

Helsby High School

Chester Road, Helsby, Frodsham, Cheshire, WA6 0HY

Inspection dates 4–5 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- This is an improving school. The drive and determination of the headteacher and his team have made a visible impact on all aspects of the school's work.
- Students' attainment is high. The most-able students do very well. They gain a significantly higher proportion of GCSE A* and A grades than nationally in a wide range of subjects.
- The majority of teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. Students enjoy very positive relationships with their teachers, who know their subjects well, and as a result, make use of a range of stimulating resources confidently to stimulate students' learning.
- Through well targeted spending of the extra money provided, the school is rapidly closing the gap that existed between the achievement of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and that of other students.
- Students' behaviour is good. They are happy and proud of their school and are mutually respectful of one another. Behaviour and attendance are improving all the time.
- Students feel safe in school and have a good awareness of e-safety.
- The rich variety of extra-curricular activities enhances the memorable experiences of students and has a positive impact on their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- The headteacher has encouraged all staff to make improvements, so that subject leaders manage their departments effectively and, as a result, standards and the quality of teaching are improving securely.
- The sixth form is good and improving, with standards that are above average. The students are exemplary role models for other students in the main school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small number of students do not make the progress expected of them. Teachers' expectations for some middle and low-ability students are not as high as they could be.
- The attendance and behaviour of a small minority of students is not as good as it should be.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 part-lessons, including four jointly with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of other short visits to lessons and registration groups.
- Inspectors met with five groups of students and talked informally with others in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body and school staff including senior and middle managers. They also spoke on the telephone to a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 93 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 33 questionnaires completed by staff.
- They observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on current students' progress, planning and monitoring documentation, the school's improvement plan, evidence of the work of the governing body, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents pertaining to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Sally Lane, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Mary Liptrot	Additional Inspector
Kathleen Harris	Additional Inspector
Andrew Henderson	Additional Inspector
John Dunne	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Helsby High is a much larger than average-sized secondary school with an average-sized sixth form.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is well below the national average. (The pupil premium is funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those from service families and those who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The majority of students are White British with very small groups from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported through school action and the proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- No students attend courses off site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Strong links are in place with all partner primary schools in the Frodsham and Villages Schools Partnership to ensure continuity of learning and progress from Key Stages 2 to 3.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress of the relatively small numbers of students supported by the pupil premium, and lower-ability students by:
 - further improving the quality of teaching so that the level of challenge is right for all students
 - consolidating and building further on the already successful approaches to help students known to be eligible for the pupil premium make faster progress
 - reducing the number of students who are absent too often and improving the behaviour of a small minority of students so that they are as good as the vast majority of students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- From their above average starting points, most students make good progress. The proportion of students attaining five GCSE passes at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, is above the national average and rising. Students gain a significantly higher proportion of A* and A grades than nationally.
- The most-able students achieve exceptionally well. They make excellent progress in the majority of lessons because the expectations of them are high. This is not always the case for some middle- and lower-ability students because not enough is expected of them in some lessons.
- The school now tracks the progress of students more closely and makes effective use of a wide range of strategies to provide support for students who are falling behind.
- Pupil Premium funding is used effectively to support the small number of students who are known to be eligible for it. As a result, students supported through this funding are now making similarly rapid progress to that of others in the school and gaps in their attainment are being successfully narrowed over time. The difference between their progress at GCSE and that of others has reduced from 39% to 24% and current tracking indicates that this will improve much further to five per cent.
- Students who enter the school with literacy and numeracy skills that are below those expected for their age receive swift and effective additional support, including that funded through the Year 7 catch-up funding, that enables them to catch up with their peers quickly.
- Students with special educational needs did not all make the progress expected of them in relation to their starting points in 2013. However, recent improvements in tracking their progress and supporting them outside lessons have improved their progress.
- The school has a policy of entering some students early for GCSE mathematics. This is based on criteria that they would get the best grade at that sitting and students have to request to be entered early. Students are still required to make at least expected progress.
- Students are articulate and able to express themselves; they give extended answers when required. In lessons, students read and understand texts well and are often asked to read aloud.
- Current standards in the sixth form are above average and standards at AS level show significant improvement. Virtually all students successfully completed their A2 courses with around half gaining passes at the higher A* to B grades. As a result, a high proportion of students were successful in moving on to higher education and/or career options. Strong tracking arrangements are in place to check students' progress and well targeted support is provided to keep them on course.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) believe that their children are making good progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and there are examples of outstanding practice across different subjects. As a result, most students make good progress and achieve well. Teaching is almost always good and often outstanding in the sixth form.
- There are many aspects of teaching that promote good learning. These include: strong subject knowledge; the use of high quality questioning to challenge students to develop their thinking further; stimulating resources used effectively to engage students; teaching approaches that inspire and interest students; and generally a very positive atmosphere for learning. In one Year 11 art lesson, for example, students worked exceptionally well in pairs, which encouraged them to think deeply not only about their own ideas but to appreciate the contributions of others. The teacher set a challenging piece of homework to reinforce their learning even further. Effective

questioning by the teacher supported them without influencing their own creative decisions and direction. This approach fostered a real passion for the subject and outstanding progress.

