

Richard Rose Central Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135621
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	333015
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Sara Morrissey HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1532
Sixth form	310
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Noble
Headteacher	Mr Mark Yearsley
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Edgehill Road Carlisle Cumbria CA1 3SL
Telephone number	01228 822060
Fax number	01228 822 061

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors in response to very serious whole-school issues raised by parents who complained to Ofsted. The complaints were deemed to be qualifying complaints that warranted further consideration under Ofsted's powers to investigate complaints about schools. As a result of the investigation Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the academy should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish if health and safety procedures are adequate to protect students; serious bullying is addressed; and staffing problems impact negatively on the quality of their children's education.

The inspection therefore focused initially on issues relating to pupils' safety and well-being, the standard and impact of pupils' behaviour, and the appropriateness of systems to manage challenging behaviour that might lead to serious bullying. As part of the inspection, parents were issued with a questionnaire to evaluate the extent to which the whole school issues raised by the complainants were reflected more widely. In line with legislation, this inspection was deemed a section 5 inspection because evidence collected raised very serious concerns about the implementation of strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils and the capacity of the academy's leadership to ensure that pupils receive an acceptable standard of education. Provision for sixth form students was not a focus of this inspection.

Description of the school

Richard Rose Central Academy opened in September 2008 following the closure and amalgamation of two secondary schools located in different districts of Carlisle. The academy is federated with a second academy in the Carlisle area. Pupils attend the academy from a wide surrounding area and many are transported by bus. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. Pupils in Years 7 to 10 are placed in mixed-age tutor groups as part of the academy's house system. In contrast, Year 11 pupils have been kept in tutor groups with their peers to provide some continuity in their final year of compulsory education. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average and the proportion of pupils with statements to meet special educational needs is broadly in line with that seen nationally. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly above the national average.

Plans to open the academy were brought forward by twelve months in November 2007 as part of the Department of Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) fast track programme. Senior leaders were appointed to the academy by May 2008 and took up post in September. In April 2008 the decision was taken to transfer pupils from the former St. Aidan's County High School, the much larger of the two predecessor schools, to the smaller predecessor school, North Cumbria Technology College, at Harraby. Sixth form provision remains in the predecessor school that was formerly St. Aidan's. The current academy site was originally designed for 900 pupils and it has been necessary to install extensive temporary accommodation including 38 additional classrooms. In November, additional funding enabled dining accommodation to be extended and improved for older pupils.

The academy is experiencing high levels of staff absence some of which is due to long-term sickness. Consequently, there is a heavy reliance on temporary supply teachers. Completion of the new academy building was planned for September 2010; however, a delay is now expected which will move the completion date to January 2011. All the staff of the two predecessor schools were given the option to become staff members at the academy in September 2008.

This has resulted in the duplication of a number of roles. The academy director has confirmed that a major restructuring of staff is planned shortly to rationalise roles and responsibilities.

The academy has specialisms in sports and science.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) 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 students 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.

The academy's senior leaders underestimated the levels of challenge presented by the amalgamation of the two schools serving different communities as well as the needs of the new Year 7 pupils who joined at the same time. Parents, pupils and staff report significant unrest in the early weeks of the academy's existence. Although many steps have been taken to try to improve the quality of educational provision and raise standards since the academy opened, leaders and managers at all levels have been diverted too often from this core purpose. The challenges that have resulted from the accelerated plans to open the academy have exceeded the capacity of leaders and managers to cope with the demands that have been placed upon them. The leadership team is not able to demonstrate that it has the capability or capacity to safeguard the welfare and safety of all pupils.

Many pupils resent what has happened and some display their resentment in inappropriate attitudes to learning and unruly behaviour. Academy leaders have been unable to win the confidence of pupils and a large number of parents. A significant number of parental questionnaires were returned and a number of emails sent and telephone calls made to the lead inspector; over ninety per cent reflected serious concerns about their children's welfare, safety and education. A significant number also expressed frustration that effective communication between the academy and parents had not been established. A small number of parents were supportive of what staff were trying to achieve but, even so, they expressed concerns about the negative impact of the current circumstances at the academy on their child's welfare and education.

