

The Bankfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111463
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	337688
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Mark Williams HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	751
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr William Woolfall
Headteacher	Mrs Carole Owen
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed the school at work. They observed 21 lessons taught by 21 teachers and looked at a wide range of documentation including various policies, audits and development plans, and a selection of students' work and records. They met with the senior leaders and a number of other key staff. In addition, they met with representatives from the governing body, the School Improvement Partner and students from each year group, including a small number from Year 11 who had just completed their examinations and courses. Inspectors also scrutinised the 124 inspection questionnaires returned from parents and carers, the 99 questionnaires returned by students and the 45 questionnaires completed by staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at whether or not:

- the positive rises in overall attainment and rates of progress over the last few years are now translating into better outcomes for students in English and mathematics, based particularly on the measure of students' attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics
- the good attitudes and attributes highlighted by the school are demonstrated consistently by students, particularly in regard to improved attendance and their engagement with and understanding of those from different ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds
- the curriculum and levels of care, guidance and support are outstanding as the school evaluates and their impact is evident on all students, particularly those whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable
- strengths in leadership identified in the previous inspection have been at least maintained.

Information about the school

This secondary school is smaller than average size. The student population is almost entirely White British. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is about twice the national average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school has been a specialist science college since September 2004. It achieved High Performing School Status in 2008 which resulted in its Applied Learning and Gifted and Talented Lead School Status from September 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Bankfield School is an outstanding school. Students achieve well in their learning and benefit from outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. They display mature and responsible attitudes to their learning, each other and staff. They are courteous and polite. Their behaviour during the inspection was exemplary.

Over time the proportion of students attaining at least five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C has risen sharply and in 2008 and 2009 was significantly above national averages. There was a similar sharp rise in the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, so that in 2008 the proportion doing so was just above the national average. While this proportion dipped in 2009, students' current work and results already secured, show the upward trend is on course to be sustained so that the numbers gaining these qualifications will be consistently at least in line with average levels. These improvements, which represent overall good achievement for students who enter the school with a wide range of starting points, are the result of determined efforts by the school to tailor learning opportunities to students' needs through a highly appropriate curriculum and outstanding levels of care and guidance. The school's philosophy of 'No child unknown' is put into practice. Such strengths have led not only to overall good achievement, but excellent rates of progress for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In addition, the good attitudes and attributes in students' personal development and well-being highlighted in the previous inspection have been enhanced so that the extent to which they feel safe, adopt healthy lifestyles, behave, and demonstrate spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding are now all outstanding. Equally pleasing, and a direct result of excellent work and liaison with parents and carers, and external agencies, is the sharp increase in attendance and the significant reduction in persistent absenteeism. These improvements in outcomes for students demonstrate the school's outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

The school is very well led by the headteacher and she is supported equally well by her senior leaders. Together they demand the highest quality and set the example in how to achieve this. Staff respond to this challenge and show high levels of commitment to the school. The leadership of the school's specialisms is strong; its impact is particularly evident in the outstanding curriculum. The leadership of teaching has successfully ensured that the quality here is good with some that is outstanding. To enhance students' achievement further there is scope for the school to refine its planning of lessons and its scrutiny of teaching so that it focuses more consistently on students' learning.

Governors support the school well and ensure that it meets its statutory responsibilities.

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They have identified ways in which they can help the school develop further and have begun to put some of these suggestions into place, although it is too early to see the full impact of this work. Parents and carers who responded to the inspection question expressed real confidence in the school and their children's experience of it. Overall, and on balance, students who attend The Bankfield School get a very good deal.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen already good achievement by:
 - – ensuring that the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is consistently at least in line with national average levels
 - – refining the focus of lesson planning and leaders' observations of teaching so they focus more on students' learning.
- Ensure that governors, having identified ways in which they can help the school to develop further, put all their suggestions into place and measure the impact of them.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Students at The Bankfield School achieve well from starting points which vary widely. While the picture of attainment on entry to Year 7 has improved in the last two years, the proportion of students in the current Years 9 to 11, and indeed in the previous Year 11 cohort which left in 2009, who were at national expectations when they entered this school is below average. It is testament to their efforts and the school's that the proportion of students attaining at least five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C has been significantly above national averages. Students' current work suggests this very positive trend will continue. Students' work in art, for example, is highly expressive; their understanding and interpretation of historical facts coupled with their ability to empathise with people of the time is impressive. In the specialism of science, students talk maturely and with understanding about ethical issues and how, for example, the different types of twins are formed. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make some outstanding progress in their learning, as a result of the high-quality support they have and continue to receive.

