

The County High School Leftwich

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111415
Local Authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	356908
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Patrick Geraghty 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	941
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Alison Massey
Headteacher	Miss Julie Brandreth
Date of previous school inspection	11 December 2007
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time visiting 31 lessons observing 31 teachers on the first day of the inspection. On the second day, the school held a series of media and arts workshops as part of its specialism day, with inspectors visiting sessions to further inform on the curriculum and quality of and approaches to learning. They also held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and other members of the governing body. Documentation was scrutinized including: information related to the tracking of the academic and personal progress of students; detailed analysis of students' attainment and progress; the school's self-evaluation; minutes from meetings of the governing body and evidence to demonstrate how the school supports students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Inspectors undertook a detailed work scrutiny of a selected group of students' work. Inspectors also examined evaluations undertaken by the school to ensure that it meets statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding (the safety and protection of students). In addition, 184 parental questionnaires were scrutinized along with questionnaires returned by a representative sample of staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether strategies to achieve high student attainment and enable good progress for all students at Key Stages 3 and 4 have been effective.
- Whether teaching and learning are sufficiently challenging to promote good or better progress for all students.
- Whether the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation by leaders and managers at all levels is sufficiently well embedded to drive and sustain improvement.
- Whether leaders and managers, at all levels, have the necessary capacity to sustain improvement trends.

Information about the school

The County High School Leftwich is an average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, as is the percentage with a statement of special educational needs. Almost all the students are White British. The school gained specialist status in media and arts in 2005.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Since its last inspection, substantive improvement has occurred across all areas of provision. Students' attainment and progress have improved and at Key Stage 4 attainment is currently above the national average. Across a broad range of subjects students now make good progress by the end of Key Stage 4. At the core of this improvement lies the establishment, by an exceptional headteacher, of an ambitious, aspirational and inclusive educational community. Her drive is exemplified by her continuing steer to establish the school as outstanding in all aspects. Added to this is the exceptional behaviour of students, their enthusiasm for independent learning and buzz for new learning challenges. Members of the governing body have contributed with their strong vision and drive for the school to offer an exceptional experience and in this they continue their razor sharp focus. Relationships throughout the school are excellent.

Students are enthused by learning and feel safe and confident within the school environment. While there is a significant amount of good and better teaching, there remains a minority of satisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3 which fails to match the students' desire for challenge and faster progress. The school acknowledges that this needs to be effectively tackled if it is to achieve the next step in its development. The curriculum matches students' needs well. The specialism of media and art has a positive impact on evolving curriculum opportunities. Dedicated and well considered curriculum initiatives at Key Stage 4 have contributed to improved attainment across all groups of students. Pupil progression rates to further education or work-based learning providers are good. Good care, support and guidance enable students to succeed.

The senior and middle leaders have a strong commitment to embedding a culture of continuous improvement and challenge. The use of data to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning has been appropriately developed. Parents and carers are supportive of the school and its ethos. Equality of opportunities for all is well promoted. Safeguarding is good. The school has a good capacity to improve because of sustained improvement trends over three years. Value for money, set against outcomes, is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the percentage of good and better teaching at Key Stage 3 so that students are offered greater challenge and at a pace and level to match their capabilities, enthusiasm and drive by ensuring:
 - questioning is used effectively to challenge individual students according to their needs
 - consistency in the use of data for lesson planning across the curriculum that enables more challenging group and pair work

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- that teachers' marking in all subjects gives a clear indication to students of what they need to do to improve
- that all teachers are alert to opportunities to accelerate learning where necessary or make appropriate interventions to elicit a fuller understanding for all students
- that the internal system for recording and evaluating lesson observations more accurately reflects current practice and more effectively identifies areas for improvement so that they can be successfully tackled.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students enter the school with above average attainment and leave having made good progress. Their level of independence, capacity and ability to make choices and manage their own learning is impressive. They are highly cooperative in challenging each others' understanding both within lessons and in the increasing opportunities they have of engaging in learning across year groups. The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has risen significantly since the last inspection and is now above the national average.. Attainment and progress in English is high and mathematics now demonstrates an improving trend over the last two years. Gaps in performance between groups of students are narrowing as a result of focused intervention. The more-able students make very good progress.

Students enjoy school, feel safe and treat each other and adults with commendable respect and dignity. Students have high confidence that any issues they raise will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Behaviour is outstanding with numerous examples seen of students encouraging each other to do well and demonstrating tolerance, respect and compassion. In every sense this is a harmonious learning community. Older students act as positive role models for younger students who appreciate their help and guidance. Students have a good understanding of safety issues relating to their own health and well-being, because these aspects are well covered through the curriculum and the pastoral system. Students increasingly adopt healthy lifestyles and take advantage of a broad range of sports provision. Attendance is above average. Students have a good awareness of national and international cultures. This, together with good development of business enterprise and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, is ensuring that students are prepared well for the next stage of their education or the world of work. Over 85% of students achieve a level 2 in the ECDL qualification (European Computer Driving Licence) by the end of Key Stage 4. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

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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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good and this represents significant and sustained improvement over the last three years. In the better lessons, tasks and resources are well matched to students' ability and teachers successfully challenge students to strive to achieve their best. Well-planned activities and the use of technology sustain motivation and engagement. When students are challenged they respond with sustained high levels of creative thinking, writing and lively, perceptive discussion. These lessons are characterised by enthusiasm, very effective use of timed activities, a good pace, and high expectations. Data is used well to plan lessons and group activities that are suitably matched to students' abilities. In some lessons at Key Stage 3, tasks were not always well matched to students' abilities and the level of challenge was too often pitched at an average or lower level. Questioning was not used to challenge and develop students' participation. In these lessons, data was not used well and there was little evidence of ongoing assessment for learning where teaching was adjusted to accelerate learning opportunities or to introduce additional steps to promote better understanding. Marking does not always indicate ways to develop and improve work. At Key Stage 4 and in the best lessons at Key Stage 3, extensive feedback is given on progress so that students know how well they are doing and how to improve. This is particularly effective in English with precise and perceptive areas for improvement identified by both teachers and students.

