

Marsden Heights Community College

Edge End Lane, Nelson, Lancashire BB9 0PR

Inspection dates

6–7 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The school's overall effectiveness has declined considerably since the last inspection.
- Leaders have failed to tackle underachievement and weak teaching rapidly enough. As a result, pupils make inadequate progress and standards remain low across the school.
- Boys and disadvantaged pupils have significantly underachieved for some time. Too few of these pupils make sufficient progress, including in English and mathematics.
- In too many subjects, teachers' assessments are inconsistent and information about the progress of pupils is unreliable.
- Expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are not high enough. Targets set for the majority of pupils are not challenging enough.
- The quality of teaching is inadequate. This slows pupils' learning and progress. The school's policies on assessment and feedback to pupils are not consistently applied and so have limited impact on their progress.
- Pupils' behaviour requires improvement. Some pupils create low-level disruption in lessons. This has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning and slows their progress.
- Attendance remains below average. This has a negative impact on the learning of some pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.
- Leaders and governors do not ensure that pupil premium funding is used effectively.
- Leadership does not currently have the capacity for further improvement. Governors do not hold leaders sufficiently to account for the quality of education provided by the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Strong relationships between staff and leaders create a climate of trust and teamwork.
- The school has reduced the number of pupils excluded for poor behaviour.
- Pupils supported by the literacy and numeracy catch-up funding are making good progress.
- Pupils are well prepared for the responsibilities of life in modern Britain. Cultural cohesion is strong throughout the school.
- The work with pupils on bullying and online safety is good. Pupils feel safe in school. Safeguarding is effective.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and secure good or better progress for all groups of pupils, across all year groups, in a wide range of subjects, especially for disadvantaged pupils and boys by:
 - taking urgent steps to ensure that leaders collect accurate and reliable information on pupils' current performance
 - using information about pupils' attainment and progress swiftly to identify any underachievement so that timely interventions can be effective
 - ensuring that leaders set sufficiently challenging targets for pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers plan challenging and engaging activities for all pupils
 - ensuring that teachers make accurate assessments of pupils' attainment and progress and use this information in their planning to provide work which is closely matched to pupils' starting points and individual needs
 - building on the recent good work on improving behaviour so that low-level disruption to learning is reduced and incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively
 - sharing more widely the good practice that already exists in pockets across the school.
- Increase the capacity for improvement and the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - insisting on high expectations at every level of what pupils can achieve so that all staff are aspirational for all groups of pupils
 - ensuring that all teachers consistently follow the school's assessment policy so that pupils receive feedback which helps them to make progress
 - ensuring that leaders intensify their work with families and the local community to improve attendance and reduce the number of pupils who are persistently absent
 - ensuring that pupil premium funding is spent effectively and improves the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
 - securely linking the procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning to pupils' progress
 - ensuring that governors hold leaders rigorously to account for the progress of all groups of pupils, in all year groups and across all subjects
 - ensuring that leaders and the governing body urgently take the action outlined in the school improvement plan to improve pupils' achievement rapidly.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The leaders and governing body of Marsden Heights Community College have overseen years of low achievement and have allowed a large proportion of pupils to leave the school having made inadequate progress. In 2016, the overall progress made by pupils from their starting points was below the national average. The school's information about current pupils shows that they, too, are unlikely to make enough progress. As a result, the overall standard of education is inadequate.
- There is the belief at all levels of leadership that the low prior attainment of the pupils has adversely affected their achievement. Leaders and governors do not realise that calculations of progress are based on comparisons with pupils' peers nationally with the same starting points. Therefore, the low attainment of pupils on entry to the school cannot be used as an excuse for poor progress.
- The self-evaluation undertaken by senior leaders is too generous and they have not fully recognised or taken action to tackle the improvements that are needed. This is largely because leaders do not have an accurate view of the progress of current pupils. The targets set for pupils are not sufficiently challenging and the purpose of teachers' assessment is not clear. There are too few opportunities in lessons for teachers to assess how much pupils have learned and leaders do not analyse thoroughly the assessment data which is collected.
- Teachers are increasingly aware of the disadvantaged pupils in the school. However, leaders have not used pupil premium funding effectively to provide any extra support for these pupils or to reduce any of the particular barriers that they face. This leads to significant underachievement of this group compared to their peers with the same starting points nationally.
- Low expectations of pupils permeate the school and targets are not aspirational enough for the majority of pupils. Together, these factors result in a lack of ambition for pupils.
- There are significant weaknesses in assessment policy and practice as leaders and the governing body have yet to embrace fully the new ways that attainment and progress measures are now calculated. Leaders' knowledge of the progress made by current pupils and by different groups of pupils across the curriculum in all year groups is not reliable.
- While leaders are working hard with parents and pupils to improve levels of attendance, a comprehensive strategy introduced to engage parents fully is in its infancy. Strong relationships between home and school have not yet been forged and, as a result, attendance is still low.
- The leadership of teaching and learning, while comprehensive in the activities undertaken to ensure quality, has not had a clear and measurable impact on pupil progress.
- Pockets of strong teaching are evident, but inconsistencies in planning and the quality of feedback mean that pupils' experiences are different throughout the school. The school's promotion of equality of opportunity is inadequate; therefore, too many groups of pupils underachieve, and pupils' progress in different year groups and different subjects varies too much.

