

Stainburn School & Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112395
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310881
Inspection dates	9–10 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Marianne Young 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	930
6th form	144
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Celia Tibble
Headteacher	Mr Chris McGrath
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Stainburn Road Workington Cumbria CA14 4EB
Telephone number	01900 325252
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team consisting of one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Stainburn School is an average sized secondary school located to the north of Workington in Cumbria. Its students come from both the town and several of the surrounding villages. The school has held specialist status for science since 2003. Free school meals entitlement is broadly average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is well above average; however the proportion of students with statements of special educational need is broadly average. Relatively few students are from backgrounds other than White British. The school holds Artsmark Silver and the local authority's Inclusion Chartermark awards and has recently achieved Healthy Schools Status. The sixth form operates in collaboration with another local secondary school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Stainburn is a good school. Since the previous inspection and most noticeably during the last year, standards have risen rapidly. Parents and the local community are regaining confidence with the school and all that it offers. This is clearly shown by the considerably increased numbers of students who are expected to start in Year 7 in September 2008. Many staff and students attribute the recent accelerated pace of change to the impact made and the expectations shown by the headteacher. He and his senior colleagues have a highly visible presence around the school. Together with the governors, senior leaders have taken difficult decisions to ensure all students are provided with a good standard of education.

Standards are rising; overall they are average at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The literacy skills of many students when they start at Stainburn in Year 7 are particularly weak. In 2007, students in Year 9 did not do as well as they should in the national tests for English; conversely they did particularly well in science. The school's information on the progress of students currently in Year 9 shows that it is good and they are on track to reach challenging targets in most of their subjects, including English. Progress is also good for students in Year 11. This improved progress has been brought about by a variety of well focused strategies that include early identification of underachievement, well targeted intervention and support, access to a broader range of accreditation, and changes to entry policies.

Students feel safe at school and are cared for well. Through the school's extended services, the expertise of an exceptionally wide range of agencies is used very effectively to ensure that students receive the help they need. This support is especially good for those students with learning and/or physical and medical difficulties. Students socialise well together and are quick to help those with physical disabilities to access some parts of the building. A significant proportion of students regularly enjoy the broad range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Those who take part in the annual Rock Challenge contest are justifiably proud of their achievements.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Most teachers are taking greater account of the assessment information regarding students' progress when lessons are being prepared. However this is not done consistently nor do all teachers mark work with sufficient detail so that students know clearly how to improve. The curriculum is satisfactory, providing a suitable range of opportunities for students in Years 10 and 11 to follow vocational and work-related courses. The school's subject specialism is providing students with an improved range of science options in Key Stage 4. An extensive review of the curriculum has taken place and plans are well advanced to implement changes in September 2008. Governors are enthusiastic supporters of the school and work hard to build links between the school and the community. They bring an appropriate level of challenge to the school's leadership. The school is well placed to make further improvement and gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form centre is satisfactory. Results for both AS and A level examinations in 2007 varied considerably between subjects, and were below average overall. Most students successfully completed their courses and were able to fulfil their higher education or career ambitions. The school seeks to provide for a wide range of students through

its flexible access arrangements. As a result, a good number who join the sixth form have relatively modest attainment at GCSE level. Overall, even allowing for this, some students have done less well than they should given their starting points. The centre recognises that sixth form performance is not good enough, and positive action is being taken to tackle underachievement. A new head of sixth form is leading these changes well. Successful initiatives include incisive analysis of sixth form performance, close monitoring of student progress, effective support to keep them on track, and an increasing focus on the quality of teaching. Performance tracking data suggests that results for both AS and A2 examinations are in line to improve in 2008.

The school works closely in collaboration with another local high school in developing post-16 provision for the area. As a result, students are able to choose from a good range of academic A Level courses together with a reasonable range of vocational qualifications. Plans are well advanced for introducing further courses, including alternatives to A Level, to ensure a closer match to students' needs and capabilities. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed.

