

William Howard School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112439
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325609
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of students	11–18
Gender of students	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,600
Sixth form	273
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Halpin
Headteacher	Mrs Lorraine Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	March 2006
School address	Longtown Road Brampton Cumbria CA8 1AR
Telephone number	01697 745700
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than average. It draws students from a wide area, with the majority from White British heritage. There are fewer than average students who speak English as an additional language and fewer than average with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly in line with national averages but has varied with more recent cohorts. The school has specialist status for science and mathematics and has won a number of awards including Healthy School, International School and the Inclusion Award. In the last two years the school has successfully integrated all students from a neighbouring school that closed.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

William Howard is a good school that is rapidly improving. Since the last inspection there has been significant improvement in students' behaviour, the curriculum is expanding to meet the diverse needs of the school community and teaching is improving through better use of assessment. These and other improvements are a result of the very good leadership of the headteacher, whose determination to provide the best opportunities for every student are evident in the drive to raise standards across the school. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to a questionnaire sent out before the inspection were very positive about the education their children receive. They accurately pinpoint the support their children receive as one of the strengths of the school.

Students achieve well and reach above average standards at the end of each key stage. Results in GCSE examinations in 2008 were above the national average, and most students had made good progress. Weaker progress by some groups and in some subjects has been tackled effectively by the school. This year's students are on course to reach the challenging targets they have been set and to exceed last year's performance. By the end of Year 9, students reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science. This year's performance has exceeded last year's because better use of assessment has pinpointed where students need extra support or challenge.

Good teaching and a good curriculum contribute to students' good achievement. Lessons are well planned and most teachers have a good understanding of students' needs. A few parents commented that the quality of teaching can sometimes vary. Inspectors agree that sometimes teaching is satisfactory rather than good and this is mainly because the use of assessment is not as effective in all classes in promoting the maximum challenge and highest standards. The school has a very strong focus on improving the consistency of teaching. The curriculum has developed well to meet the changing needs of the school population. It provides well for the different interests and aspirations of students and is constantly evolving better pathways to success for students in all phases of the school.

Students' good academic standards are matched by their good personal development. They show a good understanding of the need for a healthy lifestyle, know how to stay safe and say they feel safe in school. Behaviour is good. This is an improvement since the last inspection and reflects the school's determination to improve the learning environment and support all learners to do their best. Students willingly accept responsibility and relish opportunities to look after younger students, the environment and make a contribution to the local community. They are well prepared for the future with the acquisition of good basic skills and the confidence to seek help when they need it. There is a clear vision for ensuring all students are helped to do their best. The school's good provision for care, support and guidance has developed well since the last inspection. Increased and effective support for students with social and emotional difficulties is ensuring fewer students are excluded and that classrooms are calm and purposeful places for learning. The use of progress coaches has proved popular with students and has been effective in raising standards. Students say they feel more confident and 'in control' after

discussions about their specific problems with learning. Staff understand students well and are readily available to listen and give support whenever it is needed. Students say this is why they feel safe in school. Most teachers give students good feedback on their learning and help them to progress by setting and monitoring targets for improvement. As this is becoming more consistent across the school, the rate of learning is steadily increasing.

Leadership, management and governance are good. There is an unrelenting focus on raising standards, and the quality of teaching and learning to help the school reach its ambition to be outstanding. School self-evaluation is accurate and identifies the most pressing priorities for improvement. The headteacher has convinced staff of the need for change and has won their support to change on a wide front in the current school year. While middle leaders have moved a considerable way in monitoring the work of their departments, they are not yet sufficiently accountable for standards and progress in all classes. Governors give good support and challenge and ensure that the school gets and gives good value for money. The school has improved well since the last inspection successfully overcoming a number of challenges and it is well placed to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The large sixth form welcomes students at all levels of prior attainment. Approximately two thirds of the school's Year 11 students move into Year 12. Courses and subjects are mostly academic and meet the needs of the vast majority of students well, but the range is suitably expanding to provide for all groups of learners, for example, through more Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses. Standards overall are above average and, given students' varied starting points, this represents good achievement. Progress quickens as students move through the sixth form. Outcomes in academic courses at both A level and AS level are much better than in applied courses. Students feel very well looked after. Good teaching and very positive relationships ensure learning is good. Through good personal development, students feel they are encouraged to become mature learners. They make an outstanding contribution to the smooth running of the school, particularly in their support for younger pupils, for example, as paired readers or Year 7 mentors. Leadership and management are good. Systems of self-evaluation are rigorous and the use of data to inform how well students achieve is excellent. Leaders track individual progress effectively and intervene when appropriate if students are underperforming. Weak subject performance at the end of Years 12 and 13 is beginning to be more rigorously analysed to find the cause and bring about improvement. Partnerships with other providers are satisfactory. Links with local universities are good. At the end of Year 13, four out of every five students go on to higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further by making more consistent and effective use of assessment in the classroom.
- Make middle leaders more accountable for standards and teaching and learning within their departments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with attainment that is broadly in line with national averages but has varied with more recent cohorts. They leave at an above average standard, representing good achievement. Students of all abilities and backgrounds make good progress from Year 7 to Year 11. Results in GCSE examinations at Year 11 have remained consistently above average since the last inspection. While results in science and mathematics were exceptionally high in 2008, the school's performance in a few subjects showed that some students did not achieve as well as expected. The school has responded promptly and effectively to this situation this year. Inspection evidence and moderated results show that underperforming departments have restored their previously good standards and students have made good progress.

