



# Congleton High School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 132748  
**Local Authority** Cheshire  
**Inspection number** 294017  
**Inspection dates** 29–30 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Susan Wareing HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Box Lane
<b>School category</b>	Community		Congleton
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Cheshire CW12 4NS
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01260 273013
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1043	<b>Fax number</b>	01260 274580
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	145		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mrs P Taylor
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Hermitt
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 December 2002		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	29–30 November 2006	294017

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The school is larger than average, including a sixth form of 145 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 lower than average. The school has specialist status for engineering.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Students enter the school with standards that are above average and make satisfactory progress overall by the end of Year 11. The school has taken effective steps to improve achievement in Years 10 and 11, and this was reflected in improved GCSE results in 2006, especially amongst girls. The school recognises the need to tackle underperformance at Key Stage 3, and has begun to extend into Years 7 to 9 some of the tracking systems that have proved effective with older students. Although it is too early to judge the overall impact of these strategies, the school's own information about students' current progress shows that the school is in a position to improve achievement further.

Achievement in the sixth form is broadly average and the new head of sixth form is putting in place strategies to raise standards and achievement further, particularly in Year 12.

Students' personal development and well-being is satisfactory. Their attendance is good but punctuality is variable. Exclusions are rare and students' behaviour is generally satisfactory, and relationships are usually good. The vast majority of parents are satisfied with the school, but a few expressed concerns about behaviour.

The school has worked hard to improve the quality of its teaching and learning. The impact of this work is reflected in the generally good teaching and learning seen in the inspection. A few lessons demonstrated some outstanding features. Successful strategies are not yet consistently applied at Key Stage 3, and this contributes to lower overall achievement at this Key Stage.

The curriculum is good. A strong feature is the opportunity to study two languages at Key Stage 3. The school's specialist engineering status helps to widen the range of GCSE and vocational courses on offer and enhances the number of enrichment activities available to students. However, work related learning is not yet embedded in all subjects. The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory.

Care and support are good and safeguarding procedures are thorough, so that vulnerable students feel well supported. For example, effective tracking ensures that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress as well as others. The impact of new measures to track the academic progress of other students has yet to be felt throughout the school.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The school is aware of most of its strengths and weaknesses but has underestimated the significance of the underachievement in Years 7 to 9. Nevertheless, the school has begun to move forward and demonstrates satisfactory capacity for further improvement. For instance, most issues from the last inspection have been tackled. Achievement has improved at Key Stage 4 and the school's planning is generally effective. The school checks the progress of any changes systematically but does not always use the information gained precisely enough to improve achievement rapidly throughout the school.

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

### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form is satisfactory with some strong features. There is evidence of improvement. Overall, students make satisfactory progress and attain standards which are broadly in line with national averages. Students achieve well in vocational subjects. The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory. It is in general rich and caters well for the varied needs of learners. As a result, almost all complete their courses. Students particularly appreciate the extensive extra-curricular programme and the weekly 'Option K' enrichment activities. However, the curriculum does not currently provide a weekly lesson of religious education. Students comment that care, guidance and support are good. 'The sixth form is a community in which we feel well supported', one added. Students contribute to the life of the school. Their views are listened to and acted upon. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good but in some of the lessons students were not sufficiently challenged to learn for themselves. A new sixth form leader has a clear vision and a determination to drive up standards, especially in Year 12.

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

- Improve achievement at Key Stage 3.
- Improve the use of evaluation to focus improvement planning more sharply at departmental level.
- Embed the recent initiatives to improve teaching, learning and assessment consistently across the school.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

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

Students' attainment on entry is above average and they leave Year 11 with broadly above average standards. They therefore make satisfactory progress overall between the ages of 11 and 16. However, the rate of progress is uneven. Results at Level 5 and above in the 2006 Year 9 national tests improved in mathematics and science compared to 2005, but declined in English. Significant numbers of students made insufficient progress in Years 7 to 9 in English, mathematics and science in 2006.

The reorganised senior leadership team placed considerable investment in raising achievement first of all at Key Stage 4. As a result of these measures, GCSE results at grades A\* to C improved significantly in 2006, and the trend of girls' underperformance was reversed. There remains some variation between subjects but progress at Key Stage 4 is now satisfactory.

A newly appointed head of sixth form is developing strategies to raise standards and achievement in Years 12 and 13.

The school recognises the need to tackle underperformance at Key Stage 3 and has begun to implement some of the tracking systems that have proved effective in Years

10 and 11. The full impact of these measures has yet to be felt in overall achievement at Key Stage 3, but the school's analysis of current performance indicates that progress is beginning to improve in this Key Stage.

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

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Personal development and well-being is satisfactory. Students have a good understanding of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall, but opportunities are not always taken in lessons to allow students to reflect on spiritual matters.

Behaviour is satisfactory and linked to the quality of teaching. Most students say they enjoy their lessons. However, they talk more enthusiastically about the activities they can take part in after school, such as sports, industrial clubs and visits abroad. Attendance is good. However, a minority of students are often late for start of the school day.

