

Christleton High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111421
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	295377
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Pat Kime 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	1279
6th form	292
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Leake
Headteacher	Mr Tony Lamberton
Date of previous school inspection	13 February 2006
School address	Village Road Christleton Chester Cheshire CH3 7AD
Telephone number	01244 335843
Fax number	01244 332173

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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

Christleton High School is larger than the average secondary school. It serves an advantaged area a few miles to the east of Chester. Students come mainly from the villages of Christleton and Waverton, but also from more isolated rural communities and the city. A number of students join for the sixth form. The proportion of students taking free school meals is low. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is less than half the national average overall but has increased over the last three years. In Year 7 it is average. Around 4% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few are learning English as an additional language. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing with business and enterprise. There has been a high turnover of staff over the last three years, including at senior and middle leadership levels.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

At the last inspection the school was given a Notice to Improve. It has improved. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Christleton High School is considerably better than when it was last inspected nearly 16 months ago. It now provides a satisfactory education and a good quality of care. It has some significant strengths, notably in the curriculum, leadership and management, and students' personal development. Academic standards are high. However, they represent simply satisfactory progress because students enter the school with above average standards. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, with a significant amount that is good, some outstanding, but also some that is inadequate.

Students enjoy school life and appreciate the good pastoral care they receive. Their enjoyment is evident from the above average attendance, good take up of extra-curricular activities, the high numbers completing their courses and staying on for the sixth form, and their positive attitudes to learning. Students' good personal development is demonstrated, for example, in their maturity and thoughtfulness and their sensible suggestions about how the school and the teaching might be improved. Students make a good contribution to the school and the local community. They respond positively to the school's promotion of healthy lifestyles and they understand the rules for their safety in school. The curriculum for personal, social and health education and for spiritual and cultural development has improved since the last inspection. Students are generally well behaved but, when teaching is less than good, a few students are silly and at times this slows the pace of learning in these classes.

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. It is good in Key Stage 3 but has been inadequate in Key Stage 4 for several years. There are now signs of improvement but underachievement has not been entirely overcome. In both key stages students do better in mathematics than English. Inspectors' observations of lessons confirmed the school's view that the quality of teaching and learning has improved and is satisfactory overall. In some lessons a few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the most able are not catered for as well as they should be. The systems for setting targets for students and keeping track of their progress have improved and are now good. However, marking is sometimes too perfunctory to help students know how to do better. The school offers a good curriculum which has been adapted to take account of students' interests. It provides a wide choice of subjects and an extending range of vocational courses.

The key factor behind the school's improvement is good leadership and management. Senior staff have made good progress in bringing teaching methods and expectations up to date and have involved staff constructively whilst increasing their accountability for students' progress. Monitoring of lessons is extensive and rigorous but there is less rigour in the monitoring of students' work so some shortcomings have been missed or not followed up. The mathematics and enterprise elements of the school's specialist status have a positive impact on the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning.

One hundred and forty six inspection questionnaires were returned by parents. Slightly over two-thirds of these indicated an entirely positive view of the school. A small number of parents expressed concerns about students' behaviour and there were a very few questionnaires with

disagreement on other matters. Inspectors agree that when teaching is less than good, some students' behaviour slips but found no evidence to support parents' other criticisms.

The improvement achieved since the last inspection, the strength in the senior team and governing body, and the commitment to continue moving forward show that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards are above average. The school provided convincing evidence to substantiate its view that students achieve well overall in the sixth form. Nonetheless, there are variations in achievement between subjects. The good achievement overall is a strong indicator of good teaching and learning which is confirmed by students. They say they are challenged and required to think for themselves and they find the assessment arrangements and marking are very helpful. Students value the good support and guidance they receive. This includes a residential induction to the sixth form as well as guidance on selecting options and support with applications for higher education. Sixth formers make a strong contribution to school life. They support younger students' learning well and undertake much fundraising for charitable causes. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. This is seen in the accurate self-evaluation and the effective action that has been taken to improve provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning, ensuring that:
 - the proportion that is good or better increases
 - marking improves
 - work is matched to the needs of all students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the most able.
- Raise achievement in Key Stage 4 and in English in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Monitor students' work more closely.

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

Grade for sixth form: 2

Academic standards are above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, though at both key stages test results in English are not as good as in mathematics. The percentage of students obtaining five good passes (grades A* to C) at GCSE is well above average. These high standards mask some underachievement but the school has taken steps to tackle this and the early signs are of positive impact. That said, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the most able do not achieve as well in relation to their capabilities as do the majority. Students join the school with above average standards. Overall, their progress in Key Stage 3 is better than the average for students with a similar starting point. They do well in mathematics and science. Students' progress in Key Stage 4 has been inadequate for the last three years.

