

Culcheth High School

Warrington Road, Culcheth, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 5HH

Inspection dates 30 April 2014–1 May 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.

- Students develop good knowledge, skills and understanding well in most subjects, including English and mathematics. They make good progress from their starting points and attain high standards in GCSE examinations.
- Teaching over time is usually good and some is outstanding. Students work hard and behave well. They are respectful to teachers and other adults.
- Attendance is above average and rising.
- The school's good performance has continued during the recent period of interim leadership.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' learning are well developed. Many students are actively involved in working for charities.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of the school is comprehensive and accurate. It leads to effective development although they recognise that more could be done to enhance the learning of some groups.
- Governors understand the school well. They provide well-judged support and strong challenge to school leaders. They are prepared to take hard decisions when necessary.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Boys generally achieve less well than girls. Students eligible for the pupil premium do not achieve as well as others. Recently, achievement gaps have begun to narrow.
- The most able students do not always achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers' marking and use of questioning in lessons is not always effective in ensuring students develop good levels of understanding.
- Teaching does not always develop students' love of learning or enthusiasm for the power of education to change lives. This has a particularly detrimental impact in lower sets.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Too many students do not reach the standards of which they are capable. While wider outcomes are positive, achievement is not consistently good across all subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons taught by 46 teachers, an assembly and morning registration time activities. They examined a sample of students' work and students' exercise books in lessons.
- The conduct of students was observed at different times throughout the school day.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers. They met formally with groups of students and talked informally with others in lessons and around the school.
- Documents were examined including the school's self-evaluation information, development plan, safeguarding records, governing body minutes and data relating to students' achievement, attendance and behaviour.
- Meetings were held with governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed 109 responses to Parent View, which is Ofsted's on-line questionnaire for parents. Questionnaire returns from 45 members of staff were examined.

Inspection team

David Selby, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Royston Halford	Additional Inspector
Lenford White	Additional Inspector
Kathleen Harris	Additional Inspector
Pamela Hemphill	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is slightly larger than the average sized secondary school.
- The school has a sixth form which is much smaller than average. Governors have asked the local authority to consider a proposal that the sixth form should close from July 2015. The council's executive board voted in February 2014 to confirm the intention that the sixth form should close. The council is following statutory process relating to such a proposed change. A final decision will be made by the council's executive board in June 2014.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium¹ is below the national average.
- The proportion of students that the school has identified as disabled or having special educational needs and requiring support through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average.
- Twenty four students in Years 9, 10 and 11 have individual programmes for their learning which include off-site alternative provision, part-time at Warrington Collegiate, a work skills programme at Employ and tuition at home.
- A new headteacher joined the school on 1 May 2014. A deputy headteacher acted as interim headteacher from 1 January 2014 to 30 April 2014.
- The school works with Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School in Blackburn to provide a local group of schools with training for middle leaders. Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School is a National Support School.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching over time is more effective in developing students' skills, knowledge and understanding, developing and extending the existing good teaching so that:
 - all marking is frequent, thorough and encourages students to engage with their teachers in a more meaningful way
 - teachers always use questioning in ways which challenge the learning of all students
 - teachers help all students to develop a greater love of learning and enthusiasm for school that develops an ambitious attitude towards their future lives and careers.
- Raise the achievement of some groups of students so that:
 - the gaps in achievement between those supported by the pupil premium and others, and between boys and girls are eradicated and this is sustained over time
 - better progress for the most able leads to more A* and A grades at GCSE
 - students in the sixth form make better progress in all their subjects.

The pupil premium is specific, additional funding provided to support the education of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, pupils who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years and children who have been looked after continuously for a period of 6 months.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with attainment which is generally well above the national average. At the end of Year 11, they maintain their high standards, consistently achieving results that are well above those of students nationally. In 2013, the proportion of students gaining at least five GCSE passes at grade C or above, including in English and mathematics, and their attainment in English and in mathematics, increased even further.
- The proportion of students attaining A* to C passes at GCSE in a wide range of subjects is significantly higher than found nationally. More students attain A* to A in most subjects. However, this is not as impressive as it should be given the higher numbers of most able students. Although the school recognises this, it looks likely that the most able will not make the even faster progress needed to avoid this being repeated this year.
- The progress of Year 11 students in 2013 measured by their performance in their best eight GCSE subjects was broadly as expected. It had dipped in 2012. In 2013, boys made less progress than girls. School data show that the boys' rates of progress have now increased. Progress in each of mathematics, science, languages and humanities was as expected but it was well above average for English.
- As in most schools, students supported by the pupil premium achieve less well than others. The gaps in attainment in English and mathematics reduced a little in 2013 but the lower attainment of these students led to their GCSE results in these subjects being over one grade below others in 2013. School leaders have ensured that teachers are aware of these gaps and use information about students eligible for the pupil premium as they plan lessons. Current indications are that the gaps are reducing quickly and significantly.
- A small number of students are entered for mathematics GCSE before the end of Year 11. This is only done when teachers are confident it will help the students included achieve a better grade.
- The school's close monitoring of students included in off-site alternative provision indicates that they make good progress as a result of the close match between their needs and the work they do.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of the well-planned provision and effective support they receive.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Students join the sixth form with GCSE results which are often less than the average for similar courses nationally because a majority of most able students chose to continue their studies elsewhere. A few students make rapid progress and achieve high A level grades but many leave with lower grades. Strategies have been put in place to challenge subject leaders and teachers where students have not done well enough. These have led to improvement in, for example, biology, and information and communication technology.