Relationships are good, but sometimes a very small minority of students are discourteous and use offensive language around the school. Students enjoy the many opportunities to take on responsibility, for example through involvement in the school and year councils, and as peer counsellors, which give them an influence in the life of the school. They say that these activities give them confidence. Students feel safe in school. They confirm that incidents of bullying do not happen often and are dealt with quickly. They are certain that adults in the school will always help them and appreciate the peer mentor and support schemes.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. The school knows the strengths and weaknesses of its teaching. As a result, appropriate strategies have recently been introduced to improve it. These strategies have yet to be applied sufficiently consistently to lead to sustained impact on achievement throughout the school. Good lessons seen were well structured, with learning objectives clearly stated so that students knew what was expected of them and were able to make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and a number of them use interactive whiteboards effectively to enhance students' learning. The most effective lessons offered students opportunities to exchange ideas in groups and pairs to solve problems. There is some inconsistency in the quality of marking, so that while most students know their targets, they are not always sure of how to improve their work. Students

with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by their teachers and classroom assistants and therefore make similar progress to their peers.

In the sixth form, relaxed yet purposeful relationships enhance learning. Students make good progress when they are appropriately challenged. In some of the lessons observed, textbooks and teachers led too much of the learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is good. Students in Years 8 and 9 appreciate the opportunity to learn two modern languages. Students in Key Stage 4 have a good choice of GCSE and vocational courses. The school's specialist status provides a range of options related to engineering and supports small group provision in mathematics. The curriculum is well tailored to the varied needs of most students and, importantly, effective arrangements are made for students for whom a GCSE programme would not be appropriate. This ensures that students at risk are maintained in full-time education. The sixth form curriculum caters well for students with different levels of prior attainment. However, the requirement for a weekly lesson in religious education is not met. There is more to be done to improve students' progress across subjects in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology.

Personal, social and health education lessons help students make informed decisions about future education and employment. Visits and visitors enhance the curriculum. The residential week for Year 7 students, for example, strengthens their social development. Students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form enjoy a weekly afternoon of enrichment activities, several of which, like the aero-engineering course, reflect the school's specialist status. They also add to students' understanding of the world of work. However the provision of work related learning is not yet routinely embedded in all subjects.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school offers a safe and caring environment through clear and effective communication at all levels of the pastoral system. Teachers and adults know students well and students trust them. Students feel valued and generally free from bullying. Parental support and involvement in the school has significantly improved since the last inspection and they are happy with the care provided. Good guidance and advice is provided by learning mentors and through effective liaison with a range of external agencies, such as Connexions. Safeguarding arrangements are very good. Students' progress is tracked well in Years 10 and 11 where it has helped to raise achievement. These systems have too recently been extended to Years 7, 8 and 9 to show impact on overall achievement.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

#### Grade for sixth form: 3

After a period of considerable instability, the reorganised senior leadership team now provides the school with a clear focus on teaching and learning to improve achievement. This has been effective in tackling underachievement in Key Stage 4 and amongst girls. The management structure is beginning to be effective in holding departments to account for their performance through a recently introduced system of self-review. However, this has not yet had time to have a sustained impact on students' achievement at Key Stage 3.

The school knows some of its strengths and weaknesses, but has underestimated the significance of the underachievement at Key Stage 3. Middle managers are now well aware of what needs to be improved, but their self-evaluation is not yet consistently sharp enough to identify precise strategies to drive change and to measure the progress of new initiatives. There has been imaginative deployment of teaching assistants to provide small group teaching to vulnerable students and this has improved the progress of some individuals.

The school's specialist status fosters effective partnerships with partner primary schools and the business community and enriches the curriculum. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Governors are supportive of the school, knowledgeable and closely linked to departments. Most, but not all of the issues from the last inspection have been successfully tackled. For example, provision for basic skills remains under-developed across subjects. Systems set in place to monitor and evaluate the school's effectiveness are not yet driving the improvement of achievement fast enough throughout the whole school, but gains in Key Stage 4 indicate that, overall, the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.



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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>	<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?	2	2
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	3	3
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>	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

### 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. Congleton High School is a satisfactory school which helps you reach standards and make progress that is also satisfactory overall. Those of you in Years 10 and 11 make better progress than students in Years 7 to 9.

Teaching is good overall and your teachers know a lot about their subjects. Some of them use interactive whiteboards effectively to improve your learning. The best lessons allow you to exchange ideas in groups and pairs to solve problems. Most of you know your target grades but some teachers' marking does not always help you enough to know how to improve your work.

Generally your behaviour in lessons is satisfactory, but a few of you do not concentrate and listen as well as you could. We were also a little disappointed that some of you were not as polite to each other as you could be. We were pleased to hear about the good range of people you feel you can turn to if you have a problem or need information about your future career or study. You have a good range of subjects to choose from in Years 10 and 11 and you enjoy the out of school activities. Being a specialist college for engineering widens the range of these activities and the visits that the school offers.

The school has made a lot of improvements since the last inspection. For example, it has worked hard to improve teaching and to improve standards and progress in Years 10 and 11. We think that the school should now make sure that:

- those of you in Years 7 to 9 make even better progress
- improvements to teaching and marking happen equally across all your subjects.

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 Congleton High School.