



# Eaton Bank School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 132747  
**Local Authority** Cheshire  
**Inspection number** 294016  
**Inspection dates** 7–8 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Susan Wareing HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Jackson Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Congleton
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Cheshire CW12 1NT
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01260 273000
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	911	<b>Fax number</b>	01260 297352
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	193		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Professor D Parsons
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Paul Roberts
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 January 2003		

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	7–8 December 2006	294016

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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

The school is larger than average, including a sixth form of 193 students. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. The school population is largely of White British heritage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is broadly average. The school has specialist status for mathematics and computing.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Eaton Bank is a caring and supportive school with a strong sense of community. It provides its students with a satisfactory education. During a period of considerable instability in staffing and finance since local reorganisation, the headteacher and senior leaders have established an open culture in which all are valued and staff morale remains high. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas where development is needed. The school has, for example, prioritised improvement of teaching and learning and it is now good overall. However this improvement is not yet showing enough impact on students' achievement, especially at Key Stage 3.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Students enter Year 7 with standards that are above average and leave Year 11 with above average results at GCSE. Progress is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 and the gap between boys' and girls' achievement throughout the school is wider than that seen nationally. The school promotes good personal development of students. Behaviour and relationships are generally good and students enjoy opportunities to take responsibility for others, for example as 'buddies' to Year 7. Teachers know their students very well and students are confident that there is always a range of adults and older students to help them if they have a problem. Transition arrangements for Year 7 are good and new students say that arrangements for their induction help them to settle quickly into the life of the school. There is effective guidance to help students with options for further study and employment.

The curriculum is good, with a wide range of options at Key Stage 4 including some new vocational subjects. Students appreciate the wide variety of extra-curricular activities which enjoy good take up.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. A considerable legacy of financial deficit has constrained the school's actions for improvement over the last four years as it has worked hard with the local authority to balance the budget. Senior leaders have taken some hard decisions which place the school in a position to balance the budget in the near future. This represents sound financial management and satisfactory value for money. This is enhanced by the school's specialist status in mathematics and computing. It has contributed to improved standards in the specialist subjects. It has begun to improve information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in other subjects and established effective links with partner primary schools and the wider community. The school has set in place a rigorous system of departmental review which is proving effective in those departments where it is firmly established. The school has only recently introduced a central system of information to provide an overview of students' progress. The use of this information at departmental level is at too early and variable a stage to show sufficient impact on students' achievement, especially at Key Stage 3.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form. Most students enter Year 12 with standards that are broadly average. They make satisfactory progress through Years 12 and 13 and reach standards that are close to average by the end of Year 12 and above average by the end of Year 13, although there are large variations between subjects and too many students achieve unclassified results at the end of Year 12. Girls have outperformed boys in recent years as they do lower down the school.

Students enjoy their time in school and appreciate the help and support they receive from their teachers and support staff. Teaching and learning are good and students are well supported with regular monitoring to ensure that they are keeping up with and understand the work. The students appreciate the increased responsibility for their own learning that the school offers them.

Sixth form students make a good contribution to the school, notably in their mentoring role with younger students and their active involvement in the sixth form council.

Although there is a good range of A and AS Level subjects, the number of vocational courses is limited and the school is aware of the need for greater choice when resources allow. The curriculum benefits from a good range of enrichment activities.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Management of the sixth form is shared by a combination of teaching and support staff and students appreciate the ready access that this provides to help and support when they need it. More rigorous systems for monitoring students' overall academic progress are being introduced but the impact of these is yet to be felt.

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

- Improve achievement across the school.
- Sharpen the evaluation of the impact of changes, in order to drive achievement more rapidly.
- Ensure that assessment and target setting systems are implemented consistently across the school.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students enter Year 7 at Eaton Bank with standards which are above average and leave with above average results at the end of Year 11. This represents satisfactory progress overall but this progress is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.

By the end of Key Stage 3 in 2005, standards in mathematics and science were above average and were broadly average in English. There was some underachievement, notably of boys in English. In 2006, results were similar for mathematics and science but dropped slightly in English. Overall standards by the end of Year 11 are above

average but girls outperform boys by more than they do nationally. The school's results fell short of its own statutory targets in all three core subjects in both 2005 and 2006.

Inspection evidence points to students currently making good progress in lessons, largely as a result of the good teaching they receive, but also because of their own positive attitudes to learning. The school is aware of and is beginning to tackle the issue of boys' underachievement, for example by collecting and analysing information on their progress, in order to set them more challenging targets for improvement. This process is at a relatively early stage of development and is not yet consistent or sharp enough across all subjects.

