

Little Lever School Specialist Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105256
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	336461
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Chambers 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	1018
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr K Cotterill
Headteacher	Mr P Hewitt
Date of previous school inspection	3 January 2007
School address	Church Street Little Lever Bolton BL3 1BT
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 34 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including 89 parental questionnaires.

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

- progress overall, including whether there are persistent low standards or underachievement in any key subjects
- the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, and whether the school has an accurate view of them
- the key improvements that the school has made that demonstrate capacity to improve
- students' behaviour.

Information about the school

Little Lever is a larger than average secondary school, with specialist status in languages, which serves the local community four miles east of Bolton. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both above average. Over a third of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which is well above the national average, although a broadly average proportion has a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is above the national average. The current headteacher has been in post since January 2009.

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?**4****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to levels of attainment in English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory, but varies considerably: lessons seen during the inspection ranged from outstanding to inadequate. Where teachers prepare interesting and varied activities, students respond well and learn at a good rate. However, students' progress overall is no better than satisfactory because not enough lessons give students the opportunity to be actively engaged in their learning, for example through practical work, discussion or reflection on what they have learned. Where teaching is good or better, teachers use assessment information about students to plan work that is suitably challenging for all individuals in the class. However, this practice is not sufficiently widespread, so in some lessons not all students are set work that is sharply focused at the right level for their ability. Teaching in the core subjects of English and mathematics is not consistently strong enough to overcome barriers to learning. Many students enter the school with below average literacy levels and, although they make satisfactory progress, many do not catch up sufficiently to gain good GCSEs. In recent years a relatively high turnover of teaching staff has made continuity of teaching difficult, particularly in mathematics. As a result of inconsistent teaching, insufficient whole-school focus on the core subjects and uneven departmental leadership, overall attainment at GCSE English and mathematics has generally been significantly below the levels expected nationally over several years.

The school cares well for its students and provides good support, especially for the most vulnerable. The school's vigour in promoting good attendance has helped to secure attendance levels that are above the national average and a clear improvement on figures reported in the last inspection. Students show strengths in other areas of personal development. For example, they show good workplace skills and are well prepared to secure economic well-being. Students show good abilities in teamwork and taking responsibility, and can apply their basic skills well to solve problems. High numbers gain qualifications in information and communication technology (ICT) and broadly average and increasing numbers gain qualifications in functional English and mathematics. Students make a good contribution to the school and the wider community. The active school council manages its own budget and is well regarded by other students. It has had an impact on, for example, improving accommodation in the school's communal areas and developing the rewards system. Students are represented

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in planning for a new school building and large numbers put themselves forward to act as prefects.

The headteacher and deputies are suitably self-critical, but the performance of managers overall is uneven. Most senior leaders have given appropriate focus to developing the skills of middle managers and making them more accountable, particularly in the core subjects. However, the measures introduced are relatively recent and their impact is yet to be fully seen in outcomes for students.

The school's specialist status in languages has had a positive impact on the curriculum through providing the opportunity to study at least three different languages at Key Stage 3 and a broad range of options at Key Stage 4. The breadth of students' participation in languages has increased in the school and in local primary schools. The provision of language evening classes had had a strong impact, with over 350 people attending in the 2008–09 school year. The language department has played a leading role in promoting the use of interactive whiteboards to enhance learning across the school. It has also taken the lead in developing the use of a virtual learning environment, where students can access computer-based learning activities at home.

The school demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. The overall attainment measure combining all subjects at GCSE has risen steadily in recent years, attendance is on an upward trend and the additional vocational opportunities available to students in Key Stage 4 have had a clear impact on students' attitudes and attainment. The headteacher and deputies have identified accurately the school's weaknesses and barriers to improvement and have begun to tackle them with vigour.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in the core subjects of English and mathematics.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning across the school through increasing opportunities for active learning.
- Make better use of assessment data to ensure that lessons are appropriately challenging for all students.
- Build capacity in the school through developing the skills of middle managers and making them more accountable.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Students enter the school with broadly average attainment but below average literacy levels. In 2008 examination results were below average in many GCSE subjects. Consequently, attainment is low. Students' progress is satisfactory, with current students making the expected progress given their starting points. The school's robust evidence on the performance of current Year 11 students suggests that progress is improving, including in English and mathematics. However, students' achievement is judged to be inadequate because of the consistently low attainment in GCSE English and mathematics examinations over several years, showing little sign of real improvement. Students enjoy lessons and make better progress where they get the opportunity to work in pairs or

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when ICT is used well to support learning. Data on examination results and observations during the inspection confirm that there are no clear differences between the progress made by different groups of students. Boys and girls of different abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress. Similarly, there are no differences in the progress made by students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Both the students' and the parents' and carers' questionnaires confirm that students feel safe in school, and this supports evidence gathered during the inspection. Students are confident that any instances of bullying will be dealt with effectively. Behaviour is satisfactory. A minority of students, parents and carers, expressed some concerns about behaviour. The majority of students behave well, but a small minority show poor attitudes or work well only under close supervision.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are often enhanced through strong professional relationships

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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between students and the class teacher. Students experience many good or better lessons but the strong features of these lessons are not consistently apparent across the school. Where teaching is good, students progress well because planning takes account of different abilities in the class and the lesson has good pace and structure. Inspectors saw examples of well-designed sessions at the end of lessons that helped students to consolidate their learning, and good academic guidance, both oral and written. In weaker lessons, expectations are too low, the pace is slow and a narrow range of teaching and learning strategies leads to some students losing focus.

