

Grange Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111401
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	295376
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael McIlroy 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1080
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr S Nelson
Headteacher	Mr D Stanley
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Latham Avenue Runcorn Cheshire WA7 5DX
Telephone number	01928 578115
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Age group	11-16
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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 and serves an area with twice the level of social and economic disadvantage found nationally. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The great majority of pupils are White British. Few pupils are of minority ethnic heritage. A few pupils speak English as an additional language. Over one third of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the number of pupils with statements of special educational need is three times the average. A special unit caters for the education of a small number of pupils who have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. The school hosts a City Learning Centre on its site. The school holds a number of awards including the Sports England Sportsmark award, the Artsmark Gold award and the Financial Management Standard in Education award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In March 2006, the school was judged to require a Notice To Improve and was asked to improve the achievement and progress of pupils in Key Stage 3, attendance and assessment. In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

This is an improving school with notable strengths in pupils' personal development and well-being and in the care and support which they receive. The school is better than it was at the time of the last inspection.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall. Under the purposeful direction of the headteacher and the senior leadership team expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised. The school has determinedly tackled the issues identified for improvement in the last inspection report. Impressive progress has been made in raising attendance which is now satisfactory. This has been brought about by a relentless focus on attendance, coupled with a raft of incentives for pupils. One significant consequence of this improvement was that the attendance rate of pupils sitting public examinations in Year 11 was the highest for many years. Good progress has also been made in ensuring that behaviour is more consistently managed in and around classrooms. There is now less disruption in lessons. Since the last inspection the school has placed a heavy emphasis on improving learning which is beginning to reap rewards. The achievement of pupils at Key Stage 3 has improved and is now satisfactory overall. Better progress was made in raising standards in mathematics and science than in English. Nonetheless, standards are below average, particularly in English and mathematics. At Key Stage 4, the progress made by pupils remains satisfactory, although standards are also below average in mathematics and English. Adequate measures have been taken to ensure that assessment procedures are more deeply embedded throughout the school. As a result the school is more aware of where underachievement lies and has used this information to tackle it and to increase the accountability of staff. Effective steps have been taken to strengthen the senior leadership team and to sharpen its focus on raising standards. Although leadership at senior levels is strong, there are some weaknesses in management. The monitoring of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough. There is inconsistency in how policies and initiatives are applied across the school. Management at other levels in the school is satisfactory overall.

The care and support which pupils receive are good. These are based on well developed pastoral support arrangements and good links with other agencies. This good support also enables vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make satisfactory progress in their learning. However, the academic guidance which pupils receive is underdeveloped and not enough of it offers pupils advice on what they must do next in order to improve their work. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy school and make a good contribution to the local community. An effective school council has contributed to the improvement in behaviour. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Some teaching is outstanding. However, the wealth of assessment data the school now holds is not always sufficiently exploited by teachers to ensure that work offers challenge to pupils of all abilities. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of learners.

Governance is satisfactory. Most parents who returned questionnaires are very supportive of the school's work. In the light of the strengthening of the senior leadership team, the particularly

strong gains in behaviour and attendance as well as the improvements at Key Stage 3, the school has good capacity for further improvement. It now provides adequate value for money and is well placed to further raise the standards and achievements of pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching so that all pupils are sufficiently challenged.
- Improve the academic guidance, including marking, which pupils receive.
- Ensure policies and initiatives are implemented consistently throughout the school.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The achievement of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory overall. At the time of the previous inspection, the progress made by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 was judged to be unsatisfactory. National test results in 2005 were exceptionally low. Since then standards have improved, although they remain below average. The 2006 test results in mathematics and science were significantly better than in the previous year. Pupils currently in Year 9 are sustaining these improvements and provisional results for the 2007 end of Key Stage 3 national tests in mathematics and science confirm this. Improvement in English, however, has been slower. Results only rose marginally in this subject in 2006. Inspection evidence and the school's assessment data show that since then standards in English have improved and are now below average. One reason for this overall trend of improvement has been the improved targeting of additional resources in literacy and numeracy to help pupils who have fallen behind in their learning. As a result, pupils' progress at the end of Key Stage 3 is now satisfactory.