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

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students' personal development and well-being is good. The school promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students' behaviour and attitudes are good overall. Their attendance and punctuality is satisfactory. Students of all abilities usually work hard and there is a positive atmosphere and good relationships in classrooms. A small number of students and parents report that there is occasionally poor behaviour in some lessons and around the school, but that this is usually well dealt with by staff. Sixth formers show very good application towards their studies. Most students say they enjoy coming to the school both for lessons and the good range of sports, musical and other extra-curricular activities that the school offers. Students acquire a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and sixth formers play a key role in this work, especially with the more vulnerable younger students. Students show good awareness of safety procedures in lessons. As they move through the school they learn increasingly how to work with others. The year and school councils and occasional focus groups are effective in helping students to influence school improvement. This, together with the standards they reach, helps students to develop good skills for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning in the main school and the sixth form is good. Effective monitoring systems have helped the school sustain this level of quality during a period of change. Teachers have good specialist subject knowledge and generally effective planning. The pace of lessons is usually fast, aided by the positive attitudes and skills that students bring to their learning. The students' above average literacy skills help them to absorb, record and analyse information quickly. Most students respond with good levels of concentration and application during whole class activities

and in pairs and groups. Students deemed gifted and talented are well catered for. In a minority of lessons, usually with younger students, progress is impeded by their low concentration levels and unclear expectations from the teacher.

Sampling of students' work shows too much variation in marking systems. Some written comments do not clarify how students can improve their work or in what ways their work is good. The school has only recently started to embed a more systematic use of attainment data to set targets and raise standards. It has not yet become part and parcel of the daily routine of all lessons.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school provides a good range of curriculum opportunities both in the main school and in the sixth form. Students speak warmly about the very good range of extra curricular activities they enjoy, especially in sport and the performing arts. They appreciate the many educational trips, competitions and visits. The school is setting up appropriate systems to monitor the impact of its enrichment provision. There is a good range of academic courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The school has successfully introduced a small number of vocational courses since the previous inspection. At Key Stage 3 as well as in dance and drama the school is introducing innovative courses such as the Opening Minds course aimed at helping students become more effective learners.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. The staff know and support students very well and there are good arrangements for transition from primary school and for inducting new students. There are good partnerships with external agencies such as Connexions, to provide good advice on future options for study and employment. Procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment are robust.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory. During a period of considerable instability following local reorganisation, the headteacher and senior leaders have established an open culture in which all are valued and staff morale is high, despite the need for some hard decisions. There has been good progress on most of the key issues identified in the last inspection. This has been achieved against a legacy of considerable financial deficit and consequent staffing reductions. The school has worked hard with the local

authority to plan its return to a surplus budget in the near future. However, some of the school's actions for improvement have inevitably been constrained. For example, there remains further work to be done on the extension of vocational options in the sixth form.

The school's improvement planning is coherent, with a central focus on the development of teaching and learning. This has led to a good awareness amongst senior leaders of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and improved it so that it is now good overall. However, its impact is not yet reflected consistently in students' achievement, especially at Key Stage 3. Rigorous systems of departmental self-review have been put in place and are beginning to support and hold middle managers to account effectively. The evaluation of information from this process is not yet sufficiently sharp across the school. Therefore the targets that departments set themselves do not always allow ready measurement of success and drive improvement fast enough. The school has only recently introduced a central system to provide information about students' progress and the use of such information by staff is at an early stage. This means that pupil level targets are not always precise enough. Governors are very committed to the school and are clear about its priorities, strengths and weaknesses. The school's specialist status in mathematics and computing has led to significant improvements in provision and achievement in ICT and mathematics and has begun to improve facilities in some other subjects. There are effective links with partner primary schools and the school's community work is developing well. The school therefore provides satisfactory value for money. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve.





## 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?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
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	2
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	3	
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>	2	2
<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	2

<sup>1</sup> 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

<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	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

Following our visit to inspect your school we would like to tell you about the things we found out. Eaton Bank School is a caring and supportive school with a real sense of community. The school offers you a satisfactory education. Your teachers know you very well and help you to reach good standards by the time you leave school in Year 11. That is why many of you choose to stay on into the sixth form where your standards are also good. However, we found out that some of you, especially in Years 7 to 9, have not been making as much progress as you could, so that you could achieve even more.

Teaching overall is good and in most lessons we saw we were impressed at the skills and personal qualities that you brought to your learning. We saw how well you respond to the chance to learn in pairs and groups. In a few lessons, especially in Years 7 to 9, concentration was not as good and this sometimes disrupted learning, especially if you were not clear what you should be doing. We noticed that marking in some subjects did not set you a regular target or tell you exactly what to do to improve your work.

We were pleased to hear that you can always find a member of staff or an older student to help you if you have a problem. We also heard from you that the school looks after new students very well and that they quickly make friends and settle into the school. You also told us about the good advice you get when you are choosing subjects for Year 10 and 11, the sixth form and beyond.

The school offers you a good range of after school activities and visits and we know that you enjoy taking responsibility for others, for example as Year 7 buddies or members of the school and year councils. It was good to hear about your charity work, especially to provide villagers in the Gambia with clean water.

The school has made a number of improvements since the last inspection. The improvement in teaching is an example of this. You also now have more vocational subjects to choose from in Years 10 and 11, but there is room for more in the sixth form. Being a

specialist college for mathematics and computing has improved standards in those subjects and it is improving information and communication technology facilities in some other subjects too. We think that the school should now make sure that:

- it improves achievement still further across the school
- it makes sure that in all your subjects you get regular targets and advice on exactly how to improve your work

I would like to thank those of you who talked to the inspectors to let us know what you think of the school. We found this very helpful.

I would like to wish you all every success for your future at Eaton Bank School.