



Brine Leas High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111439
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278696
Inspection dates 15 March 2006 to 15 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs Jane Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Audlem Road
School category	Community		Nantwich
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Cheshire CW5 7DY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01270 625663
Number on roll	1054	Fax number	01270 610373
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Janet Furber
Date of previous inspection	4 April 2000	Headteacher	Mr M Butler

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	15 March 2006 - 15 March 2006	278696

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in one day. She observed the school at work, met with various staff and students, and considered a range of evidence presented by the school in support of its self-evaluation and following on from points raised in discussions. Parents' views were captured through the 301 completed questionnaires. An inspection of the playgroup was carried out at the same time by a childcare inspector.

Description of the school

Brine Leas High School is a popular comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 16 years. The school is over-subscribed. The number of students has steadily increased over the last few years; there are 1,054 on roll with more boys than girls in Years 9 to 11. About one third live outside the immediate vicinity of the school. The urban and rural wards in which the students reside are relatively advantaged socially and economically; about 5% of the students are eligible for free school meals, which is less than half the national average. Few students are of minority ethnic heritage or have home languages other than English. Six per cent of the students, about half the national average, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Seventeen students have statements of special educational need. Students' attainment on entry to the school is above average, although it is slightly stronger in the older year groups. Most students stay at the school for the full five years, and the majority progress into further education.

The school gained specialist technology status in 1998 and has recently been designated a second specialism, languages. The school holds a number of awards including Arts Mark Gold and Sports Mark Gold. It holds Investors in People status and the Inclusion Charter Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Brine Leas is a good school: it proudly lives up to its aim to provide a successful education for its students, and strives for continuous improvement. Students achieve well, and develop into well-rounded and caring individuals. The distinctive and long-established house system plays a key role in the life of the school and students' contribution to it. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students willingly take responsibility, including organising events, helping younger students, and representing others in their form, house or school. They are confident that their views count.

Students enjoy coming to Brine Leas. The behaviour of the vast majority is excellent; they meet the school's high expectations. Students receive good care, guidance and support. Most parents are very positive about the school's work and happy with their child's education. The school has refined its well-established systems for academic guidance.

Standards in national tests and examinations have been consistently above average for many years, although the school did not meet all its challenging targets in 2005. Students make good progress from their starting points, although lower-ability students and those with learning difficulties achieve slightly less well overall than their peers.

Teaching is good and there is some outstanding practice. Good subject knowledge, effective questioning and suitably challenging tasks were often evident, but there is scope to tailor activities to meet students' individual needs and abilities more closely and to improve marking. Students particularly enjoy creative and problem-solving activities. Recent initiatives have enriched professional dialogue between staff who support each other well and are keen to develop further. The school is strongly placed to make teaching and learning even better.

The curriculum is good. Some exciting developments at Key Stage 4 have broadened the range of courses offered with more in the pipeline. Students enjoy the numerous extra-curricular sports, activities and clubs, in addition to trips and visits that enrich the curriculum and broaden their experiences.

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. Strategic leadership is very good. There is a strong and shared commitment to high standards. The school's self-evaluation is reflective and self-critical; it accurately assesses the good quality of education provided. Appropriate priorities for improvement are identified. Senior leaders are effective; middle managers are developing strongly. Comprehensive management systems provide a robust framework for monitoring and evaluation. Resources are deployed to very good effect. The school capitalises most effectively on its partnerships with others. The capacity for further improvement is good: the school has its sights set on becoming outstanding in all that it does.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in national tests and examinations have been consistently above average for many years. The school did not meet all its challenging targets in 2005, although it exceeded the ones relating to its specialist technology college status. At Key Stage 3, about 85% of the students reached the standard expected of 14-year-olds, Level 5, and many students achieved the higher levels. The slight downward trend is broadly commensurate with the students' pattern of attainment on entry to the school.

There is an improving trend at GCSE in the proportion of students attaining at least five A*- C grades. In 2005, it was 74% and, impressively, 72% included English and mathematics. Almost all students, 95%, were awarded five or more A*- G grades, slightly fewer than in 2004. Students achieve well. Taking their performance at primary school as the starting point, they make good progress, although lower-ability students and those with learning difficulties achieve slightly less well overall than their peers. In some subjects, fewer students than might be expected hit the top grades or levels.

The school makes good use of analyses of examination results, in addition to other information such as that gleaned through the pastoral system, to determine where it should focus its attention. For example, having identified issues about the achievement of a few girls, it introduced a new course in health and social care. A very recent set of results show this is proving a successful strategy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding and underpin their good academic progress. Students develop into well-rounded and caring individuals. In discussions with HMI, they were very clear that the distinctive and long-established house system plays a key role in the life of the school and their contribution to it. They spoke eagerly of the wide range of inter-house competitions, including sports, dance, music and language, and end-of-term events such as plays. Students said it was good to get to know students from other year groups. Merits earned in lessons contribute to the house cup as well as earning rewards for individuals. Students were clear about the system of sanctions should they misbehave. The behaviour of the vast majority is excellent. Staff apply the 'positive behaviour' policy consistently but this does lead to a high, albeit it reducing, level of short fixed-term exclusions. Sensibly, the school intends to review strategies for managing the behaviour of repeat offenders. Permanent exclusion is rare. Instances of smoking are dealt with firmly. While most parents agree that behaviour is good, the questionnaires of a significant minority reflected some concerns.