Standards at the end of Year 11 are below average overall. When pupils' below average standards on entry to the school are taken into account, this represents satisfactory progress. Results of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in 2006 were below average with a small fall in comparison with the previous year. The results of girls were well below average. Assessment information shows that whilst standards are higher in the current Year 11, they remain below average. Achievement is often good in practical subjects such as food technology, design and technology, art and design, physical education and information and communication technology (ICT). Results in English and mathematics, however, remain too low.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. The school successfully promotes pupils' self-confidence and they develop into mature individuals well. Spiritual, social and cultural development is good. Cultural development is enhanced through the curriculum and pupils also learn well about the rich diversity of cultures in society. Moral development is also good. For example, in a discussion about euthanasia, pupils expressed very different and well-argued points of view but listened carefully and respectfully to others' opinions. The school

council has established itself quickly as a strong and influential voice. For instance, councillors have made good suggestions about improving the school and also contributed significantly to the new behaviour policy. Behaviour is good, both around the school and in lessons. There has been a marked reduction in exclusions. Attendance is now satisfactory. Pupils enjoy school and make a good contribution to the community. For example, older learners act as peer mentors for new pupils in Year 7 and help them to settle into school life. Attitudes towards leading healthy lifestyles continue to improve and regular visitors from the emergency services provide helpful guidance on safety matters. As a result pupils adopt healthy and safe practices well. Workplace skills and enterprise opportunities enable pupils to satisfactorily develop skills that will promote their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with good and outstanding features. Senior leaders have initiated a range of effective strategies to tackle weaknesses and to promote good teaching and learning and there is clear evidence of improvement. Where teaching is good or better, pupils are actively engaged in a range of activities and make good progress. For example, in an outstanding 'learning to learn' lesson, the teacher and a support assistant strongly developed pupils' teamwork skills through imaginative use of practical tasks, games, stories and presentations. Work is matched to the needs of different groups of pupils. Assessment information is well used to guide improvement, the pace of learning is fast and teachers maintain pupils' interest well. ICT is effectively used. Literacy and numeracy skills are steadily developed to enable pupils to become more independent learners. However, the school recognises the need to increase pupils' ability to learn independently across all subjects through more research tasks and group activities.

While there are many positive aspects to teaching and learning, it remains satisfactory overall because in too many lessons teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to be actively involved in learning. In these lessons the pace of learning is slower and questioning techniques are weak. Work is not always matched to the needs of pupils and as a result not all learners are sufficiently challenged. In some subjects, pupils are beginning to assess their own work and that of their peers. Marking, however, is inconsistent. In some subjects no indication is given of the progress made by learners or of the next steps they need to take. When marking is not regularly undertaken, pupils take less care in how they present their work and the quality of work often declines.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. There are some good features that make an effective contribution to the pupils' personal development and well-being. These include a wide and popular range of extra-curricular activities, a wide ranging personal, social, health and citizenship course, a good range of practical option subjects in Key Stage 4 and extra support for those taking national examinations. There are limited opportunities for gifted and higher attaining pupils to gain accredited qualifications through early examination entry. A rigorous programme of ICT helps pupils acquire a good range of skills. These are not yet matched by similar standards of skills in literacy and numeracy, despite improved provision since the previous inspection.

Opportunities for work-related learning include an enterprise programme in Year 8 and work experience in Key Stage 4. The school runs appropriate work and activity based courses both on and off the school site for pupils less suited to GCSE courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