Senior leaders and staff have worked hard by taking suitable steps to improve the behaviour of pupils and secure their well-being. In some instances, actions are beginning to have a positive impact. For example, the recently introduced behaviour management policy has improved consistency in the way inappropriate behaviour is dealt with. However, problems remain and it is too early to say whether some of these initiatives will have the necessary impact on improving the climate for learning. Punctuality to lessons is uneven; too many pupils are unaccounted for at morning registrations and throughout the day. In too many lessons, pupils' progress is unsatisfactory because a significant number demonstrate apathetic or negative attitudes, which undermine the teaching taking place and adversely affect the learning of others.

The decision in October, to prevent pupils from leaving the academy site at lunchtime was a helpful response to local difficulties, but it has placed additional pressures on dining facilities. New facilities for older pupils have eased lunchtime arrangements. However, a significant concern is that many pupils sit on floors in corridors and in quiet corners or landings to eat their packed lunch. In the main, they are unsupervised. Throughout the day, staff undertake regular duties to tackle internal truancy and misbehaviour but their effectiveness is hampered by the size and complexity of the site.

The quality of teaching and learning is too variable and inadequate overall. A positive climate for learning has not been established and academy leaders recognise that actions taken to

improve the quality of teaching and learning have been too slow. Too many lessons do not engage the pupils well enough in their learning and consequently they are not making the progress that they should. Furthermore, pupils' comments reflect parents' concerns that their rate of progress is also being adversely affected by lack of continuity due to high levels of staff absence. In some instances, supply teachers are teaching subjects for which they have little or no experience. The increasing number of supply teachers is a major concern of the pupils.

The curriculum has been designed to meet statutory requirements and has been modified following a review to meet the needs of pupils more appropriately. It is too early to evaluate the contribution and impact of subject specialisms on raising standards. However, through the sports specialism, good practice in teaching and learning in physical education (PE) lessons has been shared with staff.

Senior leaders have a clear ambition for the academy but this has not been communicated well enough to all staff, parents and pupils. The academy is still in a state of transition because staffing is being restructured. This restructuring is sensible because roles and responsibilities are not clear or established. Some middle managers are unclear about who is leading on areas of responsibility, for example, health and safety. The academy director has evaluated the progress made so far and has accurately identified the right priorities for action. He recognises fully that the pace of the academy's progress has been too slow and plans have had to be re-assessed in response to the level of difficulties encountered with pupils' behaviour, attendance and increasing staff absence. In order to improve the quality of teaching and learning more rapidly, the academy has commissioned a whole-school approach to improvement, led internally by the academy's teaching and learning group and supported by the school improvement partner. The academy has also commissioned the support of an external agency to moderate the quality of this work.

The DCSF has been alert to the difficulties facing the academy and has taken a number of useful steps to support its improvement. For example, it has promoted links with other academies to enable senior leaders to draw from good practice to develop suitable behaviour management strategies, and additional support has been provided to assist with the monitoring of teaching and learning. The academy has also been proactive in looking at national and international practice which has informed joint workshops with governors and sharpened the process of monitoring and evaluation. The academy is building links with the local authority to support its work. However, the DCSF representative recognises that additional capacity is required at senior leadership level to enable the pace of improvement to be accelerated.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: NA

Provision for sixth form students was not a focus of this inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Prioritise, as a matter of urgency, the safety and well-being of all pupils and ensure that all procedures for the safeguarding of pupils meet statutory requirements.
- Improve the behaviour and attitudes of pupils by building relationships and applying agreed procedures consistently.
- Improve the quality of all aspects of teaching and learning.
- Improve attendance and punctuality to lessons.
- Ensure that the roles of all leaders are identified clearly and their responsibilities understood to increase their effectiveness.

- Improve communication, particularly between the academy and parents and carers.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils' standards of attainment on entry to the academy are below average. Senior leaders have amalgamated assessment information from the two predecessor schools in order to set challenging targets for pupils. However, pupils are not making the progress that they should relative to their starting points. This is because of the variable quality of teaching, negative attitudes to learning and the behaviour of a significant minority of pupils who disrupt the learning of others. Staff absence is on the increase, resulting in a lack of continuity in teaching. This is a major anxiety of parents and pupils and evidence shows that they are right to be concerned.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

The pupils are not yet convinced about what the academy has to offer them and do not readily engage with the community. A period of turbulence and uncertainty has had a detrimental effect on their attitudes to learning and their confidence as learners. Strategies to promote pupils' personal development including their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development and well-being are underdeveloped. Pupils do not all feel safe, and healthy lifestyles are not adequately appreciated or pursued. Significant groups of pupils are disaffected and do not enjoy their education, as shown by their unsatisfactory attitudes, behaviour and attendance. As a result, they do not learn effectively and are not developing the social and learning skills that will equip them for work or the next stage of their education.

