

Ellesmere Port Catholic High School

Capenhurst Lane, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 7AQ

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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.

- Outstanding leadership provided by the inspirational, dedicated headteacher has been the impetus to rapid improvement.
- She has galvanised all members of the school community to shake off the legacy of underachievement. Across the school, there is a widely shared hunger for further improvement.
- Achievement of all groups of students is improving rapidly. As a result, students show confidence in themselves and are well prepared for the next stages in their lives.
- A comprehensive programme of training has driven profound improvement in the overall quality of teaching. As a result, most students experience teaching of good quality across many subjects.
- Governors are dedicated and have a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have contributed well to its improvement.
- Students' behaviour is good. They are courteous, sociable and, for the most part, keen to learn.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved markedly since the previous inspection. To a large extent, this is because the school reaches out far more effectively to parents than it did in the past.
- The sixth form is good. Outstanding leadership of the sixth form has transformed this area of the school and achievement is improving apace. Sixth form students are excellent role models for younger students and they contribute well to the wider life of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teachers are not always effective in adjusting their lessons to suit the needs of all students. As a result, although the achievement of disadvantaged students and those with disabilities or with special educational needs is improving quickly, there remain some gaps between their achievement and that of other students across the school.
- Some subject leaders do not always ensure that teachers in their departments follow school procedures and there is some inconsistency in the application of school policies, for example in marking and behaviour management. As a result, marking is not always effective in ensuring students improve their work and, on occasion, a very small minority of students do not behave as well as they might.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in lessons, visited classrooms at form time and examined a selection of students' work across a range of subjects and year groups. Inspectors also observed a 'multi-faith' day, organised for Year 8 students, which was attended by representatives of several religions in the local community.
- Inspectors interviewed a large number of students, both formally in meetings and informally at break, lunchtime and at the end of the school day.
- Inspectors studied a wide range of information provided by the school, including: records of students' progress, behaviour and attendance; the school's self-evaluation of its work and plans for further improvement; records relating to the quality of teaching; and a selection of school policies, particularly those relating to safeguarding. Inspectors also examined information on the school's website.
- Inspectors considered in detail a number of reviews of the school's effectiveness undertaken by the local authority and reports, written by subject specialists from local outstanding schools, which had been used by the school to verify its assessment of students' current attainment and progress.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other school leaders, the chaplain, staff, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors considered the 33 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors analysed 50 submissions to Parent View, Ofsted's on-line questionnaire, and also considered emails from parents of students currently attending the school, and an email submitted anonymously to Ofsted.