- Leaders have not focused sufficiently on preparing staff for their new responsibilities when they take on middle leadership roles. As a consequence, some middle leaders feel ill-equipped and lack the confidence to be fully effective in their new roles.
- Staff and newly qualified teachers value the support and training that is provided. It is improving some aspects of teaching and learning but has not yet had a positive impact on pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school's use of literacy and numeracy catch-up funding is well planned and well targeted. Records from English and mathematics show that pupils supported through this funding are making good progress.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. There is good social and cultural cohesion throughout the school and, as a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders have had some successes in improving behaviour. The recent introduction of a behaviour strategy building on the school's 'relational graces' is fuelled by a moral purpose to create well-rounded and considerate young people who can function well in society.
- The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has not held leaders sufficiently to account for the performance of the school. Newer members of the governing body are providing increasing levels of challenge, but governors are still settling for less than detailed responses from leaders. The governing body does not provide the necessary challenge to leaders.
- Governors have not been rigorous in checking on the ways in which pupil premium funding has been spent and how effective it has been in raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Governors accept that disadvantaged pupils receive only the same support as non-disadvantaged pupils. The governing body has not done enough to challenge leaders about the underachievement of this group and has failed to tackle this issue with sufficient urgency.
- Governors' lack of awareness about pupils' progress means that they are not able to ask challenging questions of leaders about pupils' performance. Governors have identified this weakness and relevant training is due next term.
- Governors' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Governors also find difficulties in engaging parents. Although governors are highly committed to the school, their low expectations mean that they do not have a clear vision for a school in which pupils can achieve highly.
- Governors have worked with the headteacher to improve the rigour of performance management processes. As a result, teachers are held more to account for the progress of their pupils, but this has had limited impact so far.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Policies and practices meet statutory requirements and the culture of safeguarding in the school means that pupils feel safe.
- Pupils are not taught about the risks of extremism and radicalisation until Year 9. Consequently, some pupils could be at risk in these areas. The school is taking steps to remedy this omission with immediate effect.

- All staff and pupils know who the designated person responsible for safeguarding is. Staff are fully aware of the procedures to follow if they feel a pupil may be at risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching is weak. There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching across the school. Leaders have been ineffective in ensuring that all teaching is of good quality. As a result, pupils make inadequate progress in the majority of subjects.
- Pupils have experienced significant changes of teaching caused by difficulties in recruitment or the long-term absence of staff. This has limited the progress of some pupils. Leaders are working to stabilise staffing and also to support staff new to the school.
- The expectations of the majority of teachers are not high enough. Teaching frequently lacks challenge and thus fails to engage pupils. In many cases, this lack of challenge leads to slow progress, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils.
- Teaching is often not well planned to meet the varying needs and abilities of pupils. Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan work that challenges and stretches pupils at the right level. Where teaching is at its weakest, all pupils do the same work whatever their ability.
- In some classes, work is planned to meet the needs of individual pupils but they are often left to choose for themselves the level of challenge in the work they do. Pupils do not regularly take up the more stretching activities provided.
- Assessment practice, both in lessons and when formally assessing pupils' attainment, is not accurate enough and fails to meet the needs of pupils.
- Too often misconceptions or errors are not corrected and pupils leave the lesson with incorrect knowledge and understanding.
- There is a lack of clarity across faculties and within departments about how teachers should formally assess pupils' attainment and progress. As a result, leaders and teachers do not have a clear idea of the achievement of groups of pupils and so interventions to tackle any underachievement are not put swiftly into place.
- Teaching of pupils in the 'alternative curriculum' provision is not driving forward their achievement rapidly enough. The quality of work seen in these pupils' books did not show challenge, and the impact of this provision on current pupils' progress is not closely tracked by leaders.
- The quality of feedback across the school varies. Little feedback given by teachers promotes learning. Even when teachers follow the marking policy, their feedback is not consistently acted on by pupils and so limited improvements are seen.
- Attitudes to learning vary across year groups and in different subjects. Strong relationships between teachers and pupils help to motivate pupils and drive a culture of positive learning. However, this is not consistent across the school.
- Pupils' literacy skills are not consistently supported across the curriculum. Frequent examples of poor punctuation, spelling and grammar are not corrected by teachers. More attention is paid to pupils' use of technical language in different subjects and this helps their communication skills.