- Teachers have high expectations, particularly of the most-able students. This results in excellent progress over time. However, not all middle- and low-ability students, do as well as the school expects them to, because teaching does not always challenge them enough.
- Teaching assistants are usually used effectively to support students' learning. Students with special educational needs feel that they are supported well in their learning. Individualised care plans are in place to deal with individual needs, which are being implemented in lessons to help students make better progress.
- Assessment is generally used well, but there are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking. While marking is regular, it sometimes lacks precise enough details of the next steps for improvement. Sometimes students are expected to respond to the advice given in order to learn from their mistakes, but this is not always the case.
- Where learning is most effective, teachers routinely check students' understanding, intervening when necessary with notable impact on the quality of learning. For example, in a Year 9 drama lesson students were challenged to expand on their script-writing ideas through effective questioning. Students were eager to contribute their ideas and made rapid progress. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson teaching made very good use of whiteboards to check learning from the previous lesson and, as misunderstandings were uncovered during the lesson, the teacher explained and questioned carefully to dispel them.
- Occasionally teachers do not ask questions that require extended answers or that challenge students' thinking sufficiently. This slows the progress that they make.
- Students in the sixth form have very positive attitudes to their studies and confidence in their ability to succeed. Teachers have a good awareness of examination requirements so that students have a clear understanding of what they need to do to be successful.
- Teachers are very conscientious and highly committed. They create good relationships in lessons throughout the school, so that the vast majority of students enjoy and take an active part in learning. A minority of students have low expectations of themselves and therefore do not make the accelerated progress they are capable of.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good. Around the school it is excellent and there is a positive atmosphere. Students are friendly, courteous and helpful. The school is a happy place where students get on well together. Movement along the quarter of a mile long corridor is extremely orderly, given the number of students passing along it.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel safe at school. They have a good awareness of how to remain safe through assemblies on topics such as e-safety. They have a detailed understanding of the different types of bullying, including prejudice-based and cyber-bullying through the personal, social and health education programme. Instances of bullying and racist incidents are infrequent.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because the attendance of some groups of students is below average and sometimes the behaviour of a few students' falls below the school's high expectations.
- Sixth form students say that they are proud of their school. They provide very positive role models for younger pupils and enjoy extensive opportunities to take on leadership roles, especially in sport and drama that make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the school. They are very appreciative of the support and guidance they receive for their personal development and value highly the very positive relationships with staff.
- Attitudes to learning are usually very positive and any low-level disruption in lessons is rare. Students cooperate well and are mutually supportive of one another. The school is dealing with a minority of badly behaved students through close monitoring and intervention and, as a result,

there has been some improvement in their behaviour over time.

- Many vulnerable students say that they trust their teachers and have confidence to speak to them if they have a problem.
- Attendance overall is improving and is above average currently. It is much lower for students in receipt of the pupil premium and those with special educational needs, but this gap is narrowing. The school now has a better system for monitoring these groups of students but recognises that continued work is necessary to improve attendance.
- Most parents indicate that their children are happy in school and that they feel safe. They also say the school makes sure that its students are well behaved and deals effectively with bullying.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher's vision for the school and his exceptional ambition for the success of all students are shared by governors and staff. He has been the driving force behind the many improvements that have taken place. The senior leadership team continues to ensure that the quality of teaching is improving.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and honest. It leads to successful actions to bring about improvement where necessary.
- Heads of department take full responsibility for improving performance in their subjects. They value the sharing of good leadership practice with other subject heads during reviews of their work. They are rigorously held to account by both governors and their senior line manager for their plans for improvement.
- Leaders and governors know their school very well and have correctly identified the progress and attendance of students in receipt of the pupil premium and those with special educational needs as a priority. Effective actions have resulted in marked improvements in many areas, but the school recognises the need to continue to work hard in this respect.
- Procedures for managing staff performance and decisions about salary progression are robust. They include, for example, lesson observations by staff internal to the school and by other professionals from outside. The robustness of these procedures ensures that most teaching is consistently good. The challenge now is to eradicate any teaching that requires improvement and increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding. There is a good programme of professional development in place for the on-going improvement of teaching and learning and leadership development.
- The curriculum has a choice of courses that meet the needs of students of different abilities. These are regularly reviewed to meet the needs of students. Literacy, numeracy and communication skills are developed effectively across subjects and this contributes significantly to students' high levels of attainment at Key Stage 4. Students receive independent careers advice during their time in school. The sixth form curriculum is well matched to students' interests and capabilities and provides a wide range of academic A-Level courses, supplemented by a small number of vocational courses.
- There is a vast range of extra-curricular activities including sporting, musical, cultural, artistic, international and educational visits that enhance students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Some students even represent England in sporting events.
- The school communicates very well with parents, particularly through e-communications and forums, and attendance at consultation evenings is high. Parents are generally committed, interested and have high expectations. The majority would recommend the school to another parent and expressed the view that the school is led and managed well.
- The sixth form has improved since the previous inspection, resulting in improvements in achievement and progress.
- Local authority support for this good school is 'light touch'. However, the school has asked for help in the past, which has had the impact of improving results in science and mathematics.
- Procedures for keeping students safe and secure are fully in place and give no cause for

concern.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are strongly committed to supporting the school. They challenge and support in equal measure. They say that the quality of information that they receive is now more focused and stimulates rigorous debate. They have a clear understanding of school strengths and priorities for improvement. They are aware of the impact of the pupil premium funding and recognise the need for further improvements and so continue to hold leaders to account.
- Governors are well informed about the achievements of students and regularly and formally monitor the quality of departments through visits to the school. Governors manage resources well, making sure the school offers good value for money. They know about the management of teachers' performance and have an excellent understanding of issues regarding the safeguarding of students.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	111440
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	426269

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	1,334
Of which , number on roll in sixth form	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	B Ratcliffe
Headteacher	John Dowler
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2008
Telephone number	01928 723551
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