



Great Sankey High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111434
Local Authority Warrington
Inspection number 288959
Inspection dates 18–19 October 2006
Reporting inspector Leszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Barrow Hall Lane
School category	Community		Great Sankey, Warrington
Age range of pupils	11–18		Cheshire WA5 3AA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01925 724118
Number on roll (school)	1838	Fax number	01925 727396
Number on roll (6th form)	276		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Cllr P Walker
		Headteacher	Mr Alan Yates
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	18–19 October 2006	288959

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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

Great Sankey High is a large mixed co-educational comprehensive school situated in the new town area of Warrington. It successfully gained accreditation as a Specialist Engineering School in 2003 and has an average sized sixth form. The physical environment for the large number of pupils is cramped.

Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds but predominantly from advantaged homes and have slightly higher than average attainment on entry into the school. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Pupils come predominantly from White British backgrounds. One in ten pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is a centre for the visually impaired and currently, it caters for five differently able learners.

The school has achieved the status of a Training School as well as the ArtsMark Gold, Investors in People, Investors in Careers Awards, and Healthy Schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's own evaluation that Great Sankey is a good and improving school. The attainment of Specialist Engineering status three years ago has proved to be a watershed in its growth and development. The school's very strong links with local and national industry, created through its status as an engineering college, is an outstanding feature of provision. The school has embraced the broader philosophy behind engineering of problem-solving across all curriculum areas and this is beginning to have an impact on standards and achievement, culminating in the best ever exam results at GCSE in 2006. This positive impact is also filtering into the sixth form but is less marked at present. The school is aware of the weaker progress made by some pupils in English and is tackling the issue. In the words of one parent, 'the school creates an environment in which academic achievement is encouraged and rewarded'. Parents are overwhelmingly happy with what the school provides. Some concerns were expressed about the quality and frequency of homework and inspectors agree that this is an issue.

The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and are positive about the changes taking place. The improvements to the curriculum, with the focus on personalised learning, are enabling wider choice and encouraging more pupils to stay on in school after the age of 16. Improvements in classroom practice have also been noted by pupils and by students in the sixth form and reflect the positive changes happening throughout the school. The quality of teaching is good overall, with pupils particularly enjoying practical activities and those occasions when they can work independently. Whilst this happens in many lessons, a few remain too teacher-directed which particularly limits the ability of the more able to shine.

Pupils and students benefit from the wide range of additional cultural, academic and sporting activities on offer after school. They feel safe and secure in a very caring environment where their opinions are valued and acted on. They are sensible, aware of the need to live healthy lives and readily accept responsibility. For example, they have been instrumental in improving the catering and school meals, although the ready availability of jam doughnuts, cakes and muffins appears to have been overlooked. The behaviour of pupils is good, although the large numbers of pupils on the move during breaks can be problematic. The growing enterprise culture is preparing pupils well for their life beyond the school. They delight in the many opportunities to test their resourcefulness and business acumen and have won many prestigious awards. They certainly managed to 'put Warrington onto the map' with their imaginative plans for the redevelopment of Burtonwood airfield.

Good management at all levels has been instrumental in the progress that has been achieved. There is a real awareness of what needs to be done to move the school forward. Strengths and weaknesses have been accurately identified and the school has a clear programme of how to make things even better. There is a shared desire to make this school a focus of the community. Parents are proud of the school and pupils thrive in the surroundings. The school provides pupils with a good start to their adult lives and the world of work.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students in the sixth form achieve standards in line with expected performances based on their prior attainment. However, recent improvements have not been in place long enough to have a sufficient impact on standards and achievement. There is mutual respect between teachers and students which results in a strong sense of community. Students are positive, mature and confident and their attitudes are generally exemplary. Very good levels of enjoyment and the high rate of participation in enrichment activities are reflected in the large majority of students completing their two year courses successfully.