Students enjoy being in the sixth form. They say they feel well supported by their teachers and tutors, particularly when planning their future career or education choices. They feel that the more rigorous checks on their progress and attendance are fair and in their best interests. Improvements are planned for students' enrichment and wider contribution to the life of the whole school. Students say they would welcome this increased responsibility and opportunity. Day-to-day management is effective and this, together with the positive support from each partner schools ensures that the centre runs smoothly. There is good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that each teacher uses assessment information consistently so that students are given work that is appropriate for them.
- Ensure that marking is undertaken rigorously so that all students know how to make improvements to their work.
- Raise standards and achievement in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' achievement is good and standards are broadly average. When students start school in Year 7 a significant proportion have weak reading and verbal skills. Standards are improving rapidly and in 2007 the school achieved their best ever results at GCSE level and in Key Stage 3 national tests for students. Results in the 2007 national tests for Year 9 students were broadly average in the core subjects. Students attained especially well in science. However, performance in English has fluctuated from year-to-year and in 2007 too many students did not achieve the standards of which they were capable. Current tracking data shows that students' progress in English is much improved.

In 2007, GCSE results were in-line with national averages overall and significantly above for students gaining five or more good grades at GCSE, including functional qualifications in English and mathematics. The school met most of its challenging targets. Students achieved particularly well in English literature, mathematics and science. Lower ability boys did less well than expected

particularly in English language. Achievement in history, music and physical education was not as strong as in other subjects. The school has recognised where the weaknesses are and has taken prompt action to improve the progress of the current Year 11 students.

Some successful strategies to improve achievement have been put in place including a well targeted mentoring programme. This successfully ensures that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to that of their peers. In addition, the underachievement of particular groups of students has been eradicated and they now make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Relationships between students are positive and they are supportive of one another. Students readily accept each other's differences and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully included in activities. Most students enjoy school especially the many additional activities that include drama and music. Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and a good proportion take part regularly in physical education and sport. The school has worked successfully to improve attendance, which is broadly average. The attendance of the older pupils is especially commendable and this contributes to their improved attainment.

The school is a calm and orderly community and students respond positively to being trusted to remain indoors at lunchtimes. Students feel safe and secure and they report that incidents of bullying are few. Behaviour is satisfactory overall. Incidents of exclusion have been high but have fallen considerably since last September. Behaviour is good in most lessons. However, a small minority of parents are right to express concerns about low level disruption in a few lessons that slows down learning.

Students have a good understanding of a breadth of cultures but have few opportunities to communicate directly with people from cultural backgrounds different to their own. Assemblies promote the school's positive values, although opportunities for reflection are sometimes missed. Students make a positive contribution to their own and the wider community including raising substantial funds for charities. They take on responsibilities well, for example, leading sporting activities for primary school pupils. The school council actively promotes improvements and is regularly consulted by leaders and governors. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education or training. They benefit from work experience and enterprise activities and develop secure basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching is a priority for the school. It is robustly monitored ensuring that school leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the provision and the quality of learning. Students are usually attentive and focused in lessons but occasionally low level disruption undermines their learning. Students respond positively to the school's procedures for tracking

their progress and the intervention measures put in place; for example, the revision classes held after school. Confident teaching, reflecting teachers' good subject knowledge, drives many lessons ensuring secure progress is achieved. In the best lessons a variety of approaches are deployed to meet the various learning styles of students. However, tasks in some less successful lessons fail to match the abilities of the students as planning does not take into account the full range of capabilities within the class. There are generally limited opportunities for students to work independently and a few lessons lack pace and challenge. Clear guidance is sometimes given to students on how to improve their work but marking is inconsistent. Learning support assistants are effectively deployed to support learning, having been involved in lesson planning with teachers. Many informative classroom and corridor displays are available and are used by both teachers and students during some lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's commitment to meeting the needs of all its students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is strong. Provision for students in Years 7 to 9 is well balanced and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. It is enhanced by the opportunity for early entry to information and communication technology (ICT) at GCSE level for all students in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, specialist status has enriched the curriculum and enabled the school to expand the range of science courses for students, with a positive impact on standards. In other respects, the school offers a reasonable range of academic, vocational and practical courses. Students who are unsuited to a full GCSE programme, or who are in danger of becoming disaffected with school, benefit from a range of alternative courses through links with the local college, or the West Cumbria Achievement Zone.

Following recent extensive review, plans are well advanced to ensure that provision is tailored more closely to meet students' individual needs and is increasingly rich and relevant. Planned improvements for September 2008 to strengthen the personalisation of Key Stage 4 provision are well underway; for example, through a foundation course in mentoring or the ASDAN certificate of personal effectiveness. In Key Stage 3, the development of literacy and learning skills feature prominently. These initiatives reflect the school's ambition to ensure greater choice, flexibility and achievement through its curricular provision.

