

Lancaster School

Prittlewell Chase, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 0RT

Inspection dates 12–13 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher's drive to do the best for every student has led to huge improvements in the quality of education the school provides.
- Her well-thought out plans, positive outlook and calm determination have made sure the necessary changes have taken place to raise standards, improve teaching and students' progress since the last inspection.
- Governors, staff and parents are right behind her and have fully supported her actions for improvement.
- She has re-organised the school leaders well so that they can help everyone share all the best ideas and practice.
- Teaching is mostly good and some is outstanding. Students really enjoy their lessons.
- Students' achieve well because teachers keep a close eye on their work, and help them catch up quickly if they fall behind.
- Excellent relationships are a real strength of the school. Students show respect for staff and each other. They behave extremely well and feel very safe.
- Staff manage any difficult behaviour very well. Potential difficulties are nipped in the bud so lessons are not interrupted.
- The school works hard to make sure parents feel that they are listened to. Parents think the school is 'brilliant' and has really made a difference.
- The sixth form is good and prepares students well for life after school by giving them a range of practical, useful experiences and basic skills that prepares them effectively for their next stage of life.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although teaching is usually good, not every teacher always plans work that is just right for every student to do the best they can.
- Sometimes staff do things for students when they need to learn to do tasks by themselves.
- Not all teaching assistants are fully involved in planning lessons and helping students' learn.
- The information about how well students are doing is not used as well as it could be to show the good progress that students make in lessons and to plan the next step in learning for individuals.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons, of which 11 were seen jointly with senior staff. They talked to students at lunchtimes, in tutorials and looked at their work
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other school leaders, two groups of governors, representative of the local authority and with a selection of students.
- Eighteen responses to the online parent’s questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account. Parents show strong support for the school’s work and high levels of satisfaction with the quality of education provided. These views were reinforced in a meeting held by an inspector with six parents. Inspectors also took account of the school’s own questionnaires for students and their parents.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents and records about how well students are doing at school, their behaviour, attendance and information about staff performance.

Inspection team

Debra McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Aileen Thomas

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Lancaster School is a secondary special school for students with statements of special educational needs for moderate, severe and profound multiple learning difficulties. Some also have autism. Most join the school at the beginning of Key Stage 4, but a few join the sixth form from other local special schools. Most students are currently in the sixth form.
- The majority of pupils are White British and speak English as their first language. They travel to school from Southend-on-Sea and the neighbouring local authority of Essex.
- Some pupils attend a local secondary school, Chase High School for course work.
- A high number of students are supported by the pupil premium, which is extra government funding for particular groups of students. In this school the funding currently applies to students who are looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible to free school meals.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding, by ensuring that every teacher:
 - always plans work that is just right to help every student reach their potential.
 - fully involves teaching assistants in planning lessons and helping pupils learn.
 - makes sure pupils have every possible opportunity to learn to do things for themselves.
- Use information about students' progress more effectively by making sure it:
 - accurately reflects the good progress students make in lessons
 - is used consistently and accurately by all teachers to plan individual students' next steps.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Information from students' records, their work and the progress they make in lessons shows that students make good progress given their original starting point on entry to school. However, the information about how well students are doing is not used as well as it could be to show the good progress that students make in lessons and to plan the next step in learning for individuals.
- Last year the school started a new way of recording students' progress. Because it was different, there were a few 'teething problems' that have now been put right and the performance data collected is giving senior leaders a much better picture of students' achievement compared with similar schools nationally. Sharing what they find with other similar schools has made the picture even clearer.
- All students achieve equally well, whatever their background or learning difficulty. They make good progress in all subjects, but especially English and mathematics. Literacy and numeracy skills are taught in specific lessons in Key Stage 4 and across a variety of subjects in the sixth form. Outcomes are good because teachers know individual pupils very well. They provide the necessary support to ensure that students make good gains in learning. They know when individuals are falling behind and provide the necessary guidance to help them catch up quickly. Senior leaders are quick to identify any extra training staff may require to help students learn better, for example, using different ways of teaching students with autism so that they can communicate and participate in lessons more effectively. Provision makes sure everyone has the same opportunities to learn effectively.
- The improved way of checking how well students in the sixth form learn and practise new skills, has helped teachers plan the right kind of experiences to move learning on. Students have some super opportunities for work experience which they clearly enjoy, such as at a local charity shop. One student said he 'couldn't wait to go again!' and was already planning how to develop his role there.
- Students take useful and relevant courses that will help them to succeed in later life. The school has developed links with local high schools and colleges to widen the range of accreditation available. For example, last year some students successfully followed GCSE courses in information and communication technology and mathematics, while this year three pupils have embarked on creative media courses. Data shows that students on external courses have made good progress in the subjects taught.
- The school does not enter students early for their GCSE's.
- Students achieve well in information and communication technology, using computer technology in a range of tasks and subjects. For example, a group of sixth formers working towards their accreditation, showed how they could 'cut and paste' pictures about 'respect' to produce a poster on their laptops.
- School leaders have thought carefully about the way subjects are taught and the different ways that students learn. For example, leaders have reorganised activities for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties to ensure that they use their senses to further promote learning. As a result, they find learning more fun, purposeful and make better progress.
- Lessons for students with severe or moderate learning difficulties are full of relevant, worthwhile

