



Christleton High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111421
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278689
Inspection dates 13 February 2006 to 14 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Leszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Village Road
School category	Community		Christleton
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Chester, Cheshire CH3 7AD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01244 335843
Number on roll	1276	Fax number	01244 332173
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Sue Leake
Date of previous inspection	22 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr Tony Lamberton

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 13 February 2006 - 14 February 2006	Inspection number 278689
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Christleton High School is bigger than most secondary schools and is a mixed 11 to 18 comprehensive school situated on a pleasant landscaped campus in the village of Christleton close to Chester. There are 1,276 pupils on roll with 288 students in the sixth form. The school has very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Although the school has pupils from a wide spread of abilities, pupils' overall attainment on entry is high. There are few pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many come from advantaged backgrounds. Parental expectations are high.

The school has specialist status in Mathematics and Computing with Business and Enterprise. It is over-subscribed and enjoys a good reputation in the community and is highly regarded as being academically successful. The culture has been very traditional but is being changed as a broader range of courses are being introduced. The school leadership team has undergone significant changes of personnel in recent years and has identified the need to establish a more forward thinking culture in the school specifically linked to the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. There has been a significant turnover of staff, particularly in the last two years, and recruitment difficulties have been experienced in some areas. The school is a real focus for the local community. Facilities are heavily used after school and at weekends, especially for activities linked to the leisure centre and newly built swimming pool.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve.

Significant improvement is required in relation to ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning meets the learning needs of all pupils. The school believes itself to be effective. Inspectors disagree with this judgement and consider that in the very important aspect of teaching and learning there are some noticeable failings which impact on provision elsewhere so that pupils are not always getting best value.

There is no doubting that the school is successful in terms of raw academic results, reflecting the high quality of the pupil and student intake. In the main these young adults are articulate, with good literacy and numeracy skills. They are well motivated and benefit from the good support provided by aspirational parents. Given these beneficial factors pupils lack the more suitable and challenging opportunities which would enable them to develop more fully as learners. Pupils enjoy school but not always their lessons. Pupils remarked that they enjoyed lessons which challenged their sense of enquiry, allowed them to develop and use a range of skills and empowered them to become critical thinkers. Unfortunately inspectors found this not to be so in too many lessons and boredom in some was also leading to incidents of low level disruptive behaviour. Overall provision in the sixth form is better than the rest of the school.

Management has identified the need to change both culture and practice in the school if it is to move forward. They are well aware of the areas which need to be improved. Visible improvements have been made to the physical fabric of the school and to resource provision, notably in terms of computer hardware and facilities. The curriculum has been broadened to provide greater choice to better meet the needs of all pupils. The many recent staff changes reflect a desire to develop an effective and vibrant teaching team. Unfortunately, progress has been slow in terms of improving the quality of the teaching and has as yet not impacted sufficiently in the classroom to meet the collective vision of the leaders in the school.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school assesses the effectiveness of the sixth form as outstanding; inspectors judge it to be satisfactory. Standards are above average and the majority of students continue to higher education. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. This, combined with the positive attitudes and commitment of the students, leads to satisfactory achievement. The heads of sixth form work together effectively to monitor students' progress and to provide a wide choice of subjects at advanced level, including vocational subjects, which meet the needs and aspirations of the students well. The quality of care and guidance in the sixth form is good. Systems for monitoring students' progress

are effective in ensuring students follow appropriate courses and achieve as they should. Timely and relevant guidance is given both on joining the sixth form and at regular intervals; this prepares students well for the next stage in their education. Although the leadership team is aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision, systems to develop consistent good practice in the sixth form are in the early stages of development and their impact is yet to be seen.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to enable pupils and students to meet their full potential.
- Monitor provision more rigorously and provide more effective support to those areas which have greatest need in order to develop and spread good classroom practice.
- Make better use of assessment information in both planning and in lessons so that all pupils know how to improve and are able to make appropriate progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's own analysis that standards are good but that achievement is only satisfactory. Pupils arrive at the school with standards that are above average. Most pupils make satisfactory progress through Years 7 to 9, maintaining their standards in English and science and improving them in mathematics. Pupils' results are above the national average as they have been for several years.