- Homework is not used regularly to deepen and extend learning. There are inconsistencies in the setting of homework. A new system has recently been introduced to improve this aspect of learning, but it is too soon to see whether this initiative has had any real impact.
- The pupils that read to inspectors did so fluently and with some meaning. Some words were pronounced incorrectly but pupils repeated the words accurately with guidance. Pupils chose books appropriate to their age and discussed what they had read, showing their understanding. Pupils told inspectors that they were given time in English for silent reading, but there are limited opportunities for reading in other subjects.
- Low-level disruption was evident in lessons and was closely linked to the lack of engagement and interest pupils showed in their work. Inspectors saw pupils become disengaged and sometimes saw more serious incidents of poor behaviour. When teaching was well matched to the needs of pupils, behaviour was much better.
- Support from teaching assistants is generally effective, particularly for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Some teaching in the school is effective. When this is the case, teachers' good subject knowledge helps them to plan learning which enthuses pupils and supports their progress.
- Some teachers have high expectations and their pupils make rapid progress. Questioning is used effectively and activities are well planned and suited to the needs of pupils. Teaching of this quality enables pupils to make significant strides in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The majority of pupils around the school show respect for each other, staff and visitors. Most pupils are courteous to adults.
- Pupils report that they feel safe on site and that bullying is rare. Pupils interviewed by inspectors said that if bullying does occur, they know who to go to and are confident that it will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Most of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed with this view.
- Pupils usually wear their uniform smartly. Pupils show respect for their environment, which is well cared for and generally free from litter and graffiti.
- The school's approach to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can be seen around the school. Displays are used to highlight themes relating to personal development and the recent work on 'relational graces' is preparing pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe online is strong. Pupils are taught how to protect themselves from a range of risks.
- Although the statutory requirements for impartial careers advice and guidance are met, provision is not sharply matched to the needs of pupils. Leaders' strategic overview of pupils' destinations and professional training for staff in this area is weak.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- A high staff presence on corridors and at lesson changeover ensures that pupils are safe. However, a small minority of pupils do not respond immediately to guidance from staff about their boisterous behaviour and, therefore, movement around the school is not always as calm as it should be.
- Pupils' behaviour is not good as their attitudes to learning are not consistently positive. This is most noticeable when teaching fails to ignite their curiosity or does not provide enough challenge. On these occasions, inspectors saw pupils disengage with their learning in lessons. Occurrences of low-level disruption were common.
- The school has recently introduced a new behaviour system built on the school's 'relational graces'. The work behind this system is underpinned by a real vision and commitment to move away from punitive responses to poor behaviour and towards dealing with the pupils' needs and barriers to learning.
- The new behaviour approach, coupled with significant investment in pastoral staff and a 'restoration' unit, has led to a decrease in the number of fixed-term exclusions. Records also show a decrease in racist incidents and bullying, including homophobic bullying.
- The impact of the new behaviour strategy on lower-level poor behaviour is not yet evident as the school's records do not yet show a falling trend in such behaviour.
- Staff work hard with parents and pupils on improving the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent from school. Despite this work, attendance is still well below national averages and is showing little sign of improvement, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- A very small number of pupils are taught at off-site provision for the whole of the week. Leaders have established procedures with the providers to ensure that pupils are attending and are engaged in their work.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils enter the school with standards that are well below average for their age. The GCSE results in both 2014 and 2015 were below the government's floor standards. Pupils' progress was weak and their attainment was low.
- In 2016, pupils' progress in English, mathematics and a wide range of other subjects for all groups of pupils was below that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- Only 36% of pupils in 2016 gained a good pass in both GCSE English and mathematics, and just over a quarter of disadvantaged pupils achieved these qualifications. Some parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, expressed real concern about achievement at the school and were disappointed that so many pupils need to re-take examinations in English and/or mathematics at college.
- By the time they reach the end of Year 11, pupils, and especially boys and disadvantaged pupils, underachieve in a wide range of subjects. This is caused by weaknesses in assessment, variability in teaching and targets that are not aspirational for a substantial proportion of pupils.

