

Ellesmere Port Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111451
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	378307
Inspection dates	23–24 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	Voluntary aided
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	1,054
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	J Coucill
Headteacher	P Lee
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2009
School address	Capenhurst Lane Ellesmere Port CH65 7AQ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. A total of 36 lessons, taught by 35 teachers and one teaching assistant were observed. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff, senior leaders and members of the governing body. Inspectors looked at the school's work and daily routines, and scrutinised policies, procedures and the latest information on examination results at GCSE and A level. A total of 505 questionnaires were returned from parents and carers and their views, together with those on 235 student questionnaires and 35 staff questionnaires, were also taken into account.

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

- The progress that students make in the school given their prior attainment and how effectively it is monitored.
- The improvement made since the school's previous inspection.
- The extent to which leaders and managers at all levels have a clear, rigorous and accurate picture of the school's current strengths and weaknesses, which is used to plan appropriate improvement.

Information about the school

Ellesmere Port Catholic High School is a larger-than-average voluntary-aided secondary school. It has a slightly higher proportion of girls than most schools, while the proportions of students known to be eligible for free school meals and from minority ethnic groups are below average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is about average. The proportions of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, are much lower than in most schools. Relatively low numbers of students join or leave the school other than at the normal entry and leaving points. The school has specialist status in the humanities, with English, history and religious education as the specialist subjects. The school is a member of the Prince's Teaching Institute for Geography and the London 2012 'Get Set' network.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school provides a safe environment and a satisfactory education both in the main school and the sixth form, and most students enjoy school. Students provide a warm and friendly welcome to visitors. They conduct themselves responsibly around school and behave well in lessons.

The quality of teaching and learning is variable but is satisfactory overall. There is some excellent practice, and lessons where all students participate with enthusiasm, build their skills as independent learners and make good progress. Technology such as interactive whiteboards and tablet computers are often used confidently and appropriately to support learning. Many teachers use carefully constructed and targeted questioning to encourage students to think and check their understanding. Too often, however, lesson planning does not allow for the range of ability within each class or provide different activities that will enable all students to make good progress. The learning objectives in each lesson are not always made clear to students in ways that enable them to understand what they need to do. While opportunities for students to assess their own and others' work exist, they are relatively rare. Insufficient use is made of assessment information on students' progress to shape the teaching to build on previous learning.

The school offers a mainly traditional, academic curriculum. There is some good practice in developing literacy skills across the curriculum and the personal, social, health and citizenship education programme has been substantially improved since the previous inspection. There is a good range of additional activities available and many students are keen participants in sporting and other activities outside the normal day. The current subject-choice process for GCSE means that a significant number of students choose to restrict their future career and higher education routes by only studying a single science subject, and there are currently no students following a separate science programme. This is out of step with the majority of schools. There are some students who are unable to benefit in terms of achievement and self-esteem from greater opportunities to follow a more vocational qualification pathway.

The school provides good care, guidance and support to students. There is some excellent practice, especially in the good collaborative arrangements with other agencies to support students and families experiencing challenging circumstances. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well-supported by the special needs department and some skilled teaching assistants. Their progress in

mainstream lessons, however, is restricted by the lack of effective planning. Many students make a positive contribution to the school community, take on roles of responsibility and also participate in the extensive range of charity and other work in which the school is involved. While there are good examples of effective links with parents and carers, there were a significant number of respondents to the questionnaire who believed that the school could do more to listen to their views and support them in aiding their children's learning.

Leaders and managers have made some progress in broadening the accountability and responsibility of middle leaders for school improvement. There is some very good practice in departmental leadership and in the development of improved teaching and learning. Improvement initiatives across the school, however, are not sufficiently well planned or coordinated to have maximum, rapid impact. The school's own evaluation of its performance is in a number of cases, overgenerous, lacking both rigour and analytical detail. Staff and parents have confidence in the headteacher, and the relatively recent improvements in leadership mean that the school's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

Up to 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate improvement in teaching and learning across the school, through more robust evaluation of current practice, used effectively to shape priorities to be urgently and consistently implemented, including:
 - defining clear learning objectives for students of all abilities to know how to make progress
 - planning to provide a range of different lesson activities, including significantly greater opportunities for students to practise independent learning skills
 - using assessment more regularly to shape and inform lesson planning and progress.