Leadership is very effective and enthusiastic and thorough procedures support and guide students, including preparing them for the next phase in their careers. The overall quality of teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Good quality facilities contribute to the capacity for students to develop their independent learning skills. Recent changes have resulted in an outstanding curriculum becoming established. There is a clear determination to create a sixth form which is a 'beacon for success' to which all students can aspire.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in English.
- Ensure that the developing good practice in the sixth form raises standards and achievement.
- Ensure that homework becomes a valuable part of pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils in the main school achieve well. In the case of the sixth form, achievement is satisfactory.

The majority of Year 7 pupils enter the school having achieved standards that are slightly above average. In 2005, at Key Stage 3, performance in English was below the school's expectations, whereas results for science and mathematics were broadly in line with them. The results obtained by pupils in 2006 indicated an overall improved performance.

By the end of Year 11, pupils attain standards well above national averages and achievement is good. The proportion of pupils obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C has risen from 65% in 2005 to a record high of 78% in 2006 reflecting the recent improvements that are beginning to have a positive impact. Pupils succeed well in vocational courses. There is no significant difference between boys' achievement and that of girls. Vulnerable children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are very well supported and make good progress.

Standards attained at AS and A level are broadly in line with the national averages. An analysis of sixth form results shows satisfactory performance when compared with similar students in similar schools and colleges.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' and students' personal development is good. They make good progress in developing their personal skills which help them become thoughtful and mature young people. Pupils enjoy being at school and feel safe. Their participation in extra-curricular activities is good. They have positive attitudes to their learning and their attendance is consistently above the national average. Pupils have good relationships with their teachers and with each other. Some complain of 'the crush' in corridors where younger children, burdened with large rucksacks, tend to cause problems. However, behaviour overall is good. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles, although their understanding is not always translated into good practice. This is not helped by the availability of some unhealthy food options in the dining room. The short time allowed for lunch restricts pupils' physical and social activity during the school day and some on last lunch complain because they have to wait too long before eating. The result is they feel they 'can't concentrate because they're hungry'.

As a result of thorough and sensitive support which begins in their primary schools, they settle quickly in Year 7. Pupils respond positively to the opportunities provided for them to take on responsibility within the school community. They are imaginative and generous fundraisers for charity. The school council has helped to improve the quality of food available in school and sixth form students support younger pupils, for example in the 'Smile Room'. As a result of such experiences, they develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well. Basic skills are generally well developed but the school recognises that underachievement in English hampers the progress of some pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall in the main school and the sixth form. Pupils want to learn, display enthusiasm and are articulate and mature in their attitude to work. Teachers are confident and learners enjoy a variety of teaching methods and activities that provide many opportunities for pupils to think for themselves, to solve problems and interact with each other. As one Year 9 pupil said, 'You don't have to sit and write all day'. However, on occasions, learning relies too heavily on teacher direction when pupils are not given opportunities to be creative or

put their own skills into practice. The school is making good use of national guidance to plan and deliver lessons that are well matched to pupils differing needs. A whole-school focus on using assessment to inform pupils about what they must do to take the next steps in their learning is having a positive effect on achievement and progress in lessons. Homework is set but pupils perceive this as something that needs finishing rather than something that is valuable. The majority of parents feel that their children are making good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school modestly judges the curriculum to be good but the inspectors conclude that it is outstanding. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. For pupils in Years 10 and 11 and students in the sixth form, the school provides a much richer range of traditional and vocational courses than usual, and a number of pathways that afford personalised routes which meet the aspirations and interests of pupils. The creative structure to the school day provides pupils with an outstanding opportunity for extended study. They can, for example, take up a third language, learn to be a DJ, or attend Young Apprentice workshops. Not only do these companies provide pupils with opportunities to experience the skills needed for the world of work, but they also serve as a thriving source of enrichment for teaching. One parent said, 'I believe that a child can be anything he/she wants to be because of the opportunities afforded at Great Sankey High School.' The school ensures that pupils are taught to develop healthy and safe lifestyles through a well-structured Personal, Social and Health Education programme. Many pupils are talented musicians. School bands and individuals perform and win awards on the local, national and international stage. An outstanding range of extra-curricular activities and visits and trips are well attended and much appreciated by pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides outstanding support and guidance for pupils and students of all ages. Procedures to ensure health and safety are good. Arrangements to support vulnerable pupils and promote child protection are excellent. Pupils and parents particularly appreciate the support given to pupils through the pastoral system. Several parents said pupils developed strong and positive relationships especially with form tutors and this has enabled them 'to have a great start'. Staff are sensitive to individuals' needs. Arrangements for supporting vulnerable children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly strong and have a significant impact upon pupils' attitudes and progress. The excellent programme of support, which begins in the primary schools, has an outstanding record of success in raising pupils' self-esteem. As a result, they feel safe, secure and are able to make the same good progress as their peers. Pupils say that, 'the school seemed big, but the induction