Students enjoy coming to Brine Leas and attend regularly. When asked to identify what is best about the school, one student said 'Everything really. People should just come and look.' Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students show a strong sense of responsibility towards others within the school and the wider community, local and international. The Year 11 student council

leads students' involvement with charities including the Horn of Africa Learning Trust. Students willingly take responsibility; for example, organising inter-house competitions and events. Many older students offer younger ones support and advice as 'FAITH' volunteers or act as buddies for reading and mathematics. Some students are form representatives or members of house councils; these feed into the school council which has representation on the governing body. This hierarchical structure gives all students the opportunity to voice their views; those interviewed by HMI cited examples of how they made a difference to the school's work. Not all parents agree, however, that the school takes account of parents' and students' views.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and there is some outstanding practice, although the overall profile is not quite as strong as the picture painted by the school. Relationships are good and behaviour is managed unobtrusively. Good subject knowledge, effective questioning and suitably challenging tasks are often evident, but there is scope to improve the choice of activities to meet more precisely the range of needs and abilities in each class, and to increase students' involvement and contribution to lessons. While there were examples of helpful comments on how students could improve their work, marking remains an area of inconsistency of which the school is aware.

Students appreciate the approachability of staff and the care that they show them. They link their enjoyment in learning with the level of success that they experience, but define success more broadly than examination performance; for example, they enjoy opportunities to be creative and solve problems. A parent, delighted with the school, attributed their son's interest in and enthusiasm about a range of subjects to the excellent teaching he receives.

Recent initiatives to improve the quality of teaching have enriched the level of professional dialogue between staff. Teachers support each other well and are keen to develop further. Less experienced staff emphasised how much they are encouraged and helped by their colleagues, but also that adopting new ideas was not just the preserve of the young! This positive approach places the school in a strong position to make teaching and learning even better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced at Key Stage 3 although the school is wrestling with ways to improve arrangements for information and communication technology (ICT). More able students study two modern foreign languages in Key Stage 3 while, at Key Stage 4, they take some GCSEs early such as mathematics. A number of support and intervention programmes help students who have learning difficulties. Some exciting developments at Key Stage 4 have resulted in a broader

range of accredited courses.. All students study a design and technology specialism and ICT. Plans to extend choice further next year include a national vocational qualification (NVQ) in business language.

Students enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs, many of which take place during the long lunch break, in addition to inter-house events. They are enthusiastic about sports, entering many competitions. All Year 9 students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. Various trips and visits enrich the curriculum and broaden students' experiences. With the 2008 Olympics in mind, an email partnership has been established with a school in Beijing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Most parents are very positive about the school's work and happy with their child's education. A few parents were concerned about bullying but students said that it was infrequent and was dealt with effectively. One student commented 'it's simply not tolerated'. Students were pleased with the guidance and support they received on transferring from primary school. One parent wrote 'Our child has settled well into Year 7, feeling happy and confident'. Year 11 students were clear about post-16 choices. The school has refined its well-established systems for academic guidance. Data is collected regularly to help track students' progress. Many students are aware of their targets and current levels of performance; a language of standards is developing. 'Homework-on-line' has proved popular with parents and students. Students are not consistently good, though, at recording homework and some do not submit it on time.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, supported by the governing body, provides very good strategic leadership. Partnerships with others are effective and key to the headteacher's vision for the school's future development. His clear direction, eloquently articulated, is focused strongly on high standards and the education of the whole child. Staff share his commitment; morale is positive. While leadership is confident, based on a history of providing a good quality of education, there is no sense of complacency. The school's self-evaluation is reflective and self-critical, and accurately assesses the good quality of education provided. It forms the basis for school improvement planning where appropriate priorities have been identified. This is a school that knows where it is heading including its wider role in the local community. The capacity for improvement is good: the school has its sights set on becoming outstanding in all that it does.

Senior leaders are effective within their areas of responsibility and corporately. Middle managers are developing strongly; they use suitable methods to check the quality of their teams' work. Subject development plans follow a format common with whole-school planning, but it is not always clear how impact of actions is to be gauged.

Management systems are comprehensive and provide a robust structure to the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. Information thus gathered could sometimes be probed more forensically to identify potential issues at an early stage. Well-established systems to set individual targets for students' performance and track their progress have been refined recently although, as the school is aware, further work is needed to ensure that the targets reflect appropriate levels of challenge for each student, especially where they have made good progress in Key Stage 3. Some Year 11 students expressed strong opinions about target minimum grades that were pitched too low.

Governance is good: it is well informed and effective, including in financial management. Resources are deployed to good effect, despite the challenges presented by old buildings and shortage of space. The school provides very good value for money.

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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

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

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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

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

I am writing to tell you about the findings of my inspection but, first of all, I would like to thank you for the friendly welcome you gave me. I enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to you about your experiences and views of school life.

I think that yours is a good school and heading to even better things. You are right to be proud of it! I think these are some of the best features of your school.

- You achieve high standards in tests and examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- You really like the house system and the fun you have with all the inter-house competitions and events. You also enjoy lunchtime and after-school activities such as sports, dance, drama, and music.
- Almost all of you behave excellently. You are polite and caring about others. You are willing to take responsibilities, like being a form representative or organising house events. You raise money for charities such as HALT and take part in events in the local community.
- Teachers are good at helping you understand your subjects and learn new facts and skills quickly. Some lessons are very exciting.
- The headteacher, helped by the staff and governors, leads the school very well. He has clear ideas about how it can develop into an outstanding school.

Here are a couple of things that the school could improve.

- To make sure that lessons stretch you just the right amount, for example, by setting you special challenging or simpler tasks depending on whether you find a subject easy or difficult.
- When marking your work, to give you good guidance on how to improve.

It was very clear to me that there are many things about your school that you enjoy. I hope you continue to do so, and wish you all the best for the future.