The headteacher and deputies have clear plans about how they wish to develop the curriculum and inspectors agree with the school's judgement that current provision is satisfactory. For example, the school recognises that clearer 14–19 pathways could be developed. A strong element in current provision is the wide range of vocational courses, involving up to eight colleges. Evidence that these courses are successful comes from the high take-up rate which involves students from across the ability range. Students have opportunities to learn an exceptionally broad range of languages. Opportunities for able students have been enhanced with the recent introduction of three separate sciences for the current Year 10. Current timetabling arrangements hinder setting arrangements and also mean that some students have fewer lessons in English and mathematics than others. A strong set of enrichment activities includes sporting and musical activities, a good range of educational visits and several 'themed days', where there is a whole-school focus on learning about such as enterprise skills or community issues.

Systems for supporting students are well organised and effective, and students value the role that learning mentors and heads of house play in helping with problems. Strong pastoral arrangements, reinforced by the recent introduction of a house system, enable staff to monitor and support students in both their academic and personal development. The group tutor role is an important feature and the new 'Seven up' tutor system helps students to feel involved in school and contributes to their understanding of social and cultural issues. The school's breakfast club is effective in providing over 20 students with a basic meal and an opportunity to relax in a supervised environment. Students confirm that transition arrangements into school and to the next stage of their lives are well planned and, as a result, they feel well supported. The school is rightly proud of the fact that only very small numbers of school leavers do not enter employment, education or training.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

Most senior leaders have a clear focus on improving outcomes for students. Part of the focus is on improving the use of attainment targets, because recent targets have represented varying levels of challenge and have been met only in part. The school has now moved to a more aspirational set of targets which sets consistent demands across all subjects, but the impact of these and many other initiatives designed to raise achievement has yet to be seen. The school has a realistic view of its strengths and weaknesses, including in teaching and learning, and understands its performance in relation to other schools. Improvement planning at whole-school level is good, with appropriate areas of focus and clearly planned actions. As a result of recent changes, individual departments are becoming more involved in evaluation and improvement planning.

Governors are committed and supportive of the school and its senior leaders. They exercise their role in monitoring the school's evaluation and improvement planning. Governors with suitable experience take responsibility for overseeing different areas of the school's work, for example child protection procedures, but governors have yet to address their role fully in relation to promoting community cohesion and raising attainment. Financial management and the school's use of accommodation is sound, but value for money, overall, is judged inadequate because too few students reach the expected standards in English and mathematics.

Evidence that the school is successful in promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination comes from the fact that all groups make similar progress and that the school monitors and analyses performance to check that this is the case. The number of racist incidents is low; where these occur they are discussed appropriately by the governing body. The school has an appropriate set of policies but not all staff have fully considered how these can influence classroom practice. Safeguarding procedures are good. The detail of the school's checks on staff is exemplary and all appropriate training has taken place.

The school works well with a range of partners, particularly welfare support agencies and those involved in providing off-site vocational opportunities. Many partnerships centre on the school's specialism and contribute to students' achievement. For example, language work in local primary schools has led to increasing numbers of students starting Year 7 with a basic knowledge of one foreign language. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to promoting community cohesion. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the school's context and provide good opportunities for international links but are not yet fully evaluating the impact of the school's actions.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

A relatively small number of parents and carers contributed their views to the inspection team through the parents' and carers' questionnaire. A large majority of replies indicate positive views of the school. Parents and carers believe that the school provides a safe environment, supporting the view of the inspection team that the school gives strong support to the welfare of its students. A minority believe that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour and inspectors took note of this, together with observations during the inspection, in judging that behaviour is satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Little Lever School Specialist Language College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 89 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,018 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	25	53	60	9	10	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	19	21	62	70	4	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	24	49	55	10	11	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	25	49	55	6	7	3	3
The teaching is good at this school	16	18	50	56	10	11	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	11	55	62	13	15	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	17	55	62	11	12	1	1
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)	15	17	56	63	8	9	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	16	57	64	10	11	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	17	41	46	17	19	8	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	12	53	60	11	12	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	16	18	55	62	7	8	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	21	50	56	10	11	2	2

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

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



15 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Little Lever School Specialist Language College, Bolton, BL3 1BT

You will recall that recently a team of inspectors and I inspected your school. I would like to thank those of you we met and those of you who completed the inspection questionnaire. You gave your views readily and helped us to build up a picture of the school. This letter is to tell you about what we found.

Here are some of the things that we liked about your school:

- the fact that you attend regularly; this is something that contributes to your future employability
- the way that you contribute to the school and the wider community
- the way that the school cares for you and gives you support when you need it in your work and your personal development.

Most aspects of the school are satisfactory and some are good. However, we judge that examination results in English and mathematics have been too low for a number of years. As a result, we have given the school a notice to improve. This means that another inspector will visit you again in about six to eight months' time to check how well the school is making progress against the areas for improvement we have identified. These are to raise attainment in English and mathematics, to give you more opportunities to be involved in your learning, to use assessments better to ensure that all of you are fully stretched, and to develop further the role of those teachers who organise your learning.

We noted that a minority of you have concerns about students' behaviour in lessons. We hope that the small number of you who do not try hard enough in your work will play your part in helping the school to improve. We also urge you all to put extra efforts into doing well in the important subjects of English and mathematics. We wish you all well.

Yours faithfully

Paul Chambers

Her Majesty's Inspector

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