The quality of teaching is good

- Achievement is good as a result of effective teaching over time. Inspectors saw teaching and learning which was usually good and some which was outstanding. No inadequate teaching and learning was seen and this matches the longer term view of the school's own observations over time.
- Where students develop the best skills, knowledge and understanding, teachers effectively use strategies they have identified to help meet the learning needs of individual students. Teachers support good learning through questioning which extends students' understanding, for example, where the teacher's questions following students' presentations lead to high level answers. In less effective examples, teachers' questioning does not ensure that all students are sufficiently involved or challenged.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and this is used well where learning is most effective to

encourage students to develop a love of the subject and thirst for knowledge. Where learning requires improvement, this is not the case.

- Students are well prepared for examinations because teachers closely link learning to examination requirements.
- Marking varies in quality between subjects and between teachers of the same subject. Too little marking is of good quality. The school expects students to respond to teachers' comments on key pieces of work. Students do not always do this and, when they do, teachers do not always check that the responses are useful. Opportunities to help students learn faster are missed because marking in some books is superficial and, in others, work is left too long before it is marked. Leaders have identified this as a priority in the school development plan.
- The high quality of teaching over time in English promotes good literacy skills. Students are encouraged to use the library more and this has led to a doubling of the number of books borrowed. Students' oral skills are good. They participate in discussions with confidence. While much mathematics teaching aims to develop mathematical theory, there is less emphasis on applying these skills. Students are given opportunities to do this in other subjects including geography and science.
- Teaching assistants contribute well to the learning of the students they support. The school has recently made new arrangements so that teaching assistants specialise in particular subjects. This approach was seen to be working particularly well in French.
- While students who talked with inspectors said teaching was good, a few felt that behaviour was less good where lessons were not as enjoyable. Most parents who responded to Parent View felt that teaching over time was good.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is not consistently good enough to ensure all students achieve to their full capacity. Over time, it has not ensured that all groups of students make good progress in all subjects. The very small classes do not always allow students to share ideas and thoughts. However, there is some very effective teaching over time where teachers steer the students to develop their knowledge and understanding by using research and computers effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They work hard and generally conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school.
- Students are respectful towards each other and their teachers. They support the learning of all by working together well. They are friendly and pleasant in their social time and generally behave very well even in crowded and busy areas of the school.
- Students are open and courteous towards visitors. They are pleased to talk about their school. They look after the buildings and site well. There is very little litter.
- Attendance is above average and is increasing further. Punctuality to school and lessons is good. Rates of exclusion from school for all students are below the national average and are decreasing. While the rates of exclusion for students supported by the pupil premium are falling they are slightly more than the average.
- Almost all students spoken to by inspectors said that bullying is rare and were confident that if it should occur, it would be dealt with effectively. The same students said that they sometimes heard homophobic language but felt that this would be challenged if heard by staff. Inspectors found that the school is active in challenging prejudice with, for example, a display of powerful images celebrating diversity in the dining area created by Year 11 students. Strong support is offered to all students. Staff work hard to ensure there is equality of opportunity for all.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. No incidents that indicate students may be unsafe were seen in lessons or around the school. Appropriate risk assessments are in place. Students are taught about ways to keep themselves safe when using modern information technology. Students say they feel safe in school. Arrangements for ensuring the safety of students involved in offsite alternative provision are thorough.

- The arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.

The leadership and management are good

- The interim headteacher worked effectively with staff and with the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders to ensure that the school's high standards were maintained in the period before the new headteacher took up his post.
- Senior leaders evaluate the school's overall effectiveness accurately as good. The interim leadership team led the writing of a new school development plan that responds to the school's key improvement needs. Immediate and effective action has been taken in response to weaker aspects of the achievement of groups of students. The evaluation of the quality of teaching as good is accurate. Staff morale is good.
- Middle leaders share the high ambition of senior leaders and this is beginning to be translated into improvements to teaching.
- The management of the performance of weaker members of staff is robust and the rewards given for effective teaching are appropriate. Ambitious targets which relate to school priorities are set for all teachers. Where needed, training to tackle weaker areas is given and further action taken if improvement does not happen.
- The curriculum meets students' needs. It is enhanced by an extensive programme of activities, after school and visits during and out of school time.
- The development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' learning is effective. The school has an active link with a partner school in Soweto. This involves teachers and students in exchange visits. Large amounts of money are raised for charity. This work is often led by sixth form students.
- Senior leaders have secured improvement in attendance. This has been particularly significant for those students supported by the pupil premium. A senior leader has been appointed with overall responsibility for the ways the gaps for these students are being closed.
- The local authority has provided good support to the school over the period of transition between substantive headteachers. School leaders seek out links with other partners where this will help the school. A review of the use of the pupil premium has been commissioned in order to understand how to make this even more effective.
- Leadership of the sixth form requires improvement, although it ensures that most students are well prepared for their next stage. All students who have left the sixth form recently have taken up university places, other educational opportunities, training or employment.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective. Governors know the school well and challenge and support senior leaders. They use evidence on the school's performance and ask probing questions of senior and middle leaders. New appointments to the governing body have brought in more governors with relevant skills and experience.
 - A governor has responsibility for the oversight of the pupil premium. Governors know about its use and how this helps the students concerned and are keen to close gaps in performance even further.
 - Governors know about the quality of teaching of different subjects and the steps that are taken to ensure it improves. They work systematically with school leaders to manage the performance of teachers. They are fully involved in decisions about pay increases to reward good performance.
 - Governors are prepared to take difficult decisions. The recommendation to close the sixth form was taken after carefully considering the quality of education offered to sixth form students, the appropriate use of limited funding and the overall impact on the school.
 - Governors have decided to commission a review of their own work to ensure that it is effective as possible.

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	111430
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	429986

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	1,132
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Heald
Headteacher	David Terry
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2009
Telephone number	01925 767587
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