Behaviour is unsatisfactory overall and reflects in part the unsettled atmosphere within the academy, the variable quality of teaching and the complex nature of the academy site itself. Pupils report that although things have improved since September, they are still concerned by regular instances when lessons and other activities are interrupted by the misbehaviour of others. A recently introduced behaviour code has the potential to provide very clear guidance and establish boundaries for pupils' behaviour. Although at an early stage, pupils have commented there has been a change in what is and is not acceptable. When teachers establish good working relationships and where activities engage and sustain their interest, pupils respond positively. This was the case in a very successful physical education lesson that captured the pupils' interest and ensured the pace of learning was well suited to their individual skills and competences.

Attendance to school is below average and too many pupils are not punctual to lessons. Internal truancy from lessons means that too many wander the site. Many pupils who spoke to inspectors expressed unhappiness about their recent experiences. However, most pupils know who to turn to for help if they have concerns. They appreciate the support from individual teachers with whom they have established good working relationships and like the range of clubs and activities available to them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is too variable. There are examples of good and outstanding practice, but too much teaching does not take into account the needs of individuals or different groups of learners. As a result, some pupils are not challenged sufficiently while others find the work too hard and are unable to participate. Planned activities are too often designed as a means to control behaviour rather than to extend learning. An over-reliance on uninspiring worksheets and mundane tasks does little to engage or sustain pupils' interest. They do not value these learning opportunities and their attitudes deteriorate. In many lessons, pupils record their work on loose sheets of paper or photocopied worksheets. In some cases the storage and recording of these sheets is unsatisfactory. As a result, pupils rarely reflect on previous tasks, or how they were marked, to help them work on what needs to be improved. Teachers are sometimes prevented from delivering well-planned activities because of the persistent low-level disruption by some pupils and the late arrival of others to the lesson. Consequently, the pace and quality of learning suffers. Supply teachers do not always have suitable plans or support materials to enable them to deliver lessons effectively. In these lessons, pupils report that they often repeat work that they have done before. However, learning support assistants deployed to work with supply staff provide helpful support to manage behaviour and assist individual pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Classroom environments are often not conducive to learning. Many walls are bare and there are few displays to celebrate pupils' work or to act as aids to learning. Although many rooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards, poor quality curtains or blinds limit their use to support learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has been designed to meet statutory requirements. Academy leaders have already reviewed provision and modified aspects of the curriculum for younger pupils in order to meet their needs more appropriately; more relevant pathways for pupils aged 14 to 19 are being planned. Physical education makes an effective contribution to promoting pupils' enjoyment through the sports specialism. There are a number of enrichment activities available to pupils and at the time of the inspection, musicians were preparing for the academy's first carol concert for parents, staff and pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Many staff are highly committed to providing suitable care and support for pupils. Following a period of significant turbulence at the start of term, the safer schools partnership officer has worked effectively with staff to reduce the number of incidents of extreme behaviour about which parents expressed concern.

However, the complexity of the academy site, the inability to establish discrete subject department areas, and difficulties with communication have meant that problems have persisted. Pastoral welfare staff are working together, with the help of a recently appointed senior member of staff, to overcome these difficulties and to ensure consistency in their practice to support

pupils. They are also aware of the need to improve the links with parents in order to strengthen partnerships.

Procedures for safeguarding pupils are partly in place, but do not meet fully the statutory requirements. There is a named child protection officer but no child protection policy to guide the implementation of procedures. The transportation of a large number of pupils to and from the school site has presented staff with some logistical difficulties. Although high levels of visible staff supervision minimise the risks to pupils' safety, problems do remain. For example, one of the two school gates does not have pedestrian access so pupils freely use this at the same time as vehicles enter and depart. Although there has been some improvement, the behaviour of a minority of pupils on buses remains a concern.

The academy benefits from having its own nurse on site who deals with the medical needs of pupils and staff. First aid stations are established and a number of staff have the appropriate certification. However, it is clear from the health and safety committee minutes that procedures to support and rationalise the work of the nurse, to ensure suitable first aid cover across the site, need to be improved.

