



# Knutsford High School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 111427  
**LEA** Cheshire  
**Inspection number** 278691  
**Inspection dates** 18 January 2006 to 19 January 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr Adrian Gray HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Bexton Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Knutsford
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18		Cheshire WA16 0EA
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01565 633294
<b>Number on roll</b>	1574	<b>Fax number</b>	01565 633796
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr John Beaumont
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 November 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr K Hollins

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 18	<b>Inspection dates</b> 18 January 2006 - 19 January 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 278691
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Knutsford High School is a large 11-19 mixed comprehensive serving the town of Knutsford in Cheshire. It operates on two sites close to the town centre, with the smaller of the sites being used only for Years 7 and 8. The school serves an area which is relatively advantaged and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national figure. There is a well established tradition of the majority of pupils continuing their studies into the school's sixth form, which is much larger than average. The school also has a unit for 48 pupils with moderate learning difficulties which serves a wider area of Cheshire.

Although its intake is broadly above average, the school is affected by the presence of selective education within a neighbouring authority and the availability of private education.

The school attained specialist status for humanities in 2004, with English as the designated lead subject.

Although its intake is broadly above average, the school is affected by the presence of selective education within a neighbouring authority and the availability of private education. Its pupil population has tended to consist of a larger than average proportion of moderately able pupils but fewer than expected of high ability.

The school attained specialist status for humanities in 2004, with English as the designated lead subject.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school's view of its overall effectiveness is that it is good. In the view of inspectors it is satisfactory overall with some good and distinctive features. Learners enter the school with standards above average and standards are good overall, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4, where they have followed a rising trend. However, although the pupils who completed their GCSEs in 2005 made good progress, the progress made by pupils in Year 9 as measured in their national test performance, was less than it should have been in mathematics and science. There has been a pattern of underachievement in mathematics in Key Stage 3 for the last three years.

Learners' personal development and well-being is good overall. The school is a calm and friendly community, with a mature and studious atmosphere in the upper school in particular. The attendance of the learners is good, they make appropriate contributions to the community and the older pupils have a well-developed understanding of skills necessary for their future economic well-being. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall; although teaching is often good in Key Stage 4, too much teaching of the younger classes is only broadly satisfactory or occasionally weaker. Assessment practices are too varied, as a result of which learners do not always have a precise understanding of the extent of their progress or how to improve; however, the school is taking action to address this aspect. The curriculum is good overall, with a range of different options being offered to pupils at age 14 which are distinctive and innovative, although the impact of recent changes in the lower school is unproven at present. The care, guidance and support of learners is good overall.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. There have been some interesting and imaginative recent developments in areas such as the curriculum and the leadership structure, and school leaders have succeeded in raising standards at GCSE over the last few years. However, they have not acted quickly enough to identify and redress insufficient progress in the younger year groups. Because of this, value for money is satisfactory. Most parents are strongly supportive of the school.

Recent changes in the school's leadership structure have enhanced its capacity to achieve future improvement by improving links between strategic and operational management. It has responded appropriately to issues raised at the last inspection although more could be done to ensure the consistent development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

## Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

The school considers the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form to be good. Inspectors, whilst recognising that there are many strengths, judge the sixth form to be satisfactory overall. The majority of students enter the sixth form having attained GCSE scores that are above average and make satisfactory progress at advanced level. The school also accepts some students into the sixth form to take a reduced number of academic courses. Standards in the sixth form have remained steady over the last

few years. They were generally above average three years ago but national standards have improved and the school's sixth form now has standards in line with those found nationally.

The school offers a good range of subjects at advanced level and has procedures in place to expand the curriculum in line with student demand. There is recognition of the limited provision regarding vocational courses within the school but these are readily available through neighbouring colleges.

Students receive very good and comprehensive advice prior to selecting their courses and benefit from outstanding care, support and guidance systems during their time in the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory and often good; very good relationships exist between students and teachers. Students themselves are very positive in their appreciation of the support they receive from their teachers. Students and parents are kept well informed of any concerns that teachers may have and students also benefit from having their achievements recognised.

