

Malbank School and Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111419
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310593
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Stephen Wall

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	1342
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr G Watts
Headteacher	Mrs J Walker
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Welsh Row Nantwich Cheshire CW5 5HD
Telephone number	01270 611009
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school in a small town enjoying generally favourable social and economic circumstances. Well below average numbers of students are entitled to free school meals. Nearly all students are of White British heritage. Fewer than average numbers of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs. The school has held specialist arts status since 2002. The school has gained the following awards: Artsmark Gold, Inclusion Quality Mark, Investors in People, Sportsmark, Investor in Careers, International School and Healthy Schools. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2006 and a new deputy headteacher took up post in January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the standards attained and students' achievement. Consequently, the school provides inadequate value for money.

Since the last inspection standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 4, have declined. Students enter the school with above average levels of attainment. For the last three years standards at the end of Year 11 have been broadly average and not as high as they should be. Overall, students' achievement has been consistently unsatisfactory. The recently appointed headteacher is tackling this underachievement rigorously. The impact of this is starting to pay dividends and is evidence that the school has clear capacity to improve further. For example, evidence from current performance data indicates that standards in Year 11 English have risen because better management has improved the quality of teaching and learning. However, standards and achievement overall are not rising fast enough, especially in Key Stage 4. The school correctly identifies that the quality of teaching and learning has been the root cause of this underachievement and has started to tackle this effectively. Examples of very effective teaching were observed in a range of subjects, but overall the quality of teaching is only satisfactory and not yet consistently good enough to overcome the legacy of significant underachievement in the main school. Standards in the school's specialist performing arts subjects are above average because teaching in these subjects is good overall and sometimes better. The school, however, has not yet capitalised fully on this to spread the good practice to other subject areas.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students are confident, articulate and responsible young adults by the time they leave the school. Their personal development is supported very effectively by the good range of enrichment activities which add significantly to their levels of confidence and adoption of healthy lifestyles. Students are starting to play a very important role in the development of the school. For example, they sit on interview panels for the appointment of new teaching staff and are involved in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. 'I'm really going to miss school when it comes time to leave. I've had many opportunities which I'm sure I wouldn't have had at lots of other schