

Knutsford High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111427
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	378301
Inspection dates	3 – 4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	John Peckham 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,247
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Armstrong
Principal	Kevin Hollins
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2008
School address	Bexton Road Knutsford WA16 0EA
Telephone number	01565 633294
Fax number	01565 633796
Email address	contacts@knutsfordhs.cheshire.sch.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. A total of 46 lessons, taught by 44 teachers, were seen and meetings were held with groups of students, staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of the school's policies and procedures including those for safeguarding. They also examined its self-evaluation and development planning, student assessment records and questionnaire responses from 275 parents and carers, 107 students and 63 staff.

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

- The improvements in teaching since the school was previously inspected.
- The effectiveness of the ways in which the school uses assessment data to set targets and plan learning.
- The accuracy and rigour of the school's self-assessment.
- The effectiveness of the school's curriculum in meeting the needs of all its students.

Information about the school

Knutsford High School is a larger than average school serving the town of Knutsford and surrounding areas. The school is also popular with parents and carers in a neighbouring local authority who choose Knutsford as the nearest comprehensive school, meaning that a good number of the school's students travel from considerably further afield. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, while the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is average. The proportions of students who speak English as an additional language, and of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are both below average. The proportion of students who join the school other than in Year 7 is much higher than average; the school attracts students from other schools, often into Year 9, Year 10 or to join the sixth form. The school operates on two sites about half a mile apart, with students in Years 7 and 8 being based on the smaller site for almost all of their learning.

The school has specialist status as a humanities college with English as the lead subject and history and geography as subsidiary subjects. It has gained the International Schools Award, Artsmark Gold and the Inclusion Quality Mark.

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

Most students really like this school. They attend well, enjoy their learning, participate fully in the life of the school and in a wealth of additional activities and say they feel extremely safe. They also make good progress in their learning. The attainment of students joining the school is very slightly above average. By the time students complete Key Stage 4, many attainment indicators are significantly above average. The wide range of experiences provided, the positive school ethos and the opportunities that students have to engage with moral and ethical issues ensure that their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

The school's examination results at GCSE have improved considerably since the school was previously inspected. Most teaching is now at least good. Teachers set clear learning objectives and frequently provide opportunities for students to assess their own and each other's work. Planning often includes different activities to suit differing abilities, but inspectors agreed with leaders and managers that there is a need to increase the range of strategies that teachers use to provide different routes to success in each lesson. Students are set realistic and aspirational targets. While most students can describe what they need to do to improve in different subjects, many are not confident about being able to reach their aspirational targets. Termly assessments in most subjects are not frequent enough to enable students and their parents and carers to monitor progress robustly. In contrast, the good assessment practice in English, where nearly all marked work is linked to attainment levels, is very much appreciated by students.

The curriculum provides an excellent range of learning opportunities to suit all needs. There are many innovative elements, such as the integrated, task-based curriculum in Key Stage 3 and the inclusion of extended project work at Key Stage 4. Effective partnerships, developed with several other educational providers, have also facilitated a very flexible provision both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. This allows students with a wide range of aptitudes and abilities to be successful. The effectiveness of the school's care, guidance and support is exceptional, with ample evidence of persistent and well-coordinated work involving a range of agencies to support students and their families experiencing challenging circumstances.

The school's leadership arrangements, thoughtfully developed by the principal, are effective in engaging staff at all levels. Commitment to improvement is high, opportunities for professional development are used well and staff enjoy working at

the school. Partnerships with organisations beyond the school are providing excellent opportunities for the further development of leadership and management. Self-evaluation is detailed and elaborate and the school has a good understanding of strengths and areas for development. The school's encouragement of innovation at all levels means that there are many initiatives being developed across the school, often arising from evaluation of the work of individual subject areas. The subjects linked to the school's specialism have been particularly influential in developing teaching and learning and generating ideas such as the use of 'green pen' for literacy marking. The impact of innovation and improvement is reduced, however, by the pursuit of too many changes in different subject areas and key stages at the same time. The good progress made since the previous inspection and the unity of purpose of the extended leadership team, indicate that the capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the impact of the school's marking and assessment procedures through:
 - greater consistency of practice between teachers and departments
 - the use of effective techniques to help students and their parents and carers to judge short-term progress and identify where improvements need to be made.
- Consolidate improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, through effective strategies to meet the differing needs of students in each class.
- Focus whole-school development planning on a small number of initiatives which have the highest potential impact.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Overall, attainment has risen over the last three years. Most subjects, including English and mathematics, show improved outcomes at all levels. The grades achieved by students in their best eight subjects have increased each year. The school's data indicate that this trend of improvement should continue. While the proportion gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, including English and mathematics, dropped slightly in 2011, progress rates actually improved, especially for the most-able students in mathematics. In the majority of lessons, students make good progress. They readily engage with learning activities and generally take pride in their work. They are confident at discussing topics, and frequently become involved in assessing their own and others' work using assessment criteria. This helps them to build a good understanding of how to improve. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided for well. They have good teaching and are supported well by teaching assistants and by the excellent provision in the 'My Space' rooms. As a result, they make good progress.