By the end of Key Stage 3 students have made good progress overall to reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science in national tests. School data and inspection evidence show that they make the best progress in mathematics. Students achieve well regardless of their background, starting points or learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps them achieve equally with other students. The school sets and meets challenging targets and is ambitious for its students to do even better. Inspection evidence indicates that the current Year 11 students are on course to reach the challenging targets set for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students, including their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development are good. Students behave well in lessons and around the school and are mindful of their own and others' safety. The school's behaviour strategy has been considerably modified and applied more consistently since the previous inspection and the Learning Provision team has expanded its role. Consequently the number of exclusions has been reduced. Relationships are good. Students report that they feel safe and would know who to turn to if they faced difficulties. Incidents of bullying are rare and students report that they are dealt with quickly and effectively. They enjoy coming to school and are well motivated. Attendance is above the national average.

Students welcome the healthy choices in the canteen and are enthusiastic about and participate well in the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities. They make a good contribution to the community because they have opportunities to influence the development of the school through taking on positions of responsibility such as peer mentors. The school forum is very active and was closely involved in the adoption of the new summer school uniform. Students also make valuable and well-received contributions to the wider community through musical and dramatic productions, charity work, fundraising, and community projects. For example, groups of students have been actively involved with local primary schools and care homes. In addition the school has an active link with a school in Tanzania. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being. They have good information and communication

technology (ICT) skills and are provided with many opportunities to develop workplace skills. As a result only a very small number do not move on to further education, training or employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall and inspectors observed some outstanding practice. Teachers demonstrate a good knowledge of their subject. There is a good climate for learning and relationships between adults and students are good. Where teaching is good, planning is thorough and based on a good knowledge of students' needs, gained through careful and accurate assessment. Learning objectives are precise and understood by students. Explanations are clear and skilful questioning helps students to improve their understanding. Tasks are varied and closely match the objectives. Well-chosen, good quality resources, including effective use of ICT, help to engage and motivate students and maintain their interest. As a result, students make at least good progress and enjoy a real sense of achievement.

Where teaching and learning are satisfactory, aspects of the teaching restrict opportunities for all students to make progress in line with their abilities. In these lessons, assessment of learning is not sufficiently well used with the result that planning neglects to take into account the needs of different students. Some lessons are too teacher-led and students are not given sufficient opportunities to work independently or assess each other's work. Some teachers give unnecessarily lengthy explanations. This reduces opportunities for students to improve their learning through discussion and reduces the time available for students to complete tasks. Evidence in books shows that there are frequent instances of incomplete work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum had been broadened since the previous inspection by the introduction of BTEC courses in media studies, performing arts and sport and a wider choice of GCSE subjects. Triple science and statistics have been introduced for the present Year 10 students. The school has responded well to students' needs and aspirations by providing five pathways of choice for Key Stage 4 students from September. This encourages them to select the most appropriate pathway, including vocational and work-related opportunities. Students are appreciative of these choices and feel they are well provided for. The curriculum is increasingly responsive to local circumstances and students' career choices.

