

Congleton High School

Box Lane, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4NS

Inspection dates

16–17 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- School leaders provide good and focussed leadership. There is good capacity for the school to continue to improve.
- Data tracking in school is rigorous. This quickly helps identify students who need additional help or more specific support.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and innovative and meets the needs of all students very well.
- The behaviour of students is good. When properly stimulated, they have very positive attitudes to learning.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Students with disabilities and special educational needs make good progress as a result of targeted support and intervention.
- Most students reach a good standard of attainment at GCSE. Attainment is continuing to improve.
- Extra-curricular activities make a good contribution to support learning.
- There is a very strong culture of care and nurture which is appreciated by both students and parents.
- Most students are very articulate and able to express and reason well.
- The leadership of the sixth form is strong. Attainment is consistently above average with a trend of good progress evident.
- Inclusion is a major attribute which permeates the whole school.
- The school prepares students very well for life in modern Britain.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The most-able students are not always challenged effectively. Consequently, some do not achieve as well as they should, especially in mathematics.
- Some assessment is not currently accurate enough or used well to support what students should learn next.
- Written feedback to students is improving, but is not yet consistent across the school.
- Senior and middle leaders' monitoring of teaching is not always consistent or rigorous enough.
- Governors do not always challenge school leaders rigorously enough.
- Some teaching, especially in Key Stage, 3 does not engage or challenge students sufficiently to impact positively on their progress.
- The gap between the performance of disadvantaged students and their peers remains, although this is now being closed quickly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons across a range of curriculum areas and year groups. A small number was observed jointly with senior school leaders. Inspectors saw registration periods, praise assemblies and observed how students behaved in and out of lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive principal, representatives of the governing body, senior staff, middle leaders and other academy staff. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Discussions were held with groups of students across the school about their educational experience and behaviour. Samples of students' written work were also scrutinised, including in lessons. Inspectors listened to younger students reading. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including the school's view of how well it is doing, development planning, pupil progress tracking, the monitoring of teaching, performance management, staff training, and records of governors' meetings. They also looked at records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, as well as a wide range of information uploaded on the school website.
- The inspection took account of 259 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and one phone message from an individual parent.

Inspection team

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Full report

Information about this school

- Congleton High School is an 11-18 academy school situated among green fields and private housing on the edge of Congleton in south east Cheshire, close to the border with Staffordshire.
- The school is larger than average.
- The school converted to become an academy in April 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- Ninety-five per cent of students are of White British heritage and the remainder is from a range of minority ethnic groups. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is very low.
- The proportion of students who receive support through pupil premium funding (additional funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals and students who are looked after by the local authority) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is slightly above the national average, although a below average number of students has a statement of special educational needs.
- The school has specialist engineering status and has developed strong links with local companies and engineering organisations.
- The school also holds the Investor in People award and there are well-established links with the local community through the use of the community sports centre.
- The school holds the Gold Cultural Diversity Quality Standard and the International School award for its work in this area.
- The school is part of the Chimney House Group Teaching School Alliance.
- This year the school founded CMAT (the Congleton Multi-Academy Trust).
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- Currently no students attend any alternative off-site provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially at Key Stage 3, so that it is consistently good in order to ensure that:
 - the most-able students are challenged in lessons to achieve much better, especially in mathematics
 - disadvantaged students are fully engaged in their learning and make better-than-expected progress in order to close the attainment gap
 - assessment is always accurate and is used effectively to help plan new learning
 - feedback and marking consistently inform and challenge students to make improvements in their work.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - middle and senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching are consistent and rigorous and lead to specific actions to develop teachers' subject knowledge and skills to make them more effective practitioners in the classroom
 - governors dig deeper to provide even greater challenge to school leaders and do not accept everything too readily at face value.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The executive principal provides clear leadership. He and his senior team are passionately committed to ensuring that the students in their care reach their full potential and are well prepared for their chosen careers or further study. There is a shared vision of 'achieving success together.' As a result, students are aspirational, well rounded individuals.
- Following a decline in the previous year, achievement is now improving. In 2014, students attained their best ever results and this positive trend is set to continue. Targets are ambitious and have proved accurate. There is good leadership capacity for the school to continue to improve.
- The school website is very detailed and more than meets all the statutory requirements. It presents a very positive picture of the school and celebrates what it does well.
- Senior leaders know the school well. The school's view of its own performance is accurate and based on strong quantitative evidence. Planning is clearly aimed at more improvement.
- Systems are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. However, judgements about the impact of teaching over time are not always consistent and at times are overgenerous. Insufficient account is taken of the progress being made in lessons by different groups of students, especially the most able, when making judgements, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Data tracking in school is rigorous and the school analyses performance by specific groups of pupils. This quickly helps identify students who need additional help or more specific support. The school has introduced a programme called 'serious about success' in order to prepare students for linear examinations; this involves a programme of support delivered via curriculum areas. The school also has the expectation that students will re-sit internal exams where poor performance is clearly a result of poor effort.
- Middle leaders are expected to make a significant contribution in the pursuit of excellence. However, improvements to teaching and achievement over time in some areas have not been matched in others. Sufficient challenge is not always being made in those subjects which consistently attain good results, but with further development could do still better.
- Relative academic success has led to some subjects working on their own. There has been a lack of engagement with professional associations, other than examination boards, to help keep teachers updated with current issues in their subject. Subject plans often do not give sufficient consideration to strategies which will directly improve classroom practice and teaching, but often focus on data-crunching or further monitoring.
- The performance management of teachers is rigorous and this is reflected in pay progression. This is linked to an extensive programme of professional development which the majority of teachers have taken good advantage of to improve aspects of their practice.
- There is good provision for students with special educational needs who achieve well as a result of targeted support and intervention and demonstrates leaders' drive for fairness and equality of opportunity.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and innovative and meets the needs of all students very well. It prepares them for life in modern Britain as well as making them aware of other cultures and the wider world. 'Tackling stereotypes' and 'Equality of opportunity' are some of the topics covered in personal, social and health education. In history, students learn about slavery, the changing role of women as well as democracy which is further supported by whole-school involvement in the work of the school council. Students are able to learn first hand about British values of democracy by voting for their form representatives to voice their views on the year leadership team and for their year representatives to ensure that their views are heard on the whole-school student leadership team.
- The wide range of quality extra-curricular provision is appreciated by the students and supports their spiritual, moral social and cultural development very well. Diversity is encouraged with strong links to schools abroad and beyond the boundaries of Europe.
- All aspects of safeguarding, including those related to the appointment of staff are monitored rigorously. There are many elements of best practice.
- Parents are very positive about the work of the school and home-school partnerships are strong.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance of the school is good. Governors are kept well informed by senior leaders and they know the school and its strengths and weaknesses well. They are aware of the strategic direction in which the school is going.
 - The governing body has recently been reconstituted to ensure that there is an improved match of relevant experience and skills. Governors undertake their duties efficiently and diligently, although at