General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results are also consistently above average. However, the school did not meet its recent targets and the progress pupils actually make in Years 10 and 11 is only satisfactory. Good standards mask the fact that the achievement of a small but significant number of pupils is lower than it should be. A group of disaffected girls did particularly badly and the most able do not always achieve their full potential. Generally, boys do not achieve as well as girls. Some teachers focus too much on examination techniques rather than learning, which frequently results in the less academic pupils losing interest and underachieving. The high expectations of parents combined with the pupils' desire to learn makes a significant contribution to pupils' success.

Results in the sixth form have been consistently above average and students achieve satisfactorily. The 2005 A-level results improved upon those of 2004, with increased numbers entered.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy coming to school and get on well with each other and with the adults who work with them. Attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. There is some variation in lessons that relates mainly to the quality of teaching that pupils receive. Good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are

evident where the teaching really motivates pupils. Pupils' social and moral development is good but there are missed opportunities to develop their spiritual and cultural awareness through the curriculum; these aspects are weak. The school does not meet statutory requirements for collective worship and assemblies only make a very limited contribution to pupils' spiritual development.

There are good opportunities for pupils to make healthy lifestyle choices including active participation in sport. Pupils are encouraged to adopt safe practice in lessons and around the school and they make a positive contribution to the wider school community. For example, they have the opportunity to work alongside youngsters from local primary schools and local adults to develop mathematics skills using the Maths Trail in the school grounds. The school council enables pupils to influence and make decisions about school life. This has helped them to understand their responsibilities as young citizens. Personal development is also well supported by a variety of trips and activities linked to specialist status. Opportunities to develop skills that contribute to pupils' future economic well-being are satisfactory, especially when linked with local businesses. These encourage them to develop their team building and entrepreneurial skills. In lessons, however, they are not given sufficient opportunities to work independently or to use their initiative. This means they are often too reliant on their teachers to provide the answers rather than having their curiosity engaged through further challenging questions.

Students in the sixth form appreciate the good relationships they have with their teachers and the fact they are treated as young adults.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors judge the quality of teaching and learning to be inadequate. The pupils' above-average results emerge from their good literacy skills and their teachers' good subject knowledge. However, achievement has been, and continues to be, less than it should be. This is because too many lessons are inadequate and not enough are good or better.

Planning for lessons does not give enough attention to what is going to be assessed, to using a range of engaging teaching methods, or to the brisk management of time. Consequently, the pace of learning is often too slow, especially given the school's long lessons. In some lessons the narrow range of activities leads to pupils losing interest and misbehaving. Teachers do not give pupils enough chance to think things out for themselves or to work together. There is not enough use of open questions to challenge thinking. In too many lessons there is too much dependence on the teacher and too few opportunities for independent work. There is not enough challenge for the different levels of abilities in a class, whether higher or lower attaining. Plans drawn up to

support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not focus on improving what they need to learn.

Despite the school initiating teaching methods associated with the secondary strategy, there are too many lessons where the learning objectives are not clear, with insufficient whole-class discussion or reflection about what pupils are learning. Some marking is helpful but too much lacks specific recognition of what has been done well or of how to improve. Good assessment procedures closely track the progress of pupils on GCSE courses. Most of these pupils know their GCSE grade targets and how to achieve them. Tracking of academic progress and the pupils' knowledge of how well they are doing is not established lower down the school.

Inspectors saw some good lessons which provide a template for future improvement. During a Year 8 design technology lesson pupils made good progress. The pace was fast. The teacher's probing questions challenged all abilities. Pupils enjoyed the well-structured opportunities to work together in groups. Many stressed to inspectors how much they enjoy lessons when they are busy and working on a range of tasks. More lessons require these qualities.

The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students have more opportunities to work independently and with others but these are not consistent. Teachers use assessment more effectively to support learning and the students are better informed about how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has improved and matches the pupils' interests and aptitudes well. In Years 10 to 11 learners select from a wide range of courses. While most take traditional, academic courses others undertake new applied GCSEs, vocational courses and off site learning. As a result many progress into the sixth form, further education, training or employment. The curriculum provides well for all learners including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) helps pupils acquire a range of skills to support their future employment. Pupils enjoy an assortment of extracurricular activities. There are also learning opportunities during out-of-school hours such as half-term GCSE classes for Year 11 pupils. There is limited flexibility in the current timetable structure. As a result some pupils have the same subject more than once on the same day. Given that lessons are unusually long this can lead to reduced motivation and concentration.