For the last two years the percentage of students gaining at least one pass at GCSE level has been only at the national average. In 2006, when all students' results were taken into account, standards had slipped to marginally below the national average. Set against this are signs of improving standards. Interim assessments of the present Year 11 suggest that these students are doing better than the last few cohorts.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Students develop into mature and thoughtful young people. Their behaviour is usually good in lessons and around the school but for some students, it slips and they can be silly when teaching is simply satisfactory. Students involve themselves in school life with evident enjoyment and they appreciate the wide range of opportunities it offers. Attendance is above the national average and the take up of activities beyond lessons is good. Students contribute well to the life of the school and the wider community. All are involved, through the school council and, in the sixth form, the head boy and head girl team, in contributing to school events and making suggestions for improving the school. Students' views on lessons have helped inform the improvements in teaching and learning. Students participate in many local events. They respond well to the school's promotion of healthy living and were well involved in recent decisions about school meals. They know how to live healthy lives, particularly by taking regular exercise and choosing healthy food. They observe the safety rules in school, for instance for using sewing machines in design and technology. Students' maturity, their academic standards, and the benefits of the good enterprise education stand them in good stead for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors' observations of lessons broadly confirmed the school's view that teaching and learning are satisfactory. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and this is recognised and appreciated by students. Some is of an outstanding quality and a significant proportion is good. Nonetheless, a considerable amount is simply satisfactory and a small proportion of inadequate teaching remains. The extensive monitoring of teaching, undertaken by senior staff since the last inspection, has paid dividends. Improvement has also been supported by the cross-department learning and teaching groups for teachers. These groups have enthused staff and stimulated useful discussion about how best to promote students' learning. The strength in mathematics teaching has been utilised well in these groups to support improvement to teaching and learning.

Lessons are well-planned to a suitable structure. Teachers are clear what students are to learn and normally share these learning objectives with them. Relationships with students are nearly always positive. The differences between satisfactory teaching and that which is good or better lie primarily in the level of challenge, which is not always sufficient for the more able students; the clarity of learning objectives; the pace of learning; and the standard set for students' behaviour. In the most effective lessons seen, teaching was underpinned by very good knowledge

of the subject and very clear explanations and instructions. Furthermore, students were fully involved in the lessons, given a good degree of responsibility and expected to think for themselves. In the satisfactory lessons students were sometimes 'spoon fed' and, whilst the pitch of work enabled most students to make progress, it did not always challenge the most able.

Marking is satisfactory. Much is of a good quality and helps students know how well they have done and how to do better. A significant amount, however, is too perfunctory and sometimes points for action are not followed up.

Teaching for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varies in quality and at times fails to meet the learning needs of a small number. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, whilst the students' general targets are usually well-matched to their needs, some subject specific targets are not sufficiently well-focused. Secondly, when the teaching is best, tasks are adapted so these students can join in lessons and work on the same topic as the rest of the class. Sometimes, however, the students are included in lessons with learning support assistants but the work is not adapted to enable them to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

There are many strengths in the curriculum which mean it is good overall, despite a few shortcomings. It now meets requirements, including for the provision for religious education. Personal, social and health education and the provision for students' spiritual and cultural development have improved significantly since the last inspection. A good range and choice of subjects is offered at GCSE level and in the sixth form, which meets students' needs. Additional subjects have been introduced to match students' interests. The good retention and completion rates are a strong indicator of the relevance and interest of the curriculum to students. The provision of vocational courses and alternative pathways, often in collaboration with a local college, has expanded. The provision for enterprise and mathematics, elements of the school's specialism, is good. The shortcomings in matching work to the needs of some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities mean that, for these students, provision overall is satisfactory.

