



Upper Wharfedale School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 121690
Local Authority North Yorkshire
Inspection number 292205
Inspection date 25 September 2006
Reporting inspector Anthony Briggs

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Wharfeside Avenue
School category	Community		Threshfield, Skipton
Age range of pupils	11–16		North Yorkshire BD23 5BS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01756 752215
Number on roll (school)	290	Fax number	01756 752363
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr R Moorfield
		Headteacher	Mrs R Reese
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–16	25 September 2006	292205

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Upper Wharfedale is a much smaller than average school. It is non-selective within a locality that operates a selective system. Pupils are drawn from generally advantaged rural areas with some travelling up to 20 miles from remote dales, farms and villages. The school's population is very stable with more boys than girls in most year groups. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage with hardly any from minority ethnic groups. The vast majority speak English fluently. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. There is an above average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school gained specialist status in sport 12 months ago. The headteacher joined the school just three weeks before this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy coming to Upper Wharfedale: many of them travel a considerable distance to be here. They like the community spirit and the way they all get on with each other and this is reflected in their good attendance. For many, school is the only contact they have with other people outside their immediate family. They speak fondly of the way teachers know them and take a genuine interest in their lives. Parents value the work of the school; one commented, 'My daughter has thrived at Upper Wharfedale'. The school benefits from a well managed specialist provision for sport. Pupils value the excellent facilities and the opportunities to take part in lots of sporting events. The impact of the specialist status has developed strong links with partner primary schools and the local community. The inspection confirms the school's view that it is providing a satisfactory education for its pupils.

In the past, GCSE examination results have been a strength of the school, but the most recent results indicate a considerable decline. However, in such a small school, each pupil accounts for 1.7% of the marks and the performance of a handful of pupils can easily skew the whole picture. Currently, standards are average because the teaching focuses mainly on ensuring that most pupils learn what they need to know to get through examinations successfully but does not always challenge them enough to get the most out of their learning. As a result, pupils' achievement is satisfactory rather than good. Consequently, the school provides satisfactory value for money. There is some variation in the quality of teaching, with a few teachers sticking to tried and tested techniques while others incorporate more interesting and exciting activities that really motivate pupils. A few teachers underestimate the ability of pupils and do not challenge them enough. Pupils are taught to become good citizens and their understanding of other cultures and faiths is strong. This strengthens their personal development and increases their knowledge of the wider world. They are keen to learn and behaviour is satisfactory in lessons and good around the school. The curriculum, while satisfactory, lacks sufficient vocational courses to cater fully for the needs of all pupils. It is enhanced considerably by a wide range of sporting activities that develop pupils' skills and enjoyment. However, pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not get enough opportunity to study information and communication technology (ICT).

Pupils are encouraged to be healthy through improved food and drink choice and lots of exercise opportunities. They feel cared for and appreciate the fact that there is always somebody to share a problem with. However, they do not get consistent advice and guidance on how to improve their work and marking of work is patchy from one subject to another. Most of the issues raised at the previous inspection have been tackled. Leaders have accurately identified the correct priorities for the school and demonstrate the necessary capacity to move the school forward.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise teachers' expectations so that all pupils are challenged to the best of their ability in lessons.

- Ensure that managers at all levels monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching to ensure that learning and achievement are at the heart of every lesson and that pupils know how well they are doing.
- Ensure that teachers mark work consistently and use assessment information to match work accurately to the needs of all learners.
- Expand the range of courses on offer to better match the aspirations and skills of pupils and ensure statutory compliance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When pupils enter school, their standards are broadly average. However, few pupils have gained the very highest Key Stage 2 test scores. Throughout Years 7 to 9, pupils do not always achieve as well as they should because some teachers have low expectations of what they can do. The work undertaken at primary school is not always built upon as well as it could be. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are presented with a more structured approach focused on ensuring that they are successful in their examinations. Consequently, for the past few years most have performed very well in examinations and left school with an above average number of qualifications. However, as a result of some unimaginative teaching, current standards are broadly average, which represents satisfactory rather than good achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their classmates because of the support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Cultural awareness is strong as other cultures are explored well through a comprehensive course of citizenship and religious education. External visitors are regular features and pupils also visit mosques and temples to improve their knowledge of multicultural Britain. Pupils are keen to learn and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning. Behaviour is satisfactory and only deteriorates in response to dull teaching. The new isolation room is having a positive impact on the number of pupils excluded from school. Attendance is good and even though over half have to be bussed into school, punctuality is not an issue. Most of the time, pupils are keen to learn and want to do well. They get on with each other and are polite and friendly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils learn satisfactorily because teaching is secure and accurate. They enjoy lessons that actively involve them in their own learning and dislike lessons that involve teachers