practical activities that prepare them well for independent life after school. For example, learning how to tell the time on analogue and digital clocks or finding out about time differences around the world.

- Students have ample practical opportunities to develop their reading skills in a variety of activities. For example, reading a series of instructions in food technology or checking their targets. They enjoy reading for pleasure and make good progress because they are given activities, reading materials and resources that match their capabilities.
- Students entitled to free school meals, and supported through pupil premium funding, make the same good progress, in English and mathematics, as all other students in school. Depending on the nature of their special educational needs, their attainment compares favourably, and is at least in line with the standards achieved by similar students that are not entitled to free school meals.
- Those students entitled to pupil premium funding benefit in a variety of ways. For example, those with profound and multiple learning difficulties have benefited from additional specialist equipment to help them join in more activities, while others have received extra adult help to accelerate their progress. Some more-able pupils are able to join in lessons at a local high school which has improved their social, emotional and academic development.

The quality of teaching is good

- The headteacher's strong focus on improving teaching means most is now good and some is outstanding. Teachers have had the opportunity to observe colleagues to see what good teaching looks like so that they can try out new ideas and improved teaching methods in their own lessons.
- The excellent relationships between staff and students means students are happy to participate in the interesting and worthwhile learning activities teachers plan for them. Staff are good at thinking of ways to keep students interested and motivated, such as splitting the class into the 'Red Tomato' and 'Green Pepper' teams, as in the popular television cookery programme, to provide an element of competition.
- Students learn to work effectively in teams. For example, in a sixth form lesson students worked together in different roles to fill hanging baskets. Having been shown what to do by the teacher, one student was then able to teach another student how to carry out the task. Mostly, students are encouraged to do as much for themselves as possible, though very occasionally opportunities are missed for students to practise skills by themselves. At times staff do things for individuals which restricts their independence.
- Information technology is generally used well to help students overcome their physical disabilities. Teachers often use alternatives to verbal communication such as using signs and symbols to promote communication. On a few occasions signs and symbols to aid communication, were not used as often as they could be and consequently students were not able to join in activities quite as well.
- Teachers mostly use questioning well to check how much students have learned and give them plenty of time to think their answers through. In the very best teaching students are given opportunities to solve problems and practise new skills on their own. They are also given feedback on their progress so they knew how to improve.