Extra-curricular provision is good. It includes a good range of activities beyond lessons, sport, and additional learning support.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pastoral care is good as are several elements of academic guidance and support. The arrangements for safeguarding students fully meet requirements. The school has good in-house support systems that are coordinated effectively. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined so students know to who go to with any concerns they may have and their personal development is monitored. The school works in close partnership with other agencies to promote students' well-being and to support those who are vulnerable. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well. For example, sports coaches are employed to enhance extra-curricular provision and cycling to school has been encouraged successfully by improved storage facilities. Positive attitudes and

behaviour are promoted effectively through an appropriate system of rewards, incentives and sanctions. Students, parents and staff confirm that instances of bullying occur occasionally but they are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Students appreciate the improved system for setting their academic targets and the very good guidance for choosing options and applying for higher education. Students' academic progress is carefully tracked and a good level of additional support is provided for those at risk of not meeting their targets. The timing of academic assessments has been adjusted to provide more time for staff and students to act on the outcomes. Academic guidance provided through marking is inconsistent and too often does not show students how they might improve. For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the general targets set for them are helpful but subject-specific targets are not always appropriate. This is a significant factor behind the shortcomings in matching work to learning needs for some of these students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The good improvement since the last inspection is clear evidence of good leadership and management. Staff at all levels confirm that there has been a 'culture change' seen particularly in the greater focus on learning and students' progress. This has been aided by clearer expectations from the senior team, a rigorous programme of lesson observations, opportunities for additional training, and the learning and teaching groups which involve all teachers. In tackling its weaknesses, the school has benefited from support provided by the local authority.

The headteacher has a clear and accurate picture of the school's effectiveness. He is supported well by a senior team whose roles are clearly defined and understood by staff. Together they have shown the drive, persistence and robustness needed to deal with areas of weakness and a desire to carry on building on what has been achieved. They know what still needs to be done. Staff understand the vision for the school and there is a good degree of enthusiasm for continuing development and improvement. The senior team has balanced challenge and support for staff well and established effective structures to promote accountability. Heightened monitoring has been a significant factor in the school's improvement. Nonetheless aspects of it, such as scrutiny of students' work, could be more rigorous, and used better to focus the agenda for further improvement.

Governance is good. The governing body is well-informed and provides a good level of challenge, tempered with support. Governors are closely involved in the drive for improvement, for instance in the English action group, and they have overseen progress on the weaknesses identified by the last inspection. Their involvement in the school's self-evaluation and developing the contribution of its specialism is less strong.

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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?	3	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	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	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	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	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

I imagine that, even if you were on study leave or taking exams, you will know that your school was inspected recently. I came, with Linda Clare, Jon Lovgreen, Clarice Nelson-Rowe, and Ian Thompson, to see how well all the students are learning and to check that the school has improved sufficiently since it was last inspected in February 2006. Things are better and the school now provides a satisfactory education and good care.

We were made very welcome and our discussions with students were particularly useful, as was the summary of the outcomes of the sixth form questionnaire. They helped us to find out a lot about what Christleton High School offers, how it has improved and what it's like to be a pupil there. This letter is to tell you the main findings of the inspection. I should be grateful if you would make sure that all the students know what it says.

After the last inspection there was a lot for the school to tackle. It has made good improvement and is now a satisfactory school. It has some important strengths and students told us it is a better place in which to learn. The school is led and managed well. The senior staff team and the governors have shown that they have the capacity to keep on improving the school. They have been helped by what students have told them about what works best in lessons. We hope that students will continue using their voice wisely to support school improvement.

Standards are above average and students now make satisfactory overall progress in their learning. They do best in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form. There are promising signs of improvement in Key Stage 4; the GCSE results will tell! Progress in English has been a weakness and it needs to improve further. We have also asked the school to improve achievement generally at Key Stage 4.

Students' personal development is good. In our discussions with students their maturity and thoughtfulness shone through. You may have heard of the national 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) agenda. We found that students at your school do well in all five of the five ECM outcomes. Students enjoy school life. Attendance is above the national average and take up of extra-curricular activities, including those for sport, is good. Students are well looked after at school and respond positively to the promotion of healthy lifestyles. We were pleased to hear that more students cycle to school, now the provision of lockers and the storage for bicycles have improved. Students told us that behaviour is no longer an issue and discipline for learning is effective. We agree. Although a small number of students play up in some lessons, the vast majority are well behaved and hard working. Students benefit from good pastoral care and many aspects of academic guidance are good. For example, students told us about the very good guidance and support for choosing options and applying for higher education.

The teaching is better than it was last year; it is now satisfactory overall. The challenge for the school now is to keep on improving it. We have said that more of the teaching should be good or better; some of the marking needs to improve; and work in lessons could be better tailored to meet the needs of a few students with special needs and the most able.

Students have a good choice of courses and plenty of activities beyond lessons. The way the school keeps track of students' progress and sets targets for them is greatly improved. Even so, we think the monitoring of students' work could be sharper. Senior staff have sometimes missed things, like shortcomings in marking, that could help focus the drive for improvement.

Thank you again for the welcome we received at your school and, on behalf of all the inspectors, I would like to wish every single pupil at Christleton the very best for happy and successful future.