Inspection team

Joan Bonenfant, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter McKay

Additional Inspector

Tudor Griffiths

Additional Inspector

Bernard Robinson

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Ellesmere Port Catholic High School is an average-sized secondary school with a sixth form. A higher proportion of girls than boys attend the school.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is slightly below the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average, but rising.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is lower than average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is less than half that found nationally.
- A very small number of students spend part of the week attending placements at West Cheshire College, 'Access 2 Employment' and the 'Youth Federation'.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations of students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4.
- The headteacher in post at the time of the previous inspection, which took place in November 2013, left the school at the end of the Spring Term in 2014, after having led the school for many years. The current headteacher has been in post since that date.
- The school receives support from a local outstanding school, Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College, led by a National Leader of Education. The school also works in partnership with a number of schools involved in the Cheshire Vale Teaching School Alliance.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all teachers adapt their lessons effectively to ensure that all students, including disadvantaged students and those with disabilities or special educational needs, make equally good progress.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring all subject leaders insist that members of their department implement school policies consistently in such a way that all students follow advice on how to improve their work and always behave well in lessons
 - refining the school development plan so that it addresses the next stages in the school's drive for further improvement more effectively
 - embedding current initiatives to accelerate the rates of progress of all students, particularly disadvantaged students and those with disabilities or special educational needs, so that all students achieve their potential.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Outstanding leadership provided by the inspirational and dedicated headteacher has been the catalyst to substantial and rapid improvement. This is now a school to which staff and students are proud to belong and where students' achievement is improving apace. It is a tribute to all involved that so much has been achieved in such a short time.
- Capacity for further improvement is strong. The headteacher has impelled all members of the school community to shake off the legacy of previous underachievement. In so doing, she has steered the school successfully out of special measures and there is a widely shared ambition to become an outstanding school in the near future.
- The large majority of staff and other stakeholders, such as governors and students, recognise the immense contribution the headteacher has made in restoring confidence and self-belief. Responses to the staff questionnaire are testament to this, for example: 'This school has improved dramatically...we are on a journey to outstanding without a doubt...students have raised their game and are more confident in achieving their potential'.
- Senior leaders have established highly effective and robust systems to track students' progress, which is frequently monitored. They use this information to hold teachers to account for their performance. Teachers have been held back from salary increases if they have not met their targets.
- The school's self-evaluation of its work is accurate. A particularly strong feature of the headteacher's approach to this aspect of leadership is her willingness to accept advice and criticism, leading to a healthily frank perception of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The school development plan, devised as a road map to guide the school on its journey out of special measures, has been an effective tool for this purpose. However, it requires some adjustment in order to drive further improvement.
- The leadership and management of teaching are good. Teaching is observed regularly, both formally and informally. A programme of coaching and relevant training to meet the individual needs of teachers has been productive in ensuring teaching is now good and improving.
- Since the time of the previous inspection, middle leadership has been of more variable quality. An unswerving approach has been taken to routing underperformance and almost half of the staff in post at the time of the previous inspection have left the school. As a result, a substantial proportion of middle leaders are new to their posts and, despite showing potential, they have not had enough time to make their mark fully.
- Not all leaders of subjects are equally effective in ensuring that all members of staff follow school policies. As a result, there remain inconsistencies of practice across the school, for example in marking and behaviour management.
- The school promotes equality and tackles discrimination more effectively than it did at the time of the previous inspection. Nevertheless, although the achievement of disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs is improving rapidly, this is from a very low base, and there are still gaps between their achievement and that of other students in the school. School leaders have created an inclusion team to drive improvements in the achievement of such students. This initiative is embryonic and, despite showing some early signs of impact, has not yet had time to be fully effective.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well; the school's chaplain plays a strong role in this respect. Students are encouraged to reflect on ethical issues in religious education lessons and through a comprehensive programme of assemblies. In addition, inspirational quotations are inscribed upon walls throughout the school, enhancing students' awareness of key intellectual figures, such as Einstein, or agents of social change, such as Mahatma Gandhi.
- The promotion of fundamental British values, such as liberty and respect for others, is incorporated into the overarching ethos of the school. Although the school is denominationally Catholic, students learn about other faiths both through the curriculum and also in specific events, such as the 'multi-faith' day, that took place during the inspection. Inspectors found that students asked intelligent questions of the representatives of other religions and showed tolerance and understanding of different points of view.
- Students' awareness of democracy is promoted in lessons and also in discussions during form time; for example, in history, all students learn about the campaign for women's suffrage that took place in the early part of the Twentieth Century. In this way, students are well equipped for life in modern Britain.
- The curriculum offers a broad range of both academic and vocational subjects. Improvements have been made to the curriculum since the previous inspection; for example, students now study courses in science that are far better suited to their needs, abilities and interests.

- Students' physical well-being is enhanced by expert teaching of sport and a wide range of extra-curricular clubs. Students' lives are also enriched by visits both locally and further afield, such as trips abroad.
- The school provides a comprehensive programme of careers information, advice and guidance. Parental involvement in the process is encouraged. Careful consideration is given to key transition points, such as in Years 9, 11 and 13, so that students make the correct choices that will help them in their future lives. As a result, the proportion of students not involved in further education, employment or training when they leave school is very low.
- The school is increasingly effective in its engagement with parents. The introduction of 'Show my homework', accessible via parents' mobile phones, has helped to keep parents much better informed regarding the work their child is doing at school. The perception of the school in the local community has improved markedly. As a result, projected numbers on roll for the forthcoming Year 7 represent a considerable increase on former years. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View would recommend this school to other parents and a similar proportion feels the school is now led and managed well.
- Highly effective partnerships have been brokered with a number of local schools; for example, all subject leaders have a link to an outstanding subject leader in other schools. This has provided support in developing the curriculum and has helped to raise standards. These links have been particularly productive in providing external verification of the school's information on current achievement. As a result, the school is confident that predictions for the results of forthcoming examinations are accurate.
- The local authority has provided support to the school of increasingly high quality. The local authority has facilitated partnerships with local schools, conducted several reviews and has provided financial assistance and help in dealing with complex personnel issues. Excellent advice and guidance have also been provided by the diocese. Both these channels of support have been immensely beneficial in moving the school forward.
- Safeguarding procedures meet requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have welcomed the lead provided by the headteacher and have developed well since the previous inspection. They have been inspired to take a far more active role in the running of the school and have contributed well to its improvement.
 - Governors are self-critical and have commissioned an audit of their skills. They have appointed new governors to fill any gaps in their areas of expertise. As a result, they have a sound basis on which to challenge the school to improve further.
 - Governors are attached to departments and attend 'breakfast meetings' with subject leaders and senior staff to discuss students' progress. As a result, they are very well informed regarding the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
 - Governors have a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have an in-depth knowledge of the expenditure of additional income, such as the pupil premium. Governors are well aware that the achievement of disadvantaged students is still not as good as it ought to be. They have challenged the school to eradicate all underachievement, for example by insisting that, for next year, all teachers must have targets relating to the achievement of disadvantaged students in their classes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Students are polite and courteous. They mix well in social spaces and require minimal supervision as they move around the school. As a result, the school is a harmonious community and provides a good climate for learning.
- Students spoken to during the inspection said they feel very safe in school. They said that instances of bullying are relatively rare and mostly take the form of name-calling. Nevertheless, students are aware that it is wrong to be hurtful to other people for whatever reason, and they said that staff are quick to sort out difficulties when they occur.
- Students wear their uniform with pride and the vast majority come to school regularly, on time and well equipped for their lessons. Students are very positive about the changes to the school since the previous inspection. For example, they relished being consulted on the refurbishments, such as the new sixth form space and the 'Student Services' area. As a result, they show great respect for their environment and inspectors saw no evidence of graffiti or litter around the buildings during the inspection.
- Racist incidents are extremely rare and dealt with effectively should they occur.
- Attitudes to learning are mixed. When students are fully engaged in the lesson, they demonstrate