Students describe an overwhelming feeling of personal safety in the school. This is supported by the views of parents and carers. Behaviour is generally good. Students perceive it as better from Year 9 onwards, once subjects have been chosen and support programmes for challenging students have had time to take effect. Students are regularly involved, through the school parliament, in monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the bullying and behaviour policy. Issues affecting the personal safety of students beyond school, such as sexual health and substance misuse, are covered well. Support is provided to students and their parents and carers to promote online safety. The school actively promotes healthy lifestyles; many students take advantage of healthy eating options and extra-curricular sporting activity. Many students and their parents and carers, however, believe that the school could do more in this respect. There are numerous ways in which students are able to take on leadership and other roles to increase their contribution to the school and community and they are keen to do so. Many are involved in charity work, such as sponsoring a girl in Guatemala, and have participated in elements of the school's links with schools in Africa and China. The school's corridors and classrooms feature a range of displays including student activity and achievement, excellent student art work and inspirational messages. 'Stop the Clock' days and an activities week build awareness and encourage reflection and understanding of moral and cultural issues. Many elements of the school's work to prepare students for life beyond school are excellent, helping to ensure that nearly all students make a successful transition to work, training or further/higher education. The acquisition of information and communication technology (ICT) skills is good, but there is scope to ensure wider accreditation of literacy and numeracy skills for those students who at present do not gain grade C or above in GCSE English or mathematics.

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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	1

How effective is the provision?

Most teachers are specialists and have strong subject knowledge. The school has made a considerable investment in developing teaching skills. As a result of these

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

two factors, much of the teaching is now good or better. Teachers make appropriate use of modern technology and other resources and many lessons include a good range of learning activities. Learning intentions are made clear at the start of each lesson and sometimes these are linked to levels of attainment. In the best lessons, there is detailed planning to allow for the differing rates of progress and abilities of the group; teachers adapt the lessons, while they are in progress, according to how well students are learning. In other lessons, however, there is only one planned set of activities which may not always provide alternative routes to enable students of differing abilities and aptitudes to make good progress. There is some excellent practice in the use of assessment. Most work is regularly marked with helpful comments. Many teachers make frequent assessment of students' progress during each lesson and encourage students to reinforce their learning and progress by talking about it. There is still a need, recognised by the school, to consolidate improvements by ensuring that all teaching and assessment practice reaches a good standard.

Because of its flexibility and its wide range of additional experiences, the curriculum succeeds in promoting good outcomes. Cross-curricular themes of literacy, numeracy and ICT are promoted well. The task-based curriculum element in Key Stage 3 has a big impact in developing skills of independent learning and thinking skills. Choices that begin in Year 9 help students to match their learning to interests and abilities. Students and parents and carers are extremely positive about the care, guidance and support offered by the school. This starts with careful support for the transition from primary school, with additional support provided for those students who, for whatever reasons, have circumstances which make them more vulnerable. In some cases, there is evidence of exemplary bespoke support and intervention, working constructively with outside agencies and with families. This support continues by ensuring good transition between lower school and upper school and then into the sixth form or to college, training and work. The school has a successful record of helping students into the university of their choice and ensuring that, as far as possible, all students have suitable placements on leaving.