- Refocus the strategic leadership of the school in order to:
 - sharpen whole-school improvement planning
 - enable more rapid development and implementation of whole-school improvements
 - provide better strategic management and overview of key data
 - link more closely, the academic and pastoral elements of sixth-form leadership
 - engage more effectively with parents and carers

- Continue to develop the curriculum, both to strengthen the preparation for academic sixth-form study and to provide a broader range of routes that will enable students to achieve in ways alongside the traditional academic subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students join this school with prior attainment that is above average. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4, however, is at least average but only sometimes above. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is now higher than three years ago. Some underachievement in specific subjects has been effectively addressed. Improvements remain fragile, however, and there is some variation in the progress of current students, linked to the quality of their teaching. In some lessons, students have a very clear idea of ambitious targets; they know their current achievement and can talk about how they can improve. In many lessons, however, the learning objectives and activities in lessons do not always make clear how students can build upon their existing knowledge and understanding to raise their attainment.

Behaviour is usually good, especially in lessons. The recently revised system of rewards, introduced after consultation with students, is generally well applied and valued. Students said that there were very few actual incidents of bullying and they feel safe in school. There is scope, however, for the school to communicate more effectively its procedures for dealing with bullying and other misbehaviour so that students and parents and carers understand them better and gain a greater confidence in them. Most students are confident that they could talk to a member of staff if they had particular concerns. Students generally have a good awareness of what constitutes unsafe situations and how to take reasonable precautions. Most students are aware of factors that affect different aspects of their health and either follow school guidelines about packed lunches or choose healthy options from the school's canteen. Many participate in a range of physical activity, both in and beyond the curriculum. Sex and relationships issues are effectively taught across Key Stages 3 and 4. A high proportion of students and their parents and carers, however, felt that the school could do more to help them be healthy.

Good attendance, punctuality and students' positive approach to work, including enterprise activities and work experience, prepare students well for future working life. Students are well supported through key transitions and most make a successful progression after school into work, training or further education, either at 16 or 18. Current overall rates of progress in English and mathematics, together with the low take-up of double and separate science, however, mean that overall, students' development of skills for their future economic well-being is only satisfactory. Spiritual and moral development is good. Students take good advantage of opportunities to reflect during retreats, weekly mass, assemblies and form periods. The school's strong ethos effectively supports the work students undertake in citizenship lessons and other events, such as a recent human rights festival. Students' ability to gain an awareness of other cultures and religions through the curriculum depends upon the subjects they have chosen to study. Currently, only small numbers of students have the opportunity to mix with different socio-economic and ethnic groups.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	3
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3
Taking into account:	2
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

There is some very good teaching in this school. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson, strong subject knowledge and an excellent relationship between teacher and students were used to generate highly effective, close questioning leading to good understanding. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson, the classroom interactive whiteboard and students' individual whiteboards were used appropriately to check understanding before guiding students to activities pitched at the right level to enable them to make good progress. There is, however, substantial variation in the quality of teaching. In weaker lessons, questioning was unfocused, there was little or no planning to allow for the needs of different students within the class, pace was slow and activities often not challenging.

Overall, the use of assessment across the school to identify students who are underachieving and to target intervention programmes is effective. It is not, however, being used to best effect to specify clear learning outcomes for different groups of students in lesson planning, to ensure a close match between learning activities and their needs. Marking, too, is variable, with the best providing clear steps for improvement and the least helpful being irregular and limited in scope.

The curriculum is adequately matched to the needs and interests of students. The provision for cross-curricular skills is good for literacy, satisfactory for information and communication technology but underdeveloped for numeracy. Shortcomings in the provision of citizenship have been addressed by the school in Key Stage 3. There is a wide range of additional activities to enrich the experience of students and the take-up of these opportunities is high. The school's approach to mixed-ability teaching in much of Key Stage 3 is not sufficiently well supported by high-quality mixed-ability teaching methods.

Advice and guidance offered to students at key transition points is good and students generally feel well cared for. There is good coordination of the work of year heads, the chaplain and other staff. The school's use of data, however, is not sufficiently developed to enable effective tracking of groups to look for trends and patterns.

