



Ellesmere Port Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111451
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278703
Inspection dates 14 November 2005 to 15 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Mike McLachlan CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Capenhurst Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Ellesmere Port
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Merseyside CH65 7AQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 355 2373
Number on roll	1105	Fax number	0151 356 9154
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr George Bishop
Date of previous inspection	11 December 2000	Headteacher	Mr P Lee

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Ellesmere Port Catholic High School is a slightly larger than average voluntary- aided school that draws students from the full social and academic range. The school has a popular sixth form and almost all students who leave school continue into employment, further education or training. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is below average and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below the national average. Very small numbers of students are of minority ethnic heritage and almost all students' first language is English. The school is very popular and oversubscribed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features particularly in the way in which it cares for and guides its students and strives to include all whatever their ability or disability. The school gives good value for money. While standards reached are average, given students' starting points, progress is good, although greater progress is made during Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7-9. The school's provision for students' personal development and well-being is good. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good although the quality across and within subjects is uneven ranging from satisfactory to outstanding. The curriculum is good and an excellent range of extra-curricula opportunities are on offer. However, further vocational opportunities are required to better meet the needs of students of all abilities aged 14-19. The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support, very strong child protection procedures and careers advice and guidance. Leadership is good overall. The strong leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by his senior and middle managers, is a key strength. School self-review is satisfactory. New systems are in place to monitor effectiveness but are yet to impact fully on bringing about the next step change in improvement identified by the ambitious targets the school has set for itself. The main recommendations from the last inspection have been addressed but the school needs to make better use of the more detailed data now available on students' standards and progress to measure its performance. The school clearly has the capacity to bring about these improvements.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Overall, provision in the sixth form is effective and efficient. Standards reached are average and most students make good progress in relation to their starting points. The personal development of students is good. They participate fully in sixth form life and support younger students very well. Teaching and learning meet the needs of students effectively, but there needs to be a sharper focus on the students' learning experiences and the promotion of independent research. The curriculum offers a broad range of advanced level courses, but vocational opportunities are limited. The quality of the care, guidance and support offered to students is outstanding. The leadership and management are becoming more effective in raising achievement and there is a clear capacity and direction for further development from committed and caring senior staff.

What the school should do to improve further

Focus on:

- achieving greater consistency in the quality of students' learning and the range and quality of teaching through rigorous implementation of the plans for monitoring by senior and middle managers

- providing greater opportunities for all students aged 14 to 19 to be involved in vocational activities or courses.
- Developing further the use of information and data about students' standards to:
- accurately track students' progress individually throughout their time at school and particularly those in Years 7-9; and
- provide managers with information that they can use to better measure the overall performance of the school and the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards achieved by the end of Year 11 are broadly average. The number of students achieving the higher grades in English and mathematics are broadly average. However, virtually all students are entered for and achieve a pass grade in these two subjects, which is a much higher proportion than is seen nationally. Fewer than average students achieve the lowest grades in GCSE. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average but there is the full range of academic ability and a significant proportion of students with below average attainment. Given this profile and the good results achieved across a range of subjects, students make good progress overall by the time they reach the end of Year 11. However, progress is uneven, being good and sometimes better in Years 10 and 11 but mainly satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. The school has identified this as one of the key issues in its development plan and has a range of strategies to redress this imbalance. The school sets itself very challenging targets, which it has not always been able to reach because the recently introduced systems for tracking progress are not yet being used to identify underperformance early enough. Standards in the sixth form are broadly average and, given the open entry policy, overall most students make good progress. Students have a good understanding of basic skills and those needed to help them in future training and employment. Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities make good and sometimes better progress because of the outstanding support and care they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school considers that students' standards of personal development and well-being are outstanding. However, because there are still areas that need further development, inspectors judge standards to be good. Students know the difference between right and wrong. Their outstanding spiritual and moral development and their good social development are enhanced by the very strong ethos, which pervades all aspects of the school's work. Students work well together and within the community. They respect each other's views. They develop satisfactory understanding of multi-cultural issues but currently there is no structured programme to develop this area. Students are confident in their relationships with teachers. Most students like school and have good attitudes. One commented that "it is a pleasure to come to school". Behaviour is good. This is due to the school's high expectations and good monitoring of student attitudes. The number of exclusions is high, but the school uses this process appropriately to