Citizenship is well planned, and the personal, social and health education programme includes career education, and contributes to students' understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They are prepared effectively for future employment or further education choices through work experience, careers advice and links with Connexions. Students enjoy taking part in a good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including sports, music, art and drama. They speak fervently of their participation in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, and in the Rock Challenge.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good reflecting the high level of commitment of all adults to encourage students' enjoyment and achievement, within a safe environment. Students say that they are happy in school and feel safe. Students have confidence that the rare incidents of

bullying will be dealt with robustly. Appropriate policies exist for students' safeguarding and their health and safety. Support for those students with severe learning disabilities and physical and/or medical difficulties is outstanding. This reflects the very good relationships these students have with their conscientious learning support assistants and their access to the well resourced 'Loweswater' facility. The school ensures that those students with difficulties are well integrated within their community. Where this is not possible timetables and the curriculum have been adapted to meet individual student needs.

Extensive links with a wide variety of outside agencies ensure that all students and their families receive support as necessary. Links with parents are more established, for example, through a recently developed and appreciated text messaging service.

Students receive target grades but not all know exactly how to improve their work. This is being addressed through a developing programme of academic guidance which is contributing well to improving students' levels of attainment.

Students joining the school are well aware of the routines and settle quickly. The success of this is due in part to the well established links and work done with partner primary schools. Arrangements for supporting students with their option choices are effective and appreciated by students. The good information about alternative pathways which is given to students when they leave school helps to raise their aspirations.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher provides very good leadership. His vision and determination that all students should achieve their potential by the time they leave Stainburn is shared and well supported by members of the senior team. Senior leaders have successfully engaged staff in making some key improvements to provision over a short period of time. Rigorous evaluation of performance is undertaken and decisive actions taken as a result. This is clearly demonstrated by the impact that some strategies have had in improving the achievement of many students. New measures introduced by senior leaders are fully supported by most staff and there is generally a common sense of purpose. Students are expected to do their best and are given the confidence to do so. Two thirds of parents who responded to their questionnaire were fully supportive of the school. One parent's view encapsulated their comments, 'The school is allowing my child to flourish.' Students and staff both value the improvement to the appearance of the school and also the way individuals' achievement, in a range of different ways, is celebrated. Despite recent improvements senior leaders are aware that more needs to be done and these are clearly identified as priorities within the school's development plan.

Middle managers welcome the opportunity to be seconded to the senior team and this is seen by them as valuable professional development. The school meets its specialist targets for science and mathematics and students achieve especially well in science. Governors know the school well and are becoming more involved in monitoring, evaluating and contributing to the work of the school. Since the previous inspection, the continuing improvement in results and the robust way in which students' progress is tracked shows clearly that the school is strongly placed to raise standards further. The school's capacity to improve further is good.

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

11 April 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Stainburn School & Science College, Cumbria, CA14 4EB

Thank you for making me and my colleagues welcome when we came to inspect your school and for speaking to us at various times during the inspection. You told us that you enjoy school and appreciate the varied opportunities you can take part in out of lesson time, especially the Rock Challenge and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Please thank your parents for returning their questionnaires. Their comments were most helpful. Stainburn School provides you with a good standard of education and it is satisfactory for those of you in the sixth form. We were pleased to see that many of you work hard in lessons and that your examination results are improving. However, your parents are right to express concerns that occasionally some of you do not always concentrate in lessons and allow yourselves to be distracted by others.

Your school is very well led and managed and is in a strong position to improve further. You are provided with high levels of care, especially for those of you who have learning and/or physical or medical difficulties. Many of you are proud to see your achievements and those of your friends celebrated around the school, so it is a pity that a few areas are spoilt by graffiti.

Mr McGrath and the staff want to see the recent improvements maintained and for the school to get even better. We have asked him and the governors to do the following three things:

- Ensure that each teacher uses assessment information consistently so that students are given work that is appropriate for them.
- Make sure that marking is undertaken rigorously so that all students know how to make improvements to their work.
- Raise standards and achievement in the sixth form.

You will all need to play your part in helping Stainburn become an even better school. Thank you again for your help during the inspection. We hope you continue to enjoy your time at the school and wish you all every future success.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young

Her Majesty's Inspector