- The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should. This is because teaching does not meet their needs and the expectations that teachers have of them are too low. Consequently, the most able move on to the next stage of their education having underperformed.
- Inspectors reviewed work in a sample of pupils' books and files during this inspection. This included those selected by inspectors in addition to books seen during lessons. Work completed by pupils varies considerably in quality. Some pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, do not make much progress, while others make more progress in some subjects than in others.
- Leaders have not ensured that assessment information about the current attainment and progress of pupils and groups of pupils is accurate. As a result, teachers' predictions of how well pupils are achieving are inconsistent across and even within subjects.
- The analysis of information about the achievement of current pupils is not sufficiently well developed to give leaders and teachers an accurate view of pupils' attainment and progress. As a result, teaching is not matched well to the individual needs of pupils and their starting points. There is no overall awareness of the progress made by the different groups of pupils in different year groups and in different subjects.
- Assessment data provided by the school about current pupils is unclear. Leaders' analysis cannot demonstrate that pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, are going to make progress in line with their peers nationally, or that progress will improve on that from last year.
- All targets set for pupils are based on a strategy which is not aspirational enough to allow the majority of pupils to match the achievement of their peers nationally. The latest national guidance for calculating attainment and progress measures for pupils with different starting points has not been used to guide leaders' target setting.
- More resources and additional support have been put in place for pupils in Year 11, but there has been no analysis of the impact of these interventions or an overview of which pupils should receive intervention in which subjects and why. As a result, there is no evidence that any of these interventions are improving pupils' achievement.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is slow. This group of pupils has underachieved considerably for some time. In 2016, disadvantaged pupils significantly underachieved in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. The most able disadvantaged pupils significantly underachieved in languages.
- Current assessment data shows that many disadvantaged pupils are currently behind their target grades in several year groups and in a range of subjects. Pupils' work over time and that seen in lessons indicates that differences between the attainment and progress of these pupils and that of other pupils nationally are unlikely to diminish.
- The majority of pupils move on to sustained education, employment or training when they leave, but the proportion is below the national average. Systems to track pupils' destinations do not give a full enough picture to enable the careers adviser to build on strengths and improve guidance for future cohorts.

School details

Unique reference number	134990
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10024204

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	902
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Ed Saville
Headteacher	Ian Adlington
Telephone number	01282 683 060
Website	www.mhcc.co
Email address	admin@marsdenheights.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 October 2012

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website about up-to date admission arrangements, curriculum information about some subjects, information about the use of pupil premium funding, pupils' attendance and the pecuniary and business interests of governors.
- Marsden Heights Community College is a broadly average-sized school with a comprehensive intake.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is higher than average. Some pupils are supported through the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, as is the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs and/or an education, health and care plan.

- A small number of pupils in key stage 4 attend alternative provision for their education at The Alternative School.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed to the school.
- In 2015, the school did not meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects in different age groups. Some observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of other short visits to lessons, form times and other activities.
- Inspectors listened to a group of pupils read.
- Inspectors met with pupils, both formally and informally, to listen to their views.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, newly and recently qualified teachers, groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation that covered: information about pupils' attainment and progress; the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan; minutes of meetings; and records relating to teaching and learning, pupils' attendance and behaviour and safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaks, lunchtimes, in registration periods, in assemblies, in lessons and at the end of the school day. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and looked at a sample of their books.
- Inspectors visited the internal behaviour 'restoration' room. Inspectors also spoke by telephone to a representative of the alternative provider.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in the 10 responses to Ofsted's online survey (Parent View) as well as comments received via the free text facility on Parent View. Inspectors also took into account the 44 responses to a questionnaire for staff and the 27 responses to a questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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