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 school has made considerable improvements over the last three years and there is a very high degree of support for the principal and senior leadership. There is evidence of decisive action taken to address poor teaching. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are undertaken by a large extended team and based around groups of subjects in 'Learning Centres.' This has the strength of encouraging diversity and innovation at all levels, including the development of links between leaders in this school and others. It has clearly helped to raise standards of achievement and teaching; best practice and professional development are led by

subject specialists in each area. The weakness, however, is that in some cases the impact is less than could be achieved if a small number of proven developments were to be implemented consistently across all subject areas of the school. The governing body is effective in fulfilling statutory functions, in supporting strategic long-term planning for the school and in building effective communication with staff at all levels. The school's good promotion of equality of opportunity is shown through careful monitoring of the outcomes of different groups and targeted action to address underachievement. Mutual respect is promoted well and students have an appreciation of discriminatory behaviour and how to tackle it. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the social, ethnic and religious context of the school and have promoted a range of initiatives to promote community cohesion, including links with schools abroad. The impact on students' knowledge of the ethnic and religious diversity in other areas of this country is less evident. Most elements of the school's procedures for safeguarding, including child-protection arrangements and suitability checks on adults, are excellent. There are inconsistencies, however, in the systems for monitoring which sixth-form students are on the site.

These are the grades for the 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	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	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The school has adopted an inclusive admissions policy for the sixth form and accepts students with a broad range of achievement at GCSE. This results in a wider range of prior attainment than in many sixth forms. The school achieves its aims, however, of providing relevant courses for students of all abilities, which offer personal development opportunities as well as academic qualifications. Students are very happy with the range of courses offered and outcomes are good. Attainment of students completing A-Levels is around the national average, and has risen in each of the last three years, meaning that students make good progress. Teaching in the sixth form is particularly strong, and many teachers have used techniques more usually associated with younger students and adapted them, with good effect, to sixth-form students. Allowance is made for the varying abilities within groups and for differing learning styles. Students in the sixth form benefit from the school's excellent care, guidance and support in many ways, but systems to monitor the progress of groups of students and their progress in subjects are less developed than in the main

school. Students are able to take a significant role in leadership through responsibilities such as that of mentor to younger students. They participate in a wide range of additional activities and, as a result, develop confidence and independence.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	2
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

The majority of responses to the inspection questionnaire for parents and carers were extremely positive. Some people also added written comments. Many of these were individual issues and were both positive and negative. However, there were four main concerns: the frequency of homework and the quality of marking, poor behaviour in some lessons, poor teaching and poor communications. Inspectors observed some excellent practice in all these areas and also came across evidence of where it is less good. Inspectors judged that these issues were linked to temporary teaching arrangements or to the rare occasions when teaching was not good, and were confident that the school was aware of the problem and was doing its best to deal with it.

Inspectors endorsed the views of parents and carers who felt that they could have better communication about learning and progress, and be better supported to help their children learn. This is reflected in one of the areas for improvement.

Some parents and carers (supported by some students) believe the school could do more to promote healthy lifestyles, especially healthy eating. This has been shared with the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Knutsford High 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 275 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,247 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	126	46	139	51	7	3	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	130	47	136	49	5	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	124	45	136	49	8	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	100	36	143	52	17	6	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	98	36	153	56	8	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	92	33	141	51	30	11	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	61	22	170	62	24	9	2	1
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)	112	41	140	51	10	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	117	43	134	49	13	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	99	36	141	51	9	3	8	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	66	24	167	61	16	6	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	104	38	140	51	12	4	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	139	51	118	43	10	4	3	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	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 is 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 up 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 Principal, 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.



7 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Knutsford High School, Knutsford, WA16 0EA

Thank you for the welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We are particularly grateful to those of you who gave up your time to speak to us and to those of you who completed the questionnaire. We found your views especially helpful in getting a full picture of the school. Many improvements have taken place over recent years; we believe that your school offers good opportunities for your learning and development and has a number of outstanding features. Most of you make good progress in your learning. We were particularly impressed by the extent to which you feel safe in the school and how much most of you enjoy attending. You have access to an outstanding curriculum with a wide range of experiences. Much of your teaching is good and teachers do their best to give you useful feedback about your learning and progress. This is particularly true in English. The care, guidance and support you are offered is outstanding and staff at the school make every effort to ensure that moving on to college, work or university is successful. We believe that the principal and other leaders and managers in the school are doing a good job in encouraging you to do as well as possible and in making the school better.

We have asked the school to prioritise future improvement by:

- helping all of you, your parents and carers to understand and monitor your progress better
- developing a range of strategies for success in each lesson
- focusing on a smaller number of improvement initiatives with high impact.

Congratulations on being part of such a good school. Please accept my best wishes for your future success.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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