The approach to learning in Years 7, 8 and 9 is under review and the move to learning zones, where subjects and skills are integrated has been carefully planned. A transitional curriculum has been successfully implemented this year in Year 7. A very good personal development programme teaches students the importance of physical and emotional well-being and how to stay safe. The programme makes very good use of external professionals to provide specialist support. The wide range of extra-curricular and lunchtime activities, particularly sport, music and drama, is well regarded and supported by students. Well-established links with a school in Tanzania are being expanded through additional links with schools in the Far East, Europe and

the United Kingdom which enhance students' awareness of cultural diversity and global issues. Specialist school status has a high profile within the school and has succeeded in extending the good practice and 'can do' attitude, which is clearly evident in mathematics and science, into other departments. Activities such as science activities week, focusing on forensic science, and parents' classes such as 'Keeping up with the Children', have encouraged community involvement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. They make a significant contribution to the school's good inclusion practices. Staff provide prompt and caring support to help all students succeed and ensure they have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. All procedures for safeguarding and child protection are in place and meet requirements. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities is good and is well complemented by good links with external agencies. Dedicated teaching assistants are well trained to support both the academic and personal development of students, so that they make good progress and are fully included in the life of the school. Students with social or emotional difficulties are well supported by specialist teams in the school who are succeeding in reducing the number of exclusions so that students' learning is not interrupted. Progress coaches have been used to good effect this year, helping students to improve their standards and develop a more confident approach to their learning.

Transition arrangements for students joining the school are good. There are close and effective links with primary schools through the school's specialist subjects. An exciting range of transition activities prepares primary pupils well for their move to the secondary school. Older students value the good guidance they receive about subject choices and career opportunities. Systems for tracking and monitoring academic performance have improved since the last inspection. Data are now used much more effectively by senior leaders and middle leaders to identify underachievement so that appropriate intervention strategies can be put in place. It is not used so effectively yet in all lesson planning. Most students are well-informed about their progress and are encouraged to reflect on ways in which they might improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership, management and governance of the school are good. There is a clear and determined focus on raising standards and students' achievement even further. The school sets and meets challenging targets. There is a shared focus, amongst leaders at all levels, on raising standards by improving the quality of teaching and learning and making better use of assessment information. The expansion of the senior leadership team since the last inspection has increased the school's capacity for monitoring and evaluating its work and identifying areas for improvement. This has had a positive effect on improving provision and standards in those departments where standards had slipped since the last inspection. While middle leaders have developed their role in monitoring and evaluating the work in their departments, their accountability for standards and provision is not developed enough.

The headteacher's ambitious vision for an outstanding school has taken a clear step forward in the current year with improvements across a broad front. She has been well supported in this by the deputy headteacher who has developed effective systems for tracking students' learning. This has helped heads of department to spot slow progress or underachievement by students and then provide well targeted support to remedy the situation. Alongside this the school has developed effective systems for managing support and guidance which have helped raise standards for significant groups of students this year. Links with external agencies are good and internal structures to support students with learning difficulties and/or difficulties ensure they succeed as well as all other students and play a full part in the life of the school. Inclusion is central to the school's ethos. Staff work hard to reduce any perceived barriers to learning so that all students feel equally valued. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion through planned provision within the school and through supportive links with the local and global communities, which extend students' understanding of their contribution as good citizens.

Governors have a good knowledge of the school. They are fully supportive, well-informed and prepared to challenge and defend the school which they do. Non-teaching managers in the school provide very good support to help this very large school run smoothly each day. Site management is excellent and has ensured that the safety of students during the extensive building programme has been paramount.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16–19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B

8 July 2009



Dear Students

Inspection of William Howard School, Cumbria, CA8 1AR

Thank you for the welcome and the help you gave us when we inspected your school recently. Please pass on our thanks to your parents and carers for the questionnaires they returned so we could take their views into account.

It was good to talk with many of you about your learning and the ways in which the school helps you to succeed. We agree with you and your headteacher that William Howard is a good school. Here are some of the things that helped us to reach this judgement.

- You reach high standards in the main school and in the sixth form.
- You are well taught and make good progress in your learning most of the time. In some lessons your progress is slower because the work set does not exactly match your needs. We have asked the school to continue to improve the use of assessment information when planning lessons so that you reach even higher standards.
- You receive good care, guidance and support. The school has developed effective systems to help you overcome any barriers to your learning and staff are vigilant about your well-being and safety. You told us this is why you feel safe and secure in school.
- You have good personal and social skills and are learning to become good citizens of the future through your involvement in school, community and global activities.
- The curriculum and extra-curricular activities are good. The school has devised many new courses and pathways that motivate you to succeed even further.
- Your school's successful specialist status for science and mathematics provides good benefits in resources and new ideas which enhance your learning.
- Leadership and management of the school are good. There is a commitment to improving your learning and the standards you reach. We have suggested that developing aspects of middle managers' work will help with this.

You are justified in being proud of your school and your achievements. We know you will help your school to continue to improve by supporting all of its work. The team send their best wishes for future success to all at William Howard School.

Yours faithfully

Moira Fitzpatrick
Lead inspector