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The school has established a highly personalised curriculum at Key Stage 4 to give students real choice and ensure that their needs are met fully. Students are very appreciative of the wide range of opportunities on offer to them. The school offers an increasing number of vocational options, many through well-developed partnerships with outside providers. For example, the school has led the development of the Creative and Media diploma in partnership with other schools and the local college of further education. The media and arts day workshops gave ample evidence of the impact of the specialism across the curriculum. School leaders acknowledge that the Key Stage 3 curriculum remains underdeveloped and have planned for the introduction of more distinctive pathways including language pathways. Dance and media have been successfully added to the Key Stage 3 curriculum. There is a good range of extracurricular activities which have a good take up by students. Progression rates to further education courses and to work-based learning programmes are high.

Very good links with primary schools and thorough transition planning enables students to commence their secondary education with great confidence. Students are very appreciative of the strong caring culture that the school provides. Since the last inspection, the introduction of learning leaders has strengthened support and guidance. Learning leaders are effective in tracking students' progress, liaising with subject tutors, identifying areas of underperformance and ensuring appropriate intervention. They also undertake lesson observations. This has impacted on improved outcomes especially at Key Stage 4. The school works effectively with parents and carers as well as external agencies to support vulnerable students and augment good student welfare and support programmes. Students are very positive about the high quality of course and progression guidance they receive.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There is highly effective and strong leadership by the headteacher. Since her appointment before the last inspection, she has relentlessly focused on improvement across all provision. There is now continuing and sustained improvement in attainment at Key Stage 4. Systems have been introduced to more effectively monitor students' progress and to implement effective intervention strategies where necessary. The headteacher, aided by her senior leaders has embedded a culture of ambition and aspiration across staff and students. She has skilfully enabled the development of a strong independent learning culture enthusiastically embraced by students. Realistically she acknowledges this as a journey only half complete. Self-evaluation is realistic and largely accurate. The internal lesson observation system, however, is over generous in its assessment of the quality of

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teaching at Key Stage 3 and does not always effectively identify areas for improvement. Members of the governing body have a very good understanding of the developing strengths and areas for improvement of the school. They play an important role in challenging leaders at all levels. For example, they meet individual subject leaders to examine their performance data, areas for improvement, strengths and progress. Middle leaders place high value on this engagement and additional accountability. There are strengths within middle leadership exemplified by the outstanding leadership of English and ICT. Parents and carers have high levels of confidence in the school. Communications with parents and carers is of a high quality. Strong partnerships with feeder primary schools ensure students' transition is seamless. The school promotes equality of opportunity successfully. Students, regardless of ability or background, make good progress and achieve well. Community cohesion is good. The school has been successful in promoting an exceptionally cohesive school society and has a strong understanding of its impact within its local community. Students' understanding and appreciation of national diversity is good. Safeguarding is good; policies and procedures are comprehensive in range and coverage. The school's value for money, set against outcomes, is good.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

An analysis of responses to the questionnaire indicates that the majority of parents and carers are happy with their child's experience at school and that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that their child is well prepared for the future. A small minority felt that the school does not help them support their child's learning. A similar proportion disagreed the school helps their children to lead a healthy lifestyle and disagreed it takes account of their views and concerns. Inspection findings did not support these views but the concerns were considered alongside other evidence and were brought to the school's attention.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The County High School Leftwich 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 184 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 941 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	75	41	97	53	8	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	73	40	105	57	1	1	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	50	27	116	63	10	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	64	35	103	56	8	4	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	49	27	117	64	11	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	20	109	59	23	13	5	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	35	19	118	64	22	12	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)	65	35	101	55	8	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	29	110	60	11	6	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	57	31	96	52	15	8	4	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	20	111	60	18	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	69	38	98	53	7	4	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	75	41	91	49	10	5	2	1

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 all 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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



8 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The County High School Leftwich, Northwich, CW9 8EZ

Thank you for the very warm and friendly welcome that you gave my colleagues and me when we inspected your school this week. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your school. We would also like to commend you for your excellent behaviour and your commitment to making the school such a harmonious place to work in. We would particularly like to thank the many students who spoke and shared their ideas with us.

Our inspection found that yours is now a good school. You are making good progress throughout your time at the school. Your results are improving and above national averages. There is much good and some outstanding teaching in the school. In these lessons, you respond well to the teachers' high expectations. However, some teaching at Key Stage 3 is insufficiently challenging and aspirational. Your curriculum options are good. The teachers and support staff give you good care, guidance and support.

The leaders in your school worked with us to decide on some ways in which your provision could be better. We decided that to achieve this, the school should:

- enable more opportunities for challenging and aspirational teaching and learning in Years 7, 8 and 9.

You can help your school to improve further by ensuring everyone continues to focus on the pursuit of excellence and for you to continue your endeavours in your studies so that you can achieve your full potential in life.

I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Geraghty

Her Majesty's Inspector

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