requirements. An effective committee structure ensures that governors' work is linked to school improvement priorities. Governors meet with a range of staff and students to ensure that they have a comprehensive view of the school's work. They monitor the school improvement plan regularly and critically. The school's procedures for receiving and acting upon feedback, including complaints, are transparent and robust.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors. A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.

School details

Unique reference number	119748
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	400202

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	645
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Dudfield
Headteacher	John Shannon
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2009
Telephone number	01524 732424
Fax number	01524 720167
Email address	office@carnforthhigh.co.uk

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