- times they accept leaders' judgements too readily.
- Governors are aware of how pupil premium funding is spent. They monitor the progress of disadvantaged students and they understand that the overall achievement and attainment gap needs to continue to close quickly. However, they have not questioned nor ensured whether the actions benefit and appropriately meet the entitlement of all students including, for example, the more-able disadvantaged students.
 - There are very clear processes for the review of teachers' performance management. Recommendations for pay progression, including those of the executive principal, are well founded on key performance indicators.
 - Governors ensure that the school meets statutory requirements for safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They are smartly dressed in school uniform and move around the school responsibly, even along narrow corridors which were not intended to cope with the current volume of traffic. Students conduct themselves safely and responsibly with minimal requirement for huge levels of supervision.
- Students are welcoming and positive and there is a strong sense of community. Student voice is a strength of the school. The head boy and head girl are active associate members of the governing body and students regularly participate in the appointment of staff.
- Students are keen to learn, but where teaching is not engaging they become passive listeners rather than active learners. This was more apparent where lessons routinely focussed on improving examination technique or in Key Stage 3 where teaching did not fully engage their interest. This slowed down the pace of teaching and, as a result, some students failed to achieve as well as they could.
- Attendance is above average and improving and punctuality to lessons is good. Students value and enjoy what the school has to offer.
- There is a strong culture of care and nurture which is appreciated by both students and parents. As a result, students are responsive and thoughtful. This was exemplified by students requesting to attend and lay a wreath at the memorial to fallen service men and women in Congleton on Remembrance Sunday.
- Exclusions are very low and reducing.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. As students remarked, 'We feel so safe, we don't even think about whether we are safe.' They know that adults will listen to and follow up their concerns. They like the closed-circuit television and front-of-school arrangements for visitors because these initiatives reinforce their sense of safety.
- Students interviewed did not consider bullying to be an issue. School records confirm that bullying of any form is infrequent and very quickly and effectively dealt with. Students have confidence that adults will, in their words 'resolve everything as quickly and fairly as possible.'
- Pastoral support from staff is very strong. There are very good systems in place to meet the needs of students with special educational needs or disabilities. There is convincing evidence of outstanding care which in turn has resulted in improvements in behaviour and attendance.
- Students receive appropriate guidance from information in lessons, tutor time and assemblies and know how to keep themselves safe when using the Internet.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of students, including checks on the recruitment of staff, are rigorous and monitored regularly and closely. All staff, including those recently appointed, have received statutory safeguarding training and are in receipt of the school's 'Keeping Children Safe' document.

