

# The Catholic High School, Chester A Specialist Science College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111449
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	378306
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joan Davis HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,040
<b>Of which number on roll in the sixth form</b>	238
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Bulmer
<b>Headteacher</b>	John Murray
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 September 2006
<b>School address</b>	Old Wrexham Road Handbridge Chester CH4 7HS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01244 981600
<b>Fax number</b>	01244 681773
<b>Email address</b>	askmrmurray@chsc.cheshire.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Teaching and learning were observed in 31 lessons and 29 teachers were seen. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff and members of the governing body. The inspection team examined the school's self-evaluation of its work, students' work and data on their current performance, minutes of meetings, the school development plan and policies. Inspectors also considered an analysis of 290 parents' and carers' questionnaires as well as those from students and staff.

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

- The effectiveness of the school's actions to increase the proportion of students gaining the highest grades at GCSE.
- The impact of the school's efforts to reduce underperformance in mathematics.
- The effectiveness of the school's work in reducing variability in performance across subjects and improving outcomes for students in the sixth form.

## Information about the school

The Catholic High School, Chester is of average size. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The school is the designated centre for West Cheshire for students with autistic spectrum disorder. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below the national average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language. The school has specialist status for science.

**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**

**3**

## Main findings

The Catholic High School, Chester is a good school. After a dip in performance in 2009 there has been improvement in some key measures and attainment is now average overall. Learning and progress are good for all groups across the school, including for those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, some of whom make outstanding progress. Students' achievement is therefore good.

The school provides a warm and caring environment in which all students are valued as individuals. The care, guidance and support they receive are good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Procedures for safeguarding are good and the vast majority of students say that they feel safe in the school. Students make a good contribution to the school and the wider community and enjoy participating in the wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities on offer. Attendance is average and students are punctual to lessons. Behaviour is good and movement around the school is orderly. Students are friendly, helpful and welcoming. They say that there is very little bullying and when it occurs it is dealt with effectively.

The quality of teaching is good overall, and often outstanding. Students work productively in lessons and relationships between students and teachers are good. For the most part, teachers use information and communication technology effectively to support students' learning.

The use of assessment to support learning is satisfactory. Students are sometimes unsure as to their targets and they do not always receive clear advice on how to improve their work. On occasions, teachers do not use to best effect the assessment information available when planning lessons. As a result, in some lessons activities are not matched sufficiently to the needs and abilities of students.

The curriculum is good and partnerships contribute effectively to improving outcomes for students. The impact of the specialism on the school and the wider community has been extremely beneficial, providing a wide range of enriching and exciting activities that raise aspiration both in the school and beyond.

Leadership, management and governance are good overall. The headteacher has effectively communicated a vision for the further improvement of the school, which is shared by all members of the school community. He is ably supported by an astute

and knowledgeable governing body, particularly in tackling some areas of underperformance, such as in mathematics. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate, but planning for improvement lacks clarity and precision. Improved procedures for monitoring performance and tracking progress against targets are at the early stages of development. There has been a lack of urgency in the drive to secure improvement in some outcomes for students. As a result, the rise in performance has not been rapid and the school did not meet its own targets for improvement in 2010 and 2011. Therefore, the school's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. The school provides good value for money and deploys resources effectively.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is good, as is the effectiveness with which the school promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination.

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good and the care, guidance and support that students receive are much appreciated; as one parent commented, 'the pastoral care within sixth form is excellent – each student is treated as an individual and with respect.'

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise attainment further by:
  - improving attendance
  - improving procedures for assessment so that it better informs lesson planning, thereby ensuring lessons incorporate activities that meet the needs and abilities of all learners
  - ensuring students receive clear information on how to improve their work
  - improving the effectiveness of procedures to monitor performance against targets in order to secure and sustain improved outcomes for students.