Quite correctly, leaders were delighted in the sharp rise in students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. They were equally concerned when this dipped in 2009 despite these results representing at least expected and sometimes good and outstanding progress. Leaders swiftly put into place measures to avoid a repeat of the dip, including focused interventions in Years 10 and 11. The result is that attainment in English and mathematics in these two year groups has risen and, not just focusing on getting students to grade C, subject leaders in these areas have targeted higher achievers who are aiming for the highest A and A* grades.

A key factor in the good achievement of The Bankfield's students is the impressive way they demonstrate mature attributes and attitudes. Inspectors saw students behave

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outstandingly well and articulate clearly how they could be healthy and safe. This was evident, for example, in their participation in 'Stay Safe in Cyber Space' – an anti-bullying and e-safety promotion, the school council's drawing up of an anti-bullying charter, and creative and media diploma students making a film for the police. In addition, there has been a sharp decline over the last three years of instances of bullying and exclusion. Improvements in the school menu and dining facilities have led to a large increase in the numbers choosing to have a healthy and appetising school lunch in welcoming surroundings. Also outstanding is students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is because the school gives high priority to personal, social, health and citizenship education. Students' work displayed around the school indicates their strong awareness of other cultures. Across the curriculum they demonstrate awareness of the feelings of others, for example by putting themselves in the shoes of a Black teenager at the height of the civil rights movement in America. They also demonstrate a keen understanding and sensitivity towards issues such as injustice and anorexia.

Not quite outstanding yet are the extent to which students contribute to the school and wider community, and the development of workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being. Both, nonetheless, are good. Students' contribution to the school community is very strong, as seen in their participation in the school and eco-councils and in sports leadership. Their participation in the wider community, for example through sports work in local primary schools, is growing. Students demonstrate good skills for life which are preparing them well for work and further education. The improvements in the proportion gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics will enhance this attribute. Very pleasing is the improvement in attendance which is now at above average levels. Equally pleasing, and owing to determined efforts, is the reduction of persistent absenteeism by about one half.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Students at this school benefit from consistently good teaching and assessment to support learning; indeed, some is outstanding. Teachers and their assistants use questioning well. In the very best lessons observed adults used this questioning and prompting skilfully to extend students' ability to apply their knowledge and understanding to a range of tasks. In an outstanding Year 10 design and technology lesson, for example, the teacher built on students' previous knowledge of packaging to engage them in group work to design and test out their own ideas for transporting eggs. They did so enthusiastically and were constantly challenged by the teacher in their thinking so they could successfully identify which materials and shapes were the most appropriate for the purpose. In this lesson, and indeed many observed across the school, the teacher had very clear ideas of what all students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, were to learn. Sometimes, though, teachers' planning is more focused towards the teaching rather than students' learning. The curriculum is outstanding and contributes to students' all-round development very well. It has been developed to include high levels of personalisation. This is particularly benefiting older students now targeted not just to gain a grade C in English and/or mathematics, but instead be challenged where appropriate to attain the highest A* or A grades. The curriculum is swiftly modified when gaps in learning become evident and when special needs arise. Pathways at Key Stage 4 via the applied learning specialism are inclusive and take into account the wide range of abilities, skills and attributes of students in Years 10 and 11. The expanding range of courses includes astronomy and childcare. Very effective links and collaborations have been established with local agencies, schools and post-16 provision to develop work-based and diploma opportunities; indeed, the school is the lead partner for a number of diploma pathways. Further key strengths in the curriculum include the emphasis on personal, social, health and citizenship education and on social and emotional aspects to learning. The result is seen in students' many outstanding personal attributes which equip them very well to gain the most from their schooling. In addition to statutory aspects, there are high-quality enrichments as diverse as history field trips to Auschwitz, art students' visits to The Clothes Show, participation in public speaking competitions and the fast tracking of more-able students of mathematics, science and modern foreign languages into early GCSE entry.

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While the school has many strengths, its most significant aspect of provision is the effectiveness of its care, guidance and support for students. Clear, excellent arrangements are in place to support younger pupils moving to this school from primary schools in which individual needs are quickly identified. As students progress through school the staff come to understand them and their strengths and needs very well so that when leaders say 'No child unknown' they mean it. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are given excellent care through, for example, nurture groups, focused support and links with external support agencies. Inspectors saw numerous testimonials from parents and carers who were appreciative of the school's efforts and successes with their children. Clear guidance and advice accompanies the students throughout their time at school so they make the most appropriate choices. Year 11 students spoke about the great levels of support and encouragement given to them as they made their choices for post-16. A key success of this advice is the significant reduction in the proportion of students leaving The Bankfield School who do not go onto employment, training or further education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, along with her leadership team, have successfully established a very strong culture of high expectation which has resulted in some significant improvements since the last inspection, including much better attendance and overall outstanding outcomes for students. This demonstrates why the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement, and the school's capacity for sustained improvement are both outstanding. The headteacher, her leadership team and the staff of the school are very clear about what is expected from them. Together, they have a very clear understanding of the school's many strengths and are equally clear about the areas to develop and how to go about them. An example of this is the school's awareness that its programme of lesson observations, which enable leaders to judge teaching quality accurately, requires refinement so that the focus becomes students' learning.