This aspect of the school's provision is satisfactory overall, although care and support are strong. One pupil commented, 'teachers and other staff make sure that you don't have any worries and help you to work around any problems you have in school and at other times'. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in place and reviewed regularly, as are health and safety procedures. Good links with external agencies contribute to the good care and support of pupils. The school has employed a part time nurse to promote pupils' health, well-being and attendance. Learning mentors and staff in the learning and behavioural support units have a good impact on pupils' personal development. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in classes by experienced teaching assistants. The few pupils with English as an additional language receive good specialist support from the local authority (LA). The academic guidance pupils receive is satisfactory. Adequate levels of homework are set. However, not all pupils know their targets. The school knows it needs to raise pupils' awareness of targets and of the next steps they should take to improve their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school considers leadership and management to be satisfactory and inspectors agree. The headteacher, ably assisted by the senior leadership team, has provided clear direction for the school. They are committed to raising standards and to the school's continued improvement. Together, they have developed and promoted a new vision of how the school can improve. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised successfully throughout the school. Pupils comment favourably on the improved ethos, which is increasingly focused on learning. The leadership team and the staff have worked hard to address the issues identified during the last inspection. Good progress has been made in raising attendance and improving behaviour in classes and around the school. Satisfactory progress has been made in improving the achievement and standards of pupils at Key Stage 3. Although not all the school's challenging targets were met last year, evidence provided by the school suggests that the school will be more successful in meeting its targets this year. Sound progress has also been made in further embedding systems to track pupils' progress. This greater focus on assessment has allowed the school to become more aware of where underperformance lies. In turn, this has enabled managers to hold staff more to account for their work.

The recent appointment of senior learning coordinators has strengthened the leadership team. It has also enabled the school to more rapidly identify and tackle underachievement in each key stage. A useful school intervention policy has been introduced and, in the wake of this, a number of effective strategies have been initiated to boost achievement. These have been positively received by pupils. Links with parents have also been developed in order to provide them with more information about how to help their children in their learning. The number of learning mentors has been increased in order to develop further the school's good pastoral care. However, there are some weaknesses in management. The monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet rigorous enough. The school has drawn appropriately on the resources of

the LA to develop the expertise of staff in this area. Whilst there is a good level of professional dialogue amongst staff, there is scope to sharpen how teaching, learning and the use of time are monitored. There is also inconsistency in how policies and initiatives are applied across the school. The school has also recognised that work needs to be more closely matched to pupils' abilities. To facilitate this, the school has timely plans to draw up a teaching and learning policy. The quality of middle management is satisfactory overall and some of it is good. The school has shared good practice to address weaknesses at this level. Some middle managers are relatively new in post. The responsibilities of others have been recently redefined to focus more sharply on learning. Consequently, staff are still growing into these new roles.

The school's self-evaluation of its effectiveness is satisfactory. The school knows its strengths and where it must improve. It is increasingly confident in taking robust action to improve standards. Governance is satisfactory. Finances are well managed. Governors have undergone training to become more effective in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Increasingly, they are offering challenge as well as support to the school's leadership, partly through the recent establishment of a committee that monitors and evaluates the school's work. An action plan for governors has been recently introduced but there is scope to develop this further. Most parents who returned questionnaires were strongly supportive of the school's work, but a few would like more account to be taken of their views and some are concerned about behaviour. Given the improvements made in addressing the issues arising from the last inspection, the school now offers satisfactory value for money.

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
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Grange Comprehensive School, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 5DX.

Thank you for being so polite and helpful when Mr Griffin, Mr Hussain, Mr Pope and I visited your school to carry out its re-inspection. As you know your school was inspected last year and found to need significant improvement in a number of areas, including attendance, assessment, results at the end of Key Stage 3 and behaviour in classes. Your school has improved and is now better than it was last year. The greatest improvements, to which you have contributed strongly, have been in attendance, which is now satisfactory, and in behaviour which is now good. We saw improvements in results at Key Stage 3 and in how information from tests is used to improve your learning and to provide extra help for many of you. We also found that you are very well cared for by the adults at your school and receive good support when you need it. Other good things which we saw were the 'learning to learn' programme and a good range of extra-curricular activities. You also have an effective school council.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make some improvements to make the school even better. These are:

- to raise standards in English and mathematics
- to make all teaching as good as the best that we saw
- to ensure that all of you know how well you are doing and know what it is that you have to do to improve your work
- to check that all policies are applied consistently across the school.

Once again, many thanks on behalf of the inspection team for your help and politeness when we recently inspected your school.