The quality of teaching is good

- Although much teaching over time is good, some teaching, especially in Key Stage 3, does not have enough impact on the progress of students. In many lessons, students' learning is rapid and they are able to show very good and deep understanding of the subject and they develop high-order skills. However, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean this is not the case in all subjects and is most notable for higher-ability students.
- In the vast majority of curriculum areas teachers are subject specialists and this benefits teaching and learning.
- Teaching in examination classes prepares students well for the next stage in their education. Teaching at Key Stage 3 does not match this in terms of pace, challenge and engagement. A number of departments begin to focus on examination techniques too early and too frequently and this is stifling enjoyment and engagement in some lessons.
- Where teaching is good, work is challenging enough to meet the needs of learners. Teachers also monitor students' responses and adapt their approaches accordingly. Questioning is also precise and effective. Staff frequently use annotated seating plans effectively as brief reminders regarding the specific needs of the students and how to address these.
- Not all teaching, however, takes enough account of prior learning or the starting points of individuals, including in those subjects which set by ability. As a result, there are occasions when students of all abilities, especially the most able, are not given work which is appropriately challenging.
- Data are used extensively to monitor students' progress. This is used well by the majority of teachers to track student progress and identify where intervention or additional support is required. This is utilised especially well in examination classes. Reporting to parents is rigorous. However, the accuracy of teachers' assessment of students' progress over time is inconsistent in some subjects, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Teaching in Option K is particularly strong with teachers being more creative in their approaches. This is an innovative programme which allows Years 10 and 11 students to work alongside sixth formers on a wide range and variety of courses which lead to a range of nationally-recognised qualifications and provide a greater variety of progression routes. In these subjects, teachers frequently impart knowledge in an engaging way, which increases students' knowledge and understanding. For example, in one lesson students were able to apply scientific principles whilst building skills and attributes like teamwork and resilience, to engender a love of learning.
- The development of literacy skills is a clear focus for development in most curriculum areas. Students were observed engaging in well-reasoned debate and discussion in many lessons. Most are very articulate and able to express and reason well. Many opportunities were evident in their books to develop skills in extended writing.
- Homework is set regularly and consistently throughout the school. This is monitored rigorously which ensures a high completion rate. Various homework clubs support students who struggle or are in need of additional help.
- There is a strong whole-school focus on using marking and feedback to improve learning. Where this is good, teachers provide helpful verbal and written feedback and students respond by correcting errors, redrafting passages and improving answers. This contributes to improved progress, especially in examination classes. However, this is not yet being applied consistently across all classes or subjects.
- Extra-curricular activities make a good contribution to support learning and students appreciate the care, guidance and support they receive from teachers who 'go the extra mile'. Relationships in lessons are very positive and these support learning well.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with levels of prior attainment above national averages.
- Most students reach a good standard of attainment at GCSE in terms of five grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. In 2013, this figure was broadly in line with the national average and in 2014, above. The figure for 2014 was the best ever result attained by the school and internal school data indicate that the positive trend is set to continue.
- Disadvantaged students attained just over half a grade lower in English and approximately 1 grade lower in mathematics at GCSE, when compared with their peers in school. Evidence identified that this gap is continuing to close.
- Although levels of progress made by disadvantaged students in English and mathematics improved significantly in 2014, school data tracking do not yet focus rigorously enough on the expectation for

better-than-expected progress for these learners. As a result, the attainment gap remains wider than it should be.

- Figures for the proportion of students making expected progress in English for 2014 are above the national average. Internal data for the present Year 11 cohort support a positive picture of improvement.
- In 2013, value-added data for mathematics were significantly below the national average. In 2014, best entry data for the school indicate a very significant improvement in expected progress, but they remain below the national average at better-than-expected progress. The school has accurately recognised that this is an area for development and current data tracking shows a significant improvement.
- The most-able students in 2014 did not make enough progress from their starting points in mathematics. Evidence collected on inspection indicates that higher-ability pupils are not always challenged to attain the highest standards across the curriculum.
- Students with special educational needs and disabilities make good progress from their starting points as a result of targeted support and intervention.
- Reading is supported well at Key Stage 3 and the levels of progress achieved by students engaged in the catch-up programme are impressive.
- The school used early entry for the first time for students in English and mathematics at GCSE in November 2013 as a deliberate strategy to motivate students. Early entry is no longer routinely used.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The leadership of the sixth form is strong. Data tracking replicates the rigorous process found lower down the school and student are closely monitored. Progress is regularly checked and parents are kept informed.
- Attainment is consistently above average with a trend of good progress evident. The quality of teaching is consistently good in most subjects.
- The very wide range of subjects offered allows students to choose academic or vocational pathways or a combination of both. They are provided with good guidance as to which best suits their abilities and aspirations. The school gets as much delight from a student achieving an apprenticeship in a local engineering firm as from another who gets a place at Oxford or Cambridge. Inclusion is a major attribute which permeates the whole school.
- Teachers have high expectations. Individual study plans and a range of enrichment activities are highly effective. There are good opportunities for work experience and visits to universities. Good careers advice is available. Almost all the students who left last year are in employment, education or training.
- Students are generally highly motivated and work well independently and collaboratively. Pastoral support is strong and there are many opportunities for them to take responsibility. They contribute to the supervision and development of younger students. They are very active in the local and wider community and support fundraising, such as helping to build science facilities for their partner school in Namibia.
- However, those few students continuing with their studies of GCSE English and GCSE mathematics do not achieve consistently well. In 2014, those re-sitting English and mathematics were more successful in English than in mathematics. Observation showed students lacking in motivation or urgency and they were not engaging with their learning.

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	136655
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	448871

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1103
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Hinckley
Executive Principal	David Hermitt
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01260 387000
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	principal@congletonhigh.com

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