talking too much and 'lots of note taking'. Some teachers are up to date with the latest developments and make their lessons interesting, exciting and challenging, while others focus too much on getting the pupils through examinations rather than ensuring that they learn as much as possible. Pupils feel that some teachers do not make them work hard enough in lessons and this view is also shared by a number of parents. One stated: 'I wish that the teachers were able to inspire and motivate more.' Many teachers do provide lessons that engage the pupils and allow them to take ownership of their learning, and it is this style of teaching that gets the best results and is enjoyed most by pupils. Because examination results have been generally good, teachers have had a certain element of complacency and have failed to spot that pupils were not achieving as well as they should. Teachers do not consistently mark work. Pupils are not fully aware of how well they are doing in each subject because assessment procedures are not embedded. It is for these reasons that teaching is satisfactory rather than good and pupils' learning is not better than satisfactory.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has a traditional range of subjects but is in need of modernisation. There is not enough emphasis on vocational and work-related courses to meet the changing needs of the pupils and help them prepare as well as possible for the world of work. ICT remains a particular issue in Years 10 and 11, with many pupils not using computers enough. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of sporting activities and links with the community, such as partner primary schools and the local rugby club. A strength is the well planned personal, social, health and citizenship education course and the wide range of interesting topics on offer.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils appreciate the small size of the school and say that teachers know them well. They feel confident in having somebody to turn to if they experience any problems. Child protection procedures are in place and in line with local and national guidelines. Pupils feel cared for and this is a strength of the school's work. Transition arrangements from the primary schools to Upper Wharfedale are effective and have been strengthened by the school's good links through its specialist status work. Parents stated: 'The journey from primary to secondary has been a good one' and, 'My son has had a brilliant start to Year 7.' The quality of academic guidance is weak. Consequently, pupils are not systematically told how well they are doing or how to improve their work and their full potential is not always realised.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The brand new headteacher is well aware of what to do to turn the school into a good school rather than a satisfactory one. The school has been successful with examination

results but this has masked some of the issues that need to be tackled. Some teaching is complacent and at times unimaginative; monitoring of this has only recently become as rigorous as it should be. The deputy headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school and has instigated a good structure for evaluating and improving teaching; this is beginning to have some impact. The senior managers have a good grasp of what the school does well and what needs improving. Governors are knowledgeable and have considerable educational expertise. They are confident that the new headteacher and the deputy headteacher will provide the necessary rigour and vision to deliver and will sort out the few problems that exist quickly and effectively. They hold the school to account but some have focused too much on the overall GCSE results rather than on the progress each pupil makes and how well they achieve.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school the other day. I was impressed with the way in which you freely told me about what you liked and disliked about Upper Wharfedale. Your comments helped me to focus my inspection and check on just how well your school is doing.

You told me you enjoy coming to school and how for many of you it is the only opportunity you get to meet with people other than your family. You made it clear that you are happy about the small size of the school and the way in which teachers look after you. You are particularly proud of the new sports hall and the opportunities you get to do physical activities. Some of you explained how you learned more in lessons that involved you in practical activities. I agreed with most of the points you raised and found your school to be doing a satisfactory job of helping you learn.

You and your parents pointed out that, on occasions, teachers gave you work that was too easy and I agree. I have asked the headteacher to make sure that all teachers give you work that stretches you in lessons. You also mentioned that you sometimes got bored in lessons when the teacher talked too much and made you make lots of revision notes. I have asked the school to make sure that all teachers make lessons interesting and focus on how much you are learning and not just on how to pass exams. I think that the teachers need to give you more helpful comments when they mark your books so that you know how well you are doing and better understand what you need to do to improve. Older pupils said they would like a wider range of courses and would like to be able to use computers more in lessons. I have asked the governors and the headteacher to look into this for you.