Students are set challenging targets based on prior attainment and receive regular assessments indicating progress towards those targets. The school recognises that the use of data to reflect upon past performance to identify strengths and weaknesses is an area for future development.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

In order to improve further, the school should:

- improve pupils' progress in mathematics and science in Key Stage 3
- continue to develop systems for tracking, evaluating and informing the progress of pupils throughout their time at the school
- improve the efficiency of systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, so that strengths and weaknesses can be used in planning improvement.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' standards on entry to the school are generally above average. Standards attained in national tests taken at age 14 were above average, despite a sharp fall in English. Because of fluctuations in the performance of individual subjects, standards have remained stationary over the last four years at a time when national standards have been improving. Pupils' progress between the ages of 11 and 14 was below expectations in 2005, following a decline from previous years when there had been good progress in English in particular. Average progress in English fell sharply in 2005. Pupils' progress in mathematics has been significantly weak for the last three years but progress was also too low in science in 2004 and 2005. Of the pupils who arrived at the school with Level 5 or higher in science, one in four did not succeed in attaining a higher level by the end of Year 9. Progress was weakest among less able boys, pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils with statements of special educational need. Pupils from the unit for those with moderate learning difficulties make sound progress.

Standards in GCSE and equivalent examinations at age 16 have been consistently good. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more higher grade passes has been significantly above the national average for the last five years. Standards measured using the capped points score are also above average. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more pass grades overall has improved significantly over the last two years and is also good. In 2005, standards were lowest in mathematics and business studies but high in English and a number of the optional subjects.

The 2005 GCSE results show that progress between the ages of 11 and 16 was generally good. Progress between 14 and 16 in the core subjects was strongest in English and weakest in mathematics. The progress made by girls was a strength, but that made by lower ability boys was less than other groups of pupils. National test and examination data show that pupils make better progress between the ages of 14 and 16 than they do between 11 and 14; this was also found to be the case in inspectors' observations of lessons.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The school judges this to be good and inspectors agree. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour around the school and in lessons are generally good. Despite this, the number of permanent exclusions has been high because the school has made regular use of exclusion as a mechanism for maintaining standards. However, there have been no permanent exclusions this year. Attendance is well above national average, which is a reflection of the pupils' enjoyment of school. An effective school council seeks the views of pupils and contributes to developments in the school. Pupils are keen to take an active role in the recently introduced student Parliament. Pupils respond well to the schools' efforts to encourage them to adopt healthy lifestyles and safe practices. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, Year 7 pupils are producing a time capsule to illustrate world cultures. The school enjoys good links with the local community. A learning and employment project is supporting under qualified young people. Pupils are well prepared for future employment. Year 7 and 8 pupils, for example, have formulated a personal career plan and in Year 10, the young enterprise scheme is helping pupils develop skills needed in the workplace.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. However, there are inconsistencies across the three key stages. Whilst teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are consistently good, in the sixth form and Years 7 to 9 they are satisfactory. Examples of outstanding teaching were seen in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. A small proportion of teaching is inadequate, mostly in Years 7 to 9. When teaching