The support offered to those pupils who have special educational needs is effective in some lessons, but this is not consistent across the academy. Individual educational plans were written before the academy opened, but have not subsequently been reviewed and there is little evidence to suggest they have been monitored. The needs of the most vulnerable pupils are not always met because they are either inappropriately placed in a class group or teaching does not plan for or consider their needs well enough.

Pupils have been given targets for most subjects. However, some older pupils are concerned that their predicted achievement at GCSE has been downgraded since the beginning of term. Whole-school systems have been introduced to track pupils' progress in all year groups. However, inspectors did not see evidence of the way in which this information is used by teachers to guide pupils so that they can achieve their best.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The academy has a strong ambition to become an innovative and exciting learning environment where pupils can thrive and achieve well. However, too much leadership and management capacity has been absorbed into reacting to the many day-to-day problems that needed to be tackled as soon as the academy opened. Barriers to progress have been exacerbated by negative perceptions expressed freely within the wider community. Academy leaders and external agencies identified that there was insufficient capacity within the senior leadership team to implement fully the priorities in the academy's development plan. Very recent steps have been taken to strengthen the capacity of senior leaders through the secondment of an additional senior manager from the federated academy. Furthermore, senior leaders have used consultancy support and visits to other institutions to shape a more robust behaviour policy in consultation with staff. It is too soon to see the full impact and there are still unresolved behaviour issues that need to be tackled.

The effectiveness of middle leaders is variable. Limitations to accommodation mean that subjects are not all taught in discrete areas. A shortage of available classrooms means that teachers currently deliver lessons in many different areas across the academy. This has proved challenging

both for the teachers and for some middle leaders who find it difficult to support teachers in their subject areas or gain a clear view of the quality of provision for which they are responsible.

Senior leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the academy's provision. However, the governing body has failed to ensure that all procedures for the safeguarding of pupils are fully in place. Procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching have been established and moderated by the school improvement partner. However, observations have not included teaching by supply teachers. Two governors have been appointed recently to monitor pupils' academic performance and behaviour more closely. A line management structure of accountability has been established and systems to monitor the work of the academy have been introduced. In response to the duplication of some roles, the director has planned a major restructuring of staff responsibilities across the academy federation in order to raise standards more rapidly. This will also serve to clarify roles, particularly for middle leaders and strengthen their capacity to take responsibility for school improvement.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	4	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3	IE ²
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	IE ²

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	IE ²
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	IE ²
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

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.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4	IE ²
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	4	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	4	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	4	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	4	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4	IE ²
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	IE ²
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	IE ²

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	IE ²
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	IE ²
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

12 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Richard Rose Central Academy, Cumbria, CA1 3SL

Some of you will know that inspectors visited recently in response to concerns raised about your experiences at the academy since it opened last September. We appreciated the chance to talk with a number of you in lessons and around school. Some of you told us that things were improving after a very difficult start to the term and that you appreciate the help you receive from the teachers you know well. However, you also raised some significant concerns by speaking with us or sending us emails. Our inspection findings support your view that things are improving but that some significant concerns remain, and we have decided that the academy needs additional support to enable you to receive the education you deserve. For this reason, we have placed the academy in special measures.

Although staff work hard on your behalf, and many of you want to learn, a significant number of you do not behave well enough. The changes many of you have experienced have had an unsettling effect and this is reflected in the way that some of you have lost interest in learning. In some lessons, you are given interesting and challenging work, but in too many cases, lessons are interrupted by low level chatter or disruptive behaviour which slows everyone's progress. Leaders and managers have found it hard to manage all the changes that have been necessary since the academy opened. They have taken a number of steps to make improvements and to ensure your safety and well-being. However, your parents told us that they do not always know about the changes that have taken place or what has improved as a result. They would like to have better links with the academy so that they know how well you are doing.

Staff need your help and support to make things better for everyone. You can make a big contribution to shaping a successful future for yourselves by attending regularly, getting to lessons promptly and taking part fully so that you can make the progress that you should. It is also important that everyone pulls together and follows the agreed codes for behaviour to ensure a safe and more positive learning environment in which you can achieve your best. Inspectors will visit again over forthcoming months to check the progress that the academy is making.

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey HMI