Governance, arrangements for safeguarding students and the effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination are all good. Statutory requirements are met. Governors have been wisely considering how they can

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enhance their effectiveness in supporting the school's development. To this end they have identified a number of useful ways in which they can do this. Arrangements for safeguarding are managed by the lead staff very well. The school is aware these arrangements could be enhanced through, for example, a more detailed analysis of the data the school holds in this area and wider involvement of governors in awareness training – a task the governors have identified themselves.

Further outstanding aspects of leadership and management include the school's engagement with parents and carers, the effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being, the effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion and leaders' deployment of resources to achieve value for money. A very large majority of the parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were most positive about the school's work and particularly how the school helps them to support their children's learning. In addition, inspectors were able to see examples of how the school had worked with parents and carers in difficult circumstances. This strong work, coupled with the school's active engagement with a wide range of agencies, supports not only students' learning but also their personal well-being outstandingly well. Work to promote community cohesion has had a highly positive impact on students' understanding of the wider world as a global community. Leaders have enabled students to experience very different communities in, for example, Birmingham and Manchester. In addition, meaningful links further afield, for example in South Africa, have been established. A thorough evaluation has taken place to identify where students may strengthen their understanding of community across the curriculum. The real impact, though, is seen in the very positive and mature attitudes displayed by pupils, particularly through their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money

1

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers are positive about the work of the school and the impact it has on their children's learning and personal development. They are right to be so. A small number of parents and carers expressed concern with how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. As highlighted in the report, inspectors observed exemplary behaviour and noted the sharp reduction in incidents of bullying and fixed-term exclusions. It is the inspector's judgement that behaviour is managed very well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Bankfield School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

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

The inspection team received 124 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 750 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	53	43	63	51	7	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	68	55	51	41	3	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	72	58	43	35	7	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	67	54	49	40	8	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	59	48	62	50	3	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	38	69	56	7	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	34	79	64	2	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	54	44	62	50	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	56	45	58	47	7	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	58	47	54	44	8	6	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	31	72	58	10	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	62	50	54	44	5	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	76	61	43	35	3	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



02 July 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Bankfield School, Widnes, WA8 7HU

You will recall that I and some colleagues inspected your school recently. I am writing to you to thank you for your warm welcome and the time you spent with us answering our questions and telling us about your school. I particularly want to thank the Year 11 students who came to see me even though their examinations and courses had finished. I have to tell you that we were very impressed by you all. You were very well behaved and courteous; in fact you demonstrated many attitudes and attributes which were mature and considered. We were particularly impressed by the respect you showed to one another and your teachers in assembly time for Year 9 and Year 10. My goodness, you considered some very serious issues there, including injustice and self-image. It is attitudes such as those we observed that led us to judge your behaviour and the extent to which you feel safe, adopt healthy lifestyles and are developing spiritually, morally, socially and culturally as outstanding. Very well done; you can be justifiably proud of yourselves.

We were also pleased to see that you are achieving well. You may not know this but your results contribute to your school attaining some standards that are significantly above the national average. But you are all mature enough to know that outstanding attitudes and good achievement do not just happen. They happen at The Bankfield School because your school has excellent leaders and a committed and hard-working staff. They have ensured that the levels of care, guidance and support you receive, along with the curriculum which involves the school's specialisms very well, are outstanding. You also benefit from good teaching that engages you well in lessons.

Now, the inspection team and I know that you all want your school to become even better. We have therefore asked that the school strengthens your already good achievement by helping more of you to attain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. You will be pleased to know you are already on track to achieve this. We have also asked your leaders to refine the focus of lesson planning and their observations of teaching so that it is more about your learning. Finally, we have seen that the governors have identified ways in which they can help the school to develop further. We are asking that they put into place their plans to do so.

I hope that from my letter you will see your school has many strengths of which you, and all who work there, should be proud. It is, in case you have not yet guessed, an outstanding school! Congratulations!

On behalf of the inspection team I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

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