course made it seem smaller'. Pupils are able to talk to a variety of people when facing difficulties and particularly value the 'Smile Room'. Comprehensive careers guidance is available to help all pupils, including students in the sixth form, to make important choices. Pupils and students know how well they are doing and what they have to do to reach their potential. This is because the school sets challenging targets and tracks pupils' progress rigorously. There are regular opportunities for pupils to discuss their progress and to set targets with their form tutors, including the annual review day for each year group. The school keeps parents very well informed about their children's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that leadership and management are good. As stated in the previous report, the headteacher provides outstanding leadership. The school has appointed senior colleagues of a similar calibre who are also having a very positive impact. At middle management level, there is some variability, although there are again examples of outstanding leadership. The school recognises where leadership and management are less strong and need improvement.

There are high expectations of both staff and students, as reflected in the use of data to set challenging targets at all levels. The 'Engineering College Status' and the introduction of a revised structure to allow the sharing of good practice across departments have led to highly collaborative and purposeful teamwork at all levels of the school.

The school's day-to-day work and the success of students of all abilities confirm its very strong commitment to equality of opportunity. The senior team's analysis of performance data for the main school is established and robust, leading to better results in examinations in 2006. Strengths and weaknesses of the school are well understood because of accurate self-evaluation. Views of parents, pupils and other stakeholders are sought and acted on.

There is good leadership of the sixth form and a committed focus on raising standards. There is a good emphasis on independent learning and assimilation into the sixth form of strategies that have improved performance in the main school.

Governors know and support the school well and challenge senior and middle managers constructively. They have worked well with the senior team to deal with any identified weaknesses from the previous inspection. The school's finances are managed carefully and efficiently, resulting in good value for money.

Inspectors agree with the school's own evaluation that the leadership of the school has outstanding capacity and determination to bring about further improvements.

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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
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	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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	
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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
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

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?	1	1
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 to below 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	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
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 spending two days in your school, I want to thank you all very much for making the experience for me and my team of inspectors a very enjoyable one. We enjoyed your good humour and appreciated all the help you gave us in reaching our decision about how well your school is doing. We agree with you that Great Sankey is a good school. You have every right to be proud of it and of all your achievements. You all succeed in your own way. Many of you do particularly well in examinations, others of you aspire to play for Warrington Wolves or Manchester United and even a few for Wigan. Some of you have developed your musical talents and have won accolades from near and far. Others have developed skills to build and create through apprenticeships or learned to wheel and deal through the enterprise experiences you have become involved in. You have acquired a wide range of talents and skills which prepare you well for future life and the world of work.

Your school has changed for the better in the last few years and attaining Engineering Status has opened up a new world of opportunity. You prefer lessons where you can work independently, be creative and solve problems. Your teachers are aware of this and are working hard to provide you with these opportunities. Most of you do not like homework and I can understand this if it has little value. But, in order to get better, you have to put in that extra effort, even if this is outside school hours. Your teachers are determined to make the work they set really worthwhile. You also need to try a little harder in English. It is a subject which is very useful in real life. Without it how can you communicate, how can you succeed in other lessons? Think: Nobody who gave of her or his best ever regretted it.

Your school is a vibrant, welcoming place. We enjoyed our stay and learnt much. I am sure you will too.