- Most, but not all, activities are matched to students' abilities and specific needs. There are times when work is not pitched quite right. Teachers build on student's strengths so that they grow in confidence and their self-esteem is boosted. Very occasionally some teachers spend too much time on whole class teaching and do not move on quickly enough to individual or small group work.
- Teaching assistants are not always fully involved in planning. On a few occasions teachers did not include them fully to move learning on and did not always make best use of their time.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Students have opportunities to reflect on the 'thought for the week', visit mosques and local churches and participate in celebrations of other cultures. Outside speakers visit assemblies and lessons, helping students to find out about life in multicultural Britain. Sixth form students interviewed staff about their religious beliefs as part of a cultural diversity course. Such work helps students gain and understanding of their own, and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students are exceptionally well behaved in lessons and around the school. They are keen to participate in activities and no disruptive behaviour was observed during the inspection. Staff manage behaviour extremely well and are able to anticipate potential problems, so that learning is not disrupted.
- Senior leaders keep a close eye on records about students' behaviour and ensure staff have the right training to deal with any eventuality. Teachers share information about students' behaviour so that everyone works together to manage individuals' behaviour effectively. There is a strong emphasis on good manners and adults' high expectations means students know exactly what is expected of them. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- Students are extremely supportive and encouraging of each other. They are considerate of their friends who use wheelchairs, holding doors open for them, and encourage classmates who are struggling, one saying 'Come on, you did it really well last time.' Students are encouraged to support others, not solely through raising money for national charities, but causes nearer to home, like helping a local child by selling plants to staff and visitors.
- The school's 'buddy system' helps older students to take responsibility for younger ones, particularly ensuring new arrivals are helped to settle in quickly. The excellent relationships established very early on with new parents ensure the smooth transition of newcomers into school life.
- The school can point to striking examples of significant improvements in students' behaviour and how it has impacted on the lives of their families. One parent spoke of 'breathing a sigh of relief' when his child joined the school, knowing they were at last being helped to manage their behaviour successfully. In a music lesson, a student was seen confidently leading her classmates in a rendition of 'Hippy, Hippy Shake,' when a few months ago she would not even enter the music room.
- Students suitably learn about healthy lifestyles, internet safety and how to be responsible adults. The school uses every opportunity to link with outside agencies, such as the local police community support officers, to help students learn about cyber bullying, stranger danger and road safety.

- Staff know that students feel safe and secure because they regularly check how individuals are feeling. Students are regularly asked if they feel safe and what they would do if they were bullied. School records show bullying is very rare and is dealt with swiftly and effectively on the rare occasion that it occurs.
- As well as working very closely with parents, the school nurse is fully involved in supporting students and their families. The school also works with other agencies, such as the local authority behaviour support team, to make sure individuals and their families get all the help that they need.
- Absenteeism is rigorously followed up and the school has worked hard to improve its attendance rate. Students who are absent, because of long term complex medical conditions, lower the overall attendance figure. Nevertheless, the attendance of all other students is good with attendance above average when compared to secondary schools nationally.

The leadership and management are good

- The period of unsettling temporary leadership ended 18 months ago with the permanent appointment of the current headteacher. She quickly identified what needed to be done to improve the school, but took care not to 'throw the baby out with the bath water' and combined the best of the old with her new ideas, to make a real impact on the quality of education the school provides.
- Parents, governors and staff are fully supportive of her work. 'Brilliant' and 'fantastic' are some of the words used to describe her leadership. Governors especially feel the school has turned the corner and that the headteacher's positive outlook and determination to see changes through, means the school is 'buzzing' with activity.
- However, although many changes and benefits can already be seen, some guidance is not fully embedded, for example, ensuring students' progress in lessons is tracked effectively and information is suitably used to plan the next steps in learning. The focus on improving the quality of teaching has taken some time to make a difference, but the impact of teaching improvements can now be seen clearly in the vast majority of lessons, with students now making good gains in their learning in lessons and over time.
- The improvement in the way subjects are taught is now well established. The reorganisation of school leaders has made them more effective. They have played a big part in improving teaching quality. Subject leaders work closely with class teachers to offer useful help and advice to improve provision and lesson outcomes.
- A wealth of additional activities are provided to enrich learning, and to promote students' personal development. Students join in a variety of lunchtime clubs, residential experiences and have opportunities for cultural exchanges. Access to local mainstream schools has added to the array of opportunities available.
- The local authority provided effective support to improve teaching and learning which has led to improved leadership and accelerated progress. It has now recognised the turning point the school has reached and provides support as and when required. Additional guidance focused on improving teaching and learning is provided through a school improvement partner.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is good. Governors have provided consistent and effective support to the school throughout its period of change and the headteacher has been given the necessary support and guidance to drive improvement quickly. Governors are appropriately shaping the strategic direction of the school. The governing body knows how well students are performing and the quality of teaching and its impact. They know what impact pupil premium funding is making on those receiving it. A fine tuning of their roles and reorganisation of their working practices has enhanced their understanding of students' progress, the school's finances and the performance management of staff. Performance management is robust. Governors know what is done to reward good teachers and to tackle any underperformance. Statutory duties, including safeguarding responsibilities, are fully met.

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	115445
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	405581

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Sharp
Headteacher	Melanie Hall
Date of previous school inspection	2-3 March 2011
Telephone number	01702 342543
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