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

<b>2</b>
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Students enter the school with prior attainment that is average overall. Performance in public examinations has fluctuated over the three years prior to this inspection. In 2008 attainment was significantly above average for most key indicators. However, attainment dipped in 2009. A trend of improvement has been established and attainment for some indicators is now slightly above the national average.

Attainment is therefore average overall. Learning and progress in lessons observed during the inspection were good for all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Poor performance in mathematics has been tackled effectively and attainment in this subject is now broadly in line with the national average.

The overwhelming majority of students feel safe in the school. They trust staff and feel they are listened to when problems arise. Behaviour is good. Students have a good appreciation of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. Students appreciate and take part in the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities available; as one parent commented, 'my children are proud to be members of the school - the staff go the extra mile providing out-of-school activities and clubs which enhance and

extend their experience'. Students assume responsibilities willingly and play a worthwhile role in the local community, for example in organising social events for senior citizens and raising money for charities. Workplace skills are satisfactory, because attendance is average and skills in numeracy for a minority of students remain underdeveloped.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This permeates the life of the school. Students have the opportunity to reflect on ethical issues both in lessons and on retreats. Students are encouraged to have sympathy for others through activities designed to help them to imagine the plight of those less fortunate than themselves. Students appreciate the many opportunities afforded by the school to deepen their appreciation of culture and cultural diversity through, for example, visits and dramatic productions.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment	3
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

The quality of teaching is good. In the best lessons teachers display good subject knowledge and plan activities which inspire and engage all students. These lessons are characterised by a brisk pace, a clear sense of purpose and a tangible sense of enjoyment on the part of students. For example, in one outstanding art lesson observed during the inspection, careful questioning on the part of the teacher helped students to refine their skills, improving their confidence and enabling them to produce work of a high standard. In the small minority of weaker lessons activities lack variety and sufficient challenge.

The use of assessment to support learning is satisfactory. Good practice exists but procedures to share this are not yet embedded. As a result, practice is inconsistent across departments. Targets are not sufficiently related to individual subjects and students do not always receive clear advice on how to improve their knowledge and skills. Teachers do not always use assessment information to plan lessons to suit the needs and abilities of learners. As a consequence, sometimes activities that are planned are not correctly pitched and take little account of prior learning.

The curriculum is good and improving. There is now a wide range of traditional subjects and an increasing variety of vocational courses. However, these developments have not had sufficient time to have had an impact on improved outcomes for students. The specialism has contributed highly effectively to the curriculum. Students have many opportunities to take part in science competitions, cross-curricular projects and extra-curricular activities, such as the visit to Imperial College in London. During the inspection students had the opportunity to see the Enigma machine. Personnel from Cambridge University were present and explained the historical significance of the machine. Students participated in a range of activities, such as code-breaking. This provided excellent intellectual challenge and stimulated the imagination of all students involved.

The effectiveness of care, guidance and support is good. Support is tailored to individual needs as students move up through the school. The transition from primary school is well supported. Students speak highly of the school’s work in this respect, as do parents and carers; as one parent commented, ‘the whole experience of transition has been positive...my son loves being at school’.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership at all levels is good. There is a clear vision, communicated effectively by the headteacher, for the further development of the school. All members of the school community feel valued and share the headteacher’s commitment to improved outcomes for students. Some areas of underperformance have been tackled and the school has worked effectively in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection; for example, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades at GCSE has risen steadily since 2006.

The leadership and management of teaching and learning are good. Systems are in place to monitor provision and there has been a concerted drive to improve the quality of teaching. This has had a discernible impact on the quality of provision and during the inspection the very large majority of teaching observed in lessons was good or better.

The governing body is capable and supportive. Governors are in the process of establishing more rigorous procedures to hold the school to account. The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers is good. The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being is good. The school is a lead school for the promotion of science education and this has improved take-up of science subjects at both Key Stages 4 and 5, not only in this school but also in its partner schools.