concentration and a keenness to learn. However, in a small minority of lessons, when the teaching is less effective, they sometimes start chatting and lose interest in their work.

- Over time, procedures to manage behaviour have been increasingly effective in reducing incidents of poor behaviour. However, a small minority of staff do not always apply the school's systems for managing behaviour consistently well. As a result, some students know that, on occasion, they can get away with misbehaviour with certain teachers.
- Students who spend part of their week at work-related training attend regularly and behave well.
- Exclusions were very high at the time of the previous inspection, particularly for boys and disadvantaged students. The exclusion rate has fallen steeply and is more evenly spread across different groups of students. Nevertheless, it remains slightly higher than average.
- Parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire, Parent View, were practically unanimous in saying their child feels safe in school and that the school makes sure its students are well behaved. Staff who responded to the staff questionnaire concurred with this view.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The school devotes considerable time and effort to ensure that all students feel valued, included and listened to, especially when they encounter difficulties in their lives. As a result, students trust staff to help them with problems they meet, both in school and outside.
- The school's programme for personal, social and health education is comprehensive. Assemblies have been used to raise awareness of issues such as child sexual exploitation or domestic violence. Events have also been arranged at weekends to help parents spot dangers their children may face, such as drug or alcohol abuse.
- The school's website includes an area where students can contact staff, in confidence, if they feel they or others may be at risk. Students spoken to during the inspection had a good grasp of how to keep themselves safe in a wide range of situations, including when using the Internet.
- Staff are trained in procedures to keep students safe. Where referrals to other professionals have been required, staff have acted promptly and effectively.
- School leaders follow all appropriate procedures in recruiting new staff and ensure risk assessments, for example for school trips, are comprehensive and comply with regulations.
- Students' attendance has improved markedly and is now broadly in line with the national average. The school has been particularly effective in reducing the proportion of students who are persistently absent from school. This has dropped from higher than average to below average. This is a direct consequence of the school's improved procedures to engage with parents, some of whom have been hard to reach in the past.

The quality of teaching

is good

- As soon as she was appointed, the headteacher recognised that weaknesses she had identified in teaching would be a major impediment to school improvement. She immediately introduced a wide-ranging programme of staff training which has been highly effective in improving swiftly the overall quality of teaching. As a result, most students now experience teaching of good quality across many subjects.
- Teaching is most effective in English, modern foreign languages, information technology, art and physical education. It is weaker in science, product design and geography.
- Poor teaching in mathematics in the past led to considerable underachievement. The mathematics department has been completely overhauled and teaching is improving rapidly in this subject. As a result, students' achievement in this subject is also improving quickly.
- Most teachers have high expectations of what students can do. Mutual respect and good rapport between students and teachers help to create a positive ethos, and most lessons proceed well with minimal interruption.
- The majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully to suit the abilities of students. As a result, most students, including the most able, make good gains in their learning in a large proportion of their lessons.
- In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not always adapt the work set to suit students' needs. For example, in one lesson observed during the inspection, the work that students were doing was clearly too difficult for some individuals, who then became disengaged and disruptive. As a result, some students made very little progress in this lesson.

