

Upton-by-Chester High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111422
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	288957
Inspection date	13 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1383
6th form	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Delores Whitton
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Holland
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003
School address	St James Avenue Upton-by-Chester Chester Cheshire CH2 1NN
Telephone number	01244 313061
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Upton-by-Chester High is a much larger than average co-educational community comprehensive school. A third of its students come from outside the local area. Over four fifths of students are White British and though a few have English as foreign language all are able to study effectively in English. The area served by the school has slightly above average social and economic conditions, though there are pockets of high deprivation. Students' prior attainment at the end of primary education is above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is half the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This school provides a good quality of education overall. Standards are high and students make good progress. The school has many strengths which have been built up over a number of years. These include the positive attitude to learning of the majority of students, good subject expertise among teachers and their capacity, in the main, to interest pupils across the curriculum, together with well developed procedures to care for, guide and support students. The recently appointed headteacher has brought a new dynamism and a range of modern management procedures. These add considerably to the school's capacity to improve further and to develop more up to date and effective practice, for example, in the assessment of pupils' work in order to enhance their learning.

Given these strengths and its established academic success, it has excellent capacity to become an outstanding school. This will require improvement in a number of areas, which the school is already pursuing energetically. These include: the disturbance to some lessons by a small minority of students, as reported by students and parents; the improvement of teaching in the few instances where it is weak or dull; more consistent marking to enable pupils to understand clearly what they must do to make good progress; broadening the curriculum to meet the needs of those students who find a diet of academic courses too difficult; eradicating inconsistencies in the effectiveness of the teaching of personal, social and health education; and improvements to parts of the building.

Planning to deal with these and other aspects of the school's operations is very good. The current reshaping of the school's senior and middle management structure has been carefully designed to help the school to bring about planned improvements. In all of this the headteacher is supported by an effective and capable governing body and a dedicated and enthusiastic staff, well led by managers at various levels of the school. The vast majority of students respond very positively to the education provided, behaving well and showing considerable enjoyment of school. They develop satisfactorily as individuals in their time at the school and leave well prepared to participate effectively in the next phase of their education or careers. Improvement since the last inspection has been sound and each of the issues identified has been dealt with as effectively as budgets have permitted. Since the arrival of the new headteacher, the speed and scale of improvement have increased considerably, based on a very clear vision of how this school is to develop in the future. Morale among staff is high and this supports well the school's impressive ambitions for improvement and to become a specialist school in the humanities with a global focus.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is a large and successful part of the school. Students attain good standards in external examinations and, given their attainment prior to joining the sixth form, they make good progress. They develop into well rounded individuals and are well prepared for higher education, both academically and in their understanding of what they will need to do to achieve their career aspirations. The high attainment is a result of expert and enthusiastic teaching, strong care, guidance and support procedures and the mature way in which they plan and carry out their studies. A wide range of courses is offered and these are supplemented by good provision of extra-curricular activities. Relationships are good and there is considerable mutual respect between staff and students. Students have access to good library facilities. Social

facilities are adequate in size but spartan in atmosphere. The sixth form is well managed and there are sensible moves to strengthen the management structure, partly to improve the way in which teaching and learning are monitored and developed. Retention rates are very high and the sixth form is a popular destination for a large proportion of students from the 11 to 16 part of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching in those few lessons and courses where it is dull and where examination results are not as good as they should be.
- Ensure that the few pupils who misbehave in lessons are dealt with effectively to promote learning.
- Ensure that all marking is consistently helpful to students' learning.
- Broaden the curriculum to cater for students who find a diet of academic subjects inappropriate.
- Improve accommodation in those areas where it remains poor.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement and standards are good and the school has ambitious plans to improve them further. Examination results at GCSE improved in 2006. They were well above local and national averages and also above the targets set for students. The GCSE results were good across the curriculum, though in a small number of subjects students' performance fell below that which was predicted on the basis of prior attainment. The school's very thorough analysis of these results shows that pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, made good progress from Year 7 to Year 11. Generally, the progress made by boys is better than average. The school is developing effective procedures using performance data to set challenging targets for specific students and has done some very good work recently to target groups of students who would benefit from specific attention. This, and other useful developments currently in train, are sharpening the school's awareness of students' progress, but they are not yet fully embedded in practice across the school. The lessons briefly observed showed students working to very high standards in a range of subjects and years.

Student's achievement in the sixth form continues to be good across a wide range of courses. Examination results have been consistently high, reflecting the good curriculum, effective teaching and the strong motivation of students. Effective assessing of work and tracking of student performance show that students are progressing as planned and meeting their targets. Students develop independent learning skills well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. They enjoy coming to school as seen in their above average attendance. They comment, however, that the quality of teaching in the 11 to 16 part of the school is not always consistently good and that a few lessons do not engage their interest all the time. Students behave well in the main and are respectful to each other and adults. They understand the importance of leading healthy lifestyles.