In the sixth form there is a very high rate of recruitment both from within the school and from other schools. There is an extremely high rate of successful course completion that demonstrates the effectiveness and appropriateness of the curriculum. Arrangements for the students to study religious education do not comply fully with legal requirements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

There are good relationships between form tutors and year groups. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are robust and this means that those who are most vulnerable are quickly identified and supported. The school follows required procedures for child protection and health and safety. Pupils' welfare and medical needs are catered for well, as are those of 'Sox' the school's diabetic cat. Pupils say they feel safe and are generally free from all forms of bullying or discrimination. They trust adults and know where to turn for help although a few say that issues are not always dealt with quickly enough and some teachers do not always listen to them.

Parents are generally happy with the school; many are very supportive but a small minority has concerns about behaviour, the inconsistent approach to the setting of homework and the school's communication with them. The school provides good quality information and holds regular discussions with pupils, which enables them to make accurate curriculum and career choices. The monitoring of pupils' progress is satisfactory, although not all pupils know how well they are doing, or what they need to do to improve; this is especially so in the lower school.

In years 7 to 11 the personal, health and social education (PSHE) programme is weak and does not sufficiently underpin pupils' personal development. The afternoon form tutor time is not always used well.

Students in the sixth form benefit from well-structured care, guidance and support, including a relevant PSHE programme that meets their needs and aspirations well. Consequently they are well prepared for their future lives beyond the school. Their academic progress is monitored closely and information gained is used well, to help students understand how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The inspection team agrees with the school's judgement that the leadership and management throughout the school are satisfactory overall. The school has steadily increased test and examination results over the past few years but admits that pupils' achievement is not improving as quickly as it should and that difficulties remain regarding the quality of teaching in some classes and curriculum areas.

The headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school. He has identified the weaknesses in teaching and in aspects of middle management, but has not been rigorous enough in tackling them. Parents and other stakeholders have not been sufficiently involved or consulted in the school's evaluation of its work. The headteacher has worked hard to improve the surroundings and resources of the school and pupils speak highly of these changes. Another focus has been to restructure the staffing of the school to improve the quality of teaching, but these changes have yet to demonstrate their full effect and a core of mundane teaching remains. The school

development plan identifies the most important issues but is not robust enough in ensuring that they are implemented.

Much has improved since the previous inspection, not least the examination results and the acquisition of specialist status. The impact of specialism, however, is limited for the most part to enrichment activities. It has, as yet, had little impact upon the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum because the school's strategies to identify and spread good practice lack focus and rigour. The new management team have not yet had enough impact in ensuring that teaching is good enough. Middle managers in particular do not take enough action to ensure teaching is effective and that new initiatives are in place. However, inspectors are confident that the new managers are now starting to secure the necessary improvement.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors are very supportive of the school and are proud of its many successes. They have supported senior managers as they have worked hard towards improving the school. However, the pace of progress in tackling shortcomings in teaching and achievement has been too slow and this needs to be addressed and challenged with more rigour. The recent strengthening of senior management is beginning to demonstrate the necessary capacity to improve and inspectors judge that leaders have the ability and drive to take the school forward.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for the very valuable contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. When you talked to inspectors we were impressed with your maturity, politeness and your ability to articulate views and opinions. You provided us with a great deal of information about the strengths of the school and also the areas about which you had real concerns.

You will no doubt have heard that as a result of our visit we have decided that your school needs to improve. We agree that your school has much to be proud of but in some important areas there are weaknesses which we believe need to be sorted out if your stay in the school is to be even more enjoyable and rewarding.

The governors, teachers and especially your parents are very proud of your very good exam successes. The school prepares and supports you very well to enable you to pass your exams and pursue further studies. Your parents are very keen for you to succeed and because they care they often challenge you about your homework and pester you to complete your coursework on time.

You enjoy some lessons, particularly those which are challenging, allow you to develop and use a range of skills and to work collaboratively. However, you drew our attention to some lessons which were uninteresting and failed to capture your imagination. We have drawn these concerns to the attention of the teachers and over the coming months they will be working hard to bring about improvements which will make many more lessons more interesting and enjoyable. For your part you must ensure that you support your teachers by not disrupting some lessons through shouting out and being inattentive.

We will remember the school as a warm, caring and safe place. We were made very welcome by everyone even though 'Sox' the cat preferred to doze near your main entrance, surveying all that passed and deigning to acknowledge our presence with one eye open and a swish of his tail.

We have asked the school to improve the quality of your lessons as quickly as possible. You and your teachers will need to work together to ensure this happens.