- Teachers mark work regularly. Most marking seen during the inspection gave clear indications to students on how to improve their work. However, in several instances, students had ignored the guidance provided by their teachers and had not made the required improvements to their work. This is because not all teachers are sufficiently diligent in checking that students have acted upon their advice.
- Students are familiar with their targets, which are used effectively to encourage students to be aspirational. Progress against these targets is monitored and reviewed frequently.
- Teaching assistants are used well in lessons to provide additional support to students who may find the work difficult. A particularly effective appointment has been made to support students who speak English as an additional language, some of whom have entered this country relatively recently and therefore have a low level of proficiency in English. This teaching assistant has worked very productively with both students and their parents. As a result, these students make good progress and are fully involved in the life of the school.
- Literacy and numeracy are promoted to some extent across the curriculum, but not always effectively. Good examples of support for numeracy were seen in students' exercise books in history and all students in Key Stage 3 have a compulsory reading session once a week in the school library. However, not all teachers apply the school marking policy consistently and during the inspection work that contained repeated errors in spelling and punctuation was seen.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students enter the school with prior attainment that is broadly in line with the national average. Most students now make good progress in most subjects, because teaching and behaviour have improved substantially since the previous inspection.
- In 2014, students who reached the end of Key Stage 4 had made strong progress in English, but their progress in mathematics was below expectations. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was just slightly above the national average.
- Inspectors scrutinised in detail a wide range of information, provided by the school, on students' current attainment and progress, particularly in Year 11. School leaders have made every reasonable attempt to ensure that this information is accurate, for example by gaining external verification of teachers' assessments in all subjects from local outstanding schools. According to this information, the school predicts that results for forthcoming GCSE examinations will be well above average. This represents a substantial improvement on previous years.
- More able students make good progress. This is because teachers now adapt their teaching better to suit the abilities of such students and therefore the work they receive is appropriately challenging.
- The achievement of disadvantaged students is improving, but not at as fast a pace as that of other students in some subjects, such as mathematics. As a result, there are still some gaps in achievement across the school between disadvantaged students and their peers.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students were just under a grade behind other students in the school in both English and mathematics. Disadvantaged students achieved as well as other students nationally in English, but made weaker progress than other students nationally in mathematics. The in-school gap has been halved in English and disadvantaged students are on target to outperform all other students nationally in this subject. This is largely owing to highly effective teaching in English.
- The achievement of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is improving rapidly, but there remains a gap between their achievement and that of other students in the school. This is because this area of the school's work has been poorly led in the past.
- Students who speak English as an additional language make good progress across a range of subjects, because the support they receive is highly effective.
- Students who attend work-related training off site for part of the week are making good progress and are on target to achieve well in both their school-based subjects and vocational pursuits.
- The use of the Year 7 catch-up funding has been effective. Students who entered the school behind their peers in reading and writing skills are catching up quickly.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. No stone has been left unturned in the transformation of this area of the school. As a result, the sixth form is now vibrant, rigorous and aspirational; achievement has

improved exponentially.

- The sixth form is expanding and is likely to more than double in size next year. This is due in no small part to the dynamic impetus provided by the head of the sixth form who has implemented many changes since her appointment at the start of this academic year.
- Students in Year 13 are on target to achieve results in their forthcoming A-level examinations that are a considerable improvement upon previous years and which are likely to be at least in line with, and in some instances above, national averages. Equally, students in Year 12 are set to achieve considerably better results in their AS examinations than those achieved last year.
- Students are well prepared for the demands of their courses in the sixth form and for the next stages in their lives, because they receive high quality advice and guidance before they make their choices. The poor retention that previously plagued the school has been overturned and students now make good progress in the courses they follow.
- Procedures for checking on students' progress are highly effective. Any underachievement is spotted quickly and support provided to set students back on track.
- Attendance has improved considerably since the previous inspection and is now above the national average for sixth forms. Well-resourced study areas enable students to use the time productively when they are not in lessons. In this way, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, which prepares them well for both higher education and employment.
- The curriculum provides a wide variety of academic courses which meet the needs and abilities of students. In addition, an extensive programme of enrichment activities is much appreciated by students. They have the opportunity to do work experience and gain further qualifications.
- Students follow a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education. As a result, they are well prepared to assess risks they may meet in the outside world and behave in such a way that will help them to keep safe.
- Students in the sixth form make a very positive contribution to the rest of the school. They play a strong role in the School Council and some students who have gained a qualification in teaching English as a foreign language use this highly productively in helping students who are at the early stages of learning English. All sixth form students encountered during the inspection were invariably polite, well dressed and behaved in a mature fashion. As a result, they provide good role models for younger students.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving because it has benefitted from the strong programme provided by school leaders to improve the overall quality of teaching. In addition, leadership of the sixth form ensures that teachers are held rigorously to account for achievement in their subject.
- Last year, all students entering the sixth form had already successfully achieved at least a grade C in English at GCSE; therefore there was no requirement to re-sit this examination. Out of the small proportion of students who enter the sixth form without a grade C in mathematics at GCSE, most manage to achieve this qualification when they re-sit the examination.

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	111451
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	456489

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	834
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	125
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Coucill
Headteacher	Mrs C Vile
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2013
Telephone number	0151 355 2373
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