For example, large numbers take part in the wide range of sporting enrichment activities. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is only satisfactory because the quality of the personal, social and health programme is variable and depends on how committed individual teachers are to teaching it. Students know the importance of personal safety. The girls' are particularly pleased with the self-defence classes they receive in Years 10 and 11. Although the situation is improving, the school misses some opportunities to encourage students to play an active part in their school community. The school council has started to give the students a voice in the school's development but it is too early for its influence to impact fully. The students' high attainment in literacy and numeracy together with their high levels of maturity and self-confidence equip them well for future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are very good in the sixth form. In the 11 to 16 part of the school they are good overall, but this is not entirely consistent as there is a small amount of weak teaching and some which is dull. Some excellent teaching was observed in a range of subjects. This showed very good subject expertise among the staff and a strong capacity to pass on their enthusiasm to students using a wide range of lively teaching methods. Students were seen making very good progress in response to this vibrant provision. The school is determined to bring the rest of the teaching up to this high level and has planned a very good set of initiatives to bring about this improvement. Marking is good in some areas, but in other areas it is less consistent and less helpful to students than it should be. Students throughout the school are, however, well aware of their targets for improvement. This reflects the school's good use of performance data in analysing the progress of students and the success of specific courses.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory in the 11 to 16 part of the school and good in the large sixth form. Until recently it has been based largely on academic National Curriculum and GCSE courses in the main school. Whilst this is entirely appropriate for most students, the school has carried out a thorough revision of its curriculum and is extending its range of subjects and qualifications to offer greater variety. This is intended, rightly, to ensure that the curriculum matches better the needs of all of the learners. However, information and communication technology (ICT) skills are not consistently built into the curriculum to support teaching and learning. A few students said that they very rarely use computers at all in Years 10 and 11. The introduction of an ICT qualification for all students in Key Stage 4 is planned and will help to rectify the situation. Large numbers of students take part in the wide range of activities in sports and the arts at lunchtimes and after school. The students are particularly proud of the school's concert band and the annual productions. These activities enrich significantly the students' educational experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are very good. Procedures for safeguarding children are firmly in place and reviewed regularly. Appropriate checks are made on adults working in the school. Health and safety matters are taken seriously and attention to risk assessments is good. Effective arrangements for the transfer of pupils from primary schools mean they settle in quickly. Similarly, very good advice and support is given to students at the end of Year 11 to assist in their choices for further study or careers. Students are confident in approaching adults with any concerns and believe that effective and swift action will be taken to deal with them. Vulnerable pupils, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are identified early and the school works effectively with a wide range of outside agencies to support them when necessary. Procedures for tracking students' progress are thorough and effective. They allow any underachievement to be quickly identified and tackled effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The recently appointed headteacher is providing the school with outstanding leadership. In a short space of time she has identified accurately the school's strengths and areas in need of further development. She is promoting good teamwork in the pursuit of improvement. Procedures for self-evaluation have been sharpened and now include the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and students. The results of these soundings and the rigorous analysis of data inform the high quality school improvement plan. This gives a clear vision and set of priorities for the future success of the school. The monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and marking is not yet as thorough as it should be and is not fully addressing the inconsistencies in these aspects. The school is planning policies and procedures to make middle managers more pro-active in their monitoring role. On a day to day basis the school is very well managed and encourages the responsible behaviour of the students. Financial planning is rigorous and is increasingly linked to priorities identified in the development plan. For example, finances are being earmarked to refurbish areas of the school which have long been neglected. The school gives good value for money. Governors are becoming increasingly effective in supporting and challenging the school because they are now being encouraged to become much more involved in its development.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
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	2	2
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?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	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?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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

Annex A

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	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

After our visit to inspect your school I would like to tell you of our findings.

- Upton-by-Chester High School gives you a good education.
- You achieve high standards in your lessons and examinations in the vast majority of subjects, though in a few areas standards need to be improved.
- You are well cared for, guided and supported by the staff in your time at school.
- The teaching is generally good and some is excellent. In a few cases, though, it is dull and the few students who misbehave in some lessons are not well controlled.
- You are given a wide range of subjects to study, but a few of you would benefit if you could study more practical subjects.
- Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and this helps you to make good progress in your studies.
- Most of you are satisfied with the school and the sixth form students in particular enjoy their studies very much.
- The school is very well managed and it has excellent plans to become even better than it is now.
- The very large building is well managed and parts have been refurbished recently. Parts are still in a poor state, however.

Although the school is good overall, there are improvements needed. There are five things we have asked the school to tackle:

- improve teaching in those lessons where it is dull and where examination results are not as good as they should be
- improve the behaviour of the few students who misbehave
- ensure that all of the marking helps you to understand what you need to do to improve
- broaden the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 to include more practical courses
- improve the building in those parts which are poor.

I wish you well for your future work and activities at Upton-by-Chester.