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

There are good links between the school and some parents and carers, especially in cases where students have been in need of additional support. Some potential improvements to the systems for communicating with parents and carers, including termly reporting and online access to information are too recent to be evaluated.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has been largely successful in devolving leadership accountability more widely. Most subject leaders now have a very clear understanding of their responsibility in raising attainment and ensuring quality of provision. A programme of lesson observation and professional development has been carried out and systems to enable the sharing of good practice established. Individual departments have devised programmes for improving teaching and learning. Staff morale is good and there is a good understanding of the need for further improvement. As yet, however, there has been insufficient detailed, strategic analysis of strengths and weaknesses to support focused, whole-school improvement planning. Systems for judging the impact of professional development and improved practice are currently too time-consuming to enable rapid assessment of impact. Leaders and managers do not take best advantage of information systems to ensure that they have an accurate picture of the attainment, attendance and participation of groups.

The governing body fulfils its statutory and other responsibilities satisfactorily, but the range and quality of systems used to understand and challenge the school are relatively underdeveloped. Safeguarding procedures are effective. Adults working on the school site are properly checked and there are appropriate policies in place. The school is a cohesive community and there are some good links with organisations in the locality but there are weaknesses in planning to promote community cohesion.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3

The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3
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Sixth form

The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. Teachers’ strong subject knowledge is generally supported by well-structured lessons that give opportunities for discussion and collaboration. Some lessons are overly content-driven and do not provide sufficient opportunity for students to discuss and reinforce their understanding of complex concepts. There is considerable scope to develop greater independence in learning, by students researching content prior to a lesson in order to give more time to develop understanding. This restricts the progress that students make and as a result, outcomes are satisfactory rather than good. The curriculum provides a core of A-level subjects with a good range of enrichment, such as visits and other activities in which students are able to participate. Many sixth-form students also take on roles of responsibility supporting younger students in the school. There is good guidance available to students, both in choosing subjects and in helping them to select and prepare for further and higher education opportunities.

Leaders in the sixth form have focused effectively on tracking the progress of students so that support can be offered to any who fall behind. Good backing is offered to students experiencing challenging circumstances. Teachers know their students well and relationships are good. The current separation of pastoral and academic management, however, does not support the close analysis of the progress of groups, the development of sixth-form specific learning approaches or a strong vision for the future of sixth-form education at the school.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

A very high proportion of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. A number included specific concerns or comments. The largest common theme to these comments was variability in teaching quality, its impact on the progress of students and insufficient allowance being made for individual learning needs. This concern is addressed in the recommendations for improvement made in this report. A second significant theme related to poor communication between the school and parents and carers, particularly in ways that would enable parents and carers to better support their children. There were also a number of replies that expressed concern about bullying and the school’s response to incidents of fighting in school. These concerns have been shared with the school while retaining anonymity.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ellesmere Port Catholic 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 **505** completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,054 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	113	23	362	71	23	5	6	1
The school keeps my child safe	157	32	323	64	12	2	7	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	121	25	299	61	63	13	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	119	24	335	66	33	7	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	91	18	366	72	32	7	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	83	17	316	64	74	15	8	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55	11	328	67	84	17	10	2
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)	107	22	317	64	24	5	4	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	85	17	359	73	30	6	8	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	127	26	280	57	50	10	15	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	47	9	320	64	79	16	16	3
The school is led and managed effectively	95	18	356	71	30	6	11	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	133	27	324	66	22	4	7	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 are 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).

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.



25 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Ellesmere Port Catholic High School, Ellesmere Port CH65 7AQ

Thank you for the welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We are particularly grateful to the students who gave up their 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 and we were impressed with the good behaviour that we saw throughout the inspection.

We judge that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. There is some excellent teaching that enables students to make good progress. In good lessons, teachers use modern technology well and provide a range of activities well adapted to suit the needs of all students. There is, however, too much variability in the quality of teaching and in some lessons, the work does not help everyone to understand or make good progress. Sometimes it is not sufficiently challenging, in other cases some students find it difficult to follow. The care, guidance and support offered to you are good but we found that not all students have faith in the school to deal effectively with bullying or other serious misbehaviour. Most of you appreciate the subjects you are able to choose, but we believe that the school could encourage more students to take double or separate sciences and also provide some vocational courses. Many of you take good advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school.

In order to improve further, we have asked the headteacher and teachers to focus on:

- improving the proportion of good teaching
- giving senior leaders more precise whole-school roles to improve the school faster
- making improvements to the curriculum.

My very best wishes for your future success.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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