ensure that good behaviour is maintained. Most students attend regularly. Students develop skills that are relevant to the world of work. They move around the school in a sensible and safe manner in spite of the restricted space in some of the corridors. Most students are developing healthy approaches to life. Although students' views are listened to there is no formal, whole school process for taking into account their thoughts on the work they do in the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching is good and ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. Sixth form students are both challenged and supported by the teaching, although there is insufficient focus on independent learning. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of good teaching and support. Teachers have good subject knowledge, manage behaviour well, explain tasks very clearly and time them well to hold students' concentration. Relationships are very good and most students are interested in the work, keen to please, and confident to ask for help. Teachers supportively test for understanding. Occasionally, learning is outstanding when students are constantly challenged to extend their knowledge and skills and given excellent opportunities to assess their own and their peers' work to improve understanding. Two good examples were seen in mathematics and drama where these approaches ensured significant progress and high enjoyment. Weaker aspects of overall satisfactory teaching are characterised by activities that do not always encourage independent learning, questioning that does not always stretch the more able or involve quieter students, and sometimes insufficient time devoted at the end of lessons for students to summarise their learning. Some homework in the main school is unchallenging. Most marking for all students is good, regular and provides targets for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school evaluates the curriculum as outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. Inspectors agree that it has many strengths but judge that it is good overall. The curriculum meets all statutory requirements, but the range of vocational courses offered for older students is insufficient to ensure that the needs of students of all abilities are fully met. Curriculum development through government initiatives has been implemented well and is beginning to have an impact on teaching and learning. There is good provision for the development of literacy and numeracy and recent investment in information and communication technology (ICT) is beginning to extend opportunities. Students are clear about progression routes. The options system offers a broad range of GCSE and advanced level courses. Few vocational courses are offered and low take up has resulted in them not running this year. The school has yet to convince parents and students of the benefits these courses may

offer for students of all abilities. Work-related learning and enterprise are effective but need to be further developed so that all subjects make effective contribution to these areas. There is an excellent range of extra clubs and activities and good study support. Students are encouraged to develop healthy and safe lifestyles and the programmes for citizenship and personal, social and health education are effective.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding guidance, advice and support for its students. This stems from the very high level of commitment of the school staff and their systems for monitoring and supporting students. This monitoring is especially strong in Years 10 to 13. A similar process is being developed in Years 7 to 9. As a result students are pushed to improve; as one sixth form student put it "teachers want you to excel". Regular reporting to parents is also a strength. Students are very pleased with the school's induction arrangements and careers advice. There are very good and rigorous procedures for ensuring the health and safety of students and for child protection. The procedures for logging the extremely infrequent racial incidents are very good. The school is actively renewing its racial awareness policy to provide a clearer framework for all staff. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive outstanding support. In line with its strong inclusive ethos, the school has invested heavily in adapting its buildings to cater for the needs of students with mobility difficulties. Indeed many parents and students choose this school because of its excellent and well-deserved reputation in this area.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that leadership and management are good. Under the able leadership of the headteacher academic standards have been maintained despite a significant turnover of key staff. Other managers share the headteacher's vision and the new senior leadership team is working effectively with the middle managers to foster the Christian ethos and achieve the well-judged aims of this very inclusive school. Managers at all levels have a clear understanding of the main strengths and weaknesses and priorities of the school. They are now putting in place more rigorous systems to track students' progress and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in pursuit of ambitious GCSE targets. Use of data at a whole school level is not fully developed. This prevents managers from acquiring a coherent overview of the students' progress throughout their school and sixth form career and measuring how well the school does compared to similar institutions. Parents and students are supportive of school leadership but would, rightly, welcome a greater input into how the school is run. The school is well staffed and avenues to support professional development are strong. Governors are supportive. They have a good appreciation of the strengths of the school but are less aware of areas for improvement and consequently provide stronger support than challenge. There have been recent major improvements to accommodation and ICT resources, which have not yet had

time to impact on standards. Financial management is good and best value principles are followed effectively.

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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?	2	2
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

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
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?	1	1

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	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

On behalf of the inspection team can I thank you for the way in which you greeted and looked after us during our inspection of your school. We would like to give particular thanks to the students we interviewed and those of you we saw in lessons. We clearly felt you represented your school very well indeed.

We think that your school is a good school with some outstanding features particularly in the way in which it cares for you and guides you.

We were impressed by the way the school provides for you whatever your range of skills and abilities and particularly for those of you who find learning difficult or have physical or other disabilities.

We thought your personal development and your attendance and behaviour are good and the headteacher's and teachers' very clear expectations of this help all of you to get the best out of your school.

We thought the standards you reach in examinations are broadly average and this shows you make good progress when compared with what you knew when you started at school.

We thought the teaching you receive and the way you approach your learning is good and some we saw was outstanding. We thought this could be improved if you and your teachers worked harder at helping you become more independent as learners.

We thought the range of subjects and courses you take is good and the extra curriculum and study support on offer is excellent.

We did think this could be improved, however, if there were more vocational courses and activities available and if you and your parents understood more clearly the benefits these courses may offer you.

It was clear to us that the school gives you outstanding care support and guidance within school and also to prepare you for future study or employment.

We could see that the school does try and seek your views but we thought that there should be more planned opportunities for you and your parents to be involved in the work of the school.

We think the school is well led by the headteacher, senior staff, subject and pastoral leaders. They know what is needed to make your school better. We thought they needed to monitor your standards, learning and the teaching you receive more closely to help you improve the progress that you make.

It was clear that the comment we had from one of you that "it is a pleasure to come to school" was shared by many of you. Thank you again for the way in which you represented your school and yourselves so well during our time with you.