The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion is good. The school is a highly cohesive community and it reaches out to others who are less fortunate in other countries throughout the world, such as Kenya and Uganda. The effectiveness with which the school tackles discrimination and promotes equal opportunities is good. Students are encouraged to appreciate diversity through the curriculum, assemblies and by developing links with schools in other parts of the United Kingdom.

*These are the grades for the leadership and management*

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

## Sixth form

Students make good progress during their time in the sixth form, given their starting points, and attainment for many students at the end of Years 12 and 13 is higher than average. However, there remains some variability in performance across subjects. Retention levels are good, students' attendance is above average and most students go on to higher education. The contribution made by students in the sixth form to the wider life of the school and the local community is exemplary. For example, they run a 'Listening Group' and a walking club for younger students and participate in a conservation project in Kenya. Learning and progress, as seen in lessons observed during the inspection, are good overall.

The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good overall and, in many instances, outstanding. Lessons are well constructed and stimulating. For example, in one outstanding French lesson observed during the inspection, there was a high degree of intellectual challenge, students sustained concentration and effort and, as a consequence, made excellent progress. The school provides many opportunities for students to develop their key skills and improve their employment prospects, for example the work-shadowing schemes for students who wish to pursue careers in medicine. The curriculum is good and the school is in the process of introducing a wider variety of courses in order to provide appropriate progression routes for students lower down the school. Care, guidance and support are highly effective; as one student commented, 'the staff go out of their way – every student is well known'.



Leadership and management are good. The school monitors performance rigorously and procedures for tackling areas of weakness are, for the most part, effective. The sixth form runs smoothly and staff are passionate in their determination to secure improvement in outcomes for students.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

## Views of parents and carers

There was a higher-than-average return to the Ofsted questionnaire. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and the very large majority say that their children enjoy school and that it meets their children’s needs. Most parents and carers feel that the school informs them well of their children’s progress and that their children are making enough progress. Most parents and carers feel that the teaching is good at the school and that the school meets their children’s particular needs. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers feel that the school keeps their child safe.

A very small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns regarding channels of communication with the school. The school appears to have a range of means by which the staff may be contacted. Nevertheless, the headteacher agreed to work with governors in order to improve this aspect of its work.

Most parents and carers expressed the opinion that the school is led and managed effectively and the very large majority are happy with their child’s experience at The Catholic High School, Chester.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Catholic High School, Chester A Specialist Science College 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 290 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,040 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	133	46	142	49	10	3	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	150	52	136	47	1	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	113	39	149	51	9	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	101	35	149	51	17	6	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	122	42	152	52	5	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	87	30	154	53	27	9	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	81	28	179	62	14	5	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)	111	38	144	50	9	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	119	41	140	48	18	6	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	126	43	136	47	10	3	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	78	27	159	55	17	6	6	2
The school is led and managed effectively	139	48	129	44	5	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	147	51	127	44	7	2	1	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 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



Friday 23 September 2011

Dear Students

### **Inspection of The Catholic High School, Chester, CH4 7HS**

We would like to thank you all for the warm welcome we received during our inspection of your school. We were impressed by your friendliness and your cooperative attitude. You show kindness towards each other and towards people less fortunate than yourselves in other parts of the world. We found that your school provides you with a good quality of education. Many of you take part in the life of the school and you make a good contribution to your local community. You make good progress as you move up through the school and attainment at the end of Year 11 and Year 13 is average overall.

Teaching is good. The school has worked effectively to improve the quality of teaching. We found that the very large majority of lessons were interesting and helped you to learn. Your behaviour is good and you are very polite. The school cares for you well and you know you will be listened to if you have a problem.

We have identified a number of areas where we think the school should make further improvements. We have asked the headteacher to make sure that you and your teachers know your targets and that you receive clear information on how to improve your work. We have also asked him to make sure that your progress is monitored so that you can meet your targets or do even better. In our judgement, if the school takes these actions then this will help you to improve your examination results.

All of you can help in the further improvement of your school by attending school regularly, continuing to work hard and taking advantage of the many opportunities available to you.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Joan Davis  
Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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