is outstanding, the teacher has an excellent knowledge of the subject, can anticipate some of the difficulties pupils might have, welcomes questions, maintains a vigorous pace and so fully engages pupils. In many lessons relationships are excellent, pupils concentrate well and give of their best. A number of lively question and answer sessions were seen in which pupils were effectively challenged and made to think deeply. Behaviour and attitudes are usually very good. Whilst in the best lessons the challenge of the work is closely matched to pupils' prior attainment, in the less effective ones too little attention is given to the data available in planning the work, with the result that the challenge provided is inappropriate, being either too easy or not recognising when pupils have special needs. The school has recently introduced a new system of reporting and assessing progress which has helped in raising pupils' and parents' awareness of progress on a regular basis. However, it remains the case that the quality of marking is inconsistent. At best, it provides high quality detailed guidance, as is seen in some GCSE work in English and religious studies. However, many opportunities are missed for giving pupils the information to guide their own learning and for teaching basic skills, particularly in literacy in Years 7 to 9.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school judges the curriculum to be outstanding. Whilst acknowledging strengths in the curriculum, the inspectors judge it to be good. It is innovative with a wide range of subjects. Statutory requirements are met. However, the full impact of new initiatives has yet to be seen; these include the Year 7 Integrated Tasks programme, seen by the school as a strength and the Year 9 International School. The delivery of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is not as good as at Key Stage 4. The teaching of numeracy and literacy across the curriculum is inconsistent. Courses have been introduced to suit students of differing abilities, including the Talk Now programme in Year 9 and the opportunity to study Chinese. In addition to the more traditional subjects, a range of vocational courses is offered. The options system in Year 10 offers a wealth of choice and learning opportunities to develop essential life skills, making good strategic use of the large size of the school to enhance choice for pupils. Specialist college status has enabled alternative courses in history and science to run alongside others. The media centre provides opportunities for distance learning. Links with the community have been strengthened through the specialist status. A wide range of extra curricular activities is offered to enhance students' learning, well-being and enjoyment. These are well supported.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The school considers this to be outstanding but the inspection team judge care, guidance and support to be good overall. The newly appointed heads of student services give unstintingly of their time in caring for pupils. Pupils appreciate this and the support they get from all adults in the school. In addition, younger pupils also feel

very well supported by sixth form students who act as their mentors. The guidance pupils receive at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 when making option choices is good. Pupils are given targets but they are not always well-informed about their progress and how to improve; the sixth form offers a good model for this. Child protection arrangements are soundly established and understood by staff. The schools' health and safety and risk assessment systems are fully in place and monitored. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties are well supported and are fully integrated into the life of the school. The school works well with parents who are regularly consulted and the school makes efforts to seek their views and involve them in school life.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The school's leadership has developed a vision based on improvement, achievement and innovation. This is widely supported by staff and governors, although the commitment to innovation is the area that is most clearly distinctive. It is most evident in the curriculum and in the new structure for the school's senior leadership. The leadership are strongly committed to the success of the school and to the service it can provide for their community. They have maintained a commitment to being an inclusive community school, for example in choosing a specialism which would be accessible for all types of learners. They have engaged well with other agencies and parents in seeking improvement.

The school has well-established procedures for reviews of major areas of the curriculum and for ensuring that curriculum leaders are held to account for examination results, which are analysed down to pupils level at GCSE and A level and to group level in Key Stage 3. The impact of these strategies is less than it might be because routines for quality assurance are not so well embedded. Systems of target-setting are clearly established, but the school has lacked an effective approach for tracking and analysing pupils' progress until recently. As a result, there is too much variation in key aspects such as marking and planning for the needs of all learners, resulting in the different rates of progress made in the key stages. There has been persistent underachievement in mathematics in Key Stage 3. The school does not maintain a clear analysis of the quality of teaching, based on evidenced judgements. This has, in turn, restricted the effectiveness of the governors who are, of necessity, reliant on the quality of information they receive from the school in making their own evaluations. The governors are an able and committed body who are conscientious in serving the school.



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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
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	2	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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	insufficient evidence

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
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**

The inspection team and myself would like to thank you for the help you gave us in inspecting your school recently. Many of you spoke to us, both in the lunchtime meetings and in the various lessons that we visited. We received a clear message from you that many of you are very happy with your school and are keen to do well. The purpose of this letter is to tell you about our main findings - what we saw as the strengths of the school, and also some suggestions about what could help to make it an even better place in which to learn.

The best features of the school included:

- the good progress that pupils make in Years 10 and 11: many of you said that you enjoyed the extra challenge at this level and we felt that the school works hard to give you an interesting range of courses to choose from
- the care, guidance and support given to the sixth formers in their studies is outstanding
- the attendance, behaviour and personal development of you - the students - is good
- the school's leadership are committed to making the school a place where everyone is welcome and they believe in doing their best for the community of Knutsford.

Our report includes a few suggestions for what the school could do to improve further. We know that the school's leaders are already thinking about some of these. They include:

- improving the progress made in the first two years of the school
- continuing to develop systems for keeping you informed about the progress you are making, so that you know how to improve
- improving the ways in which the school's leaders make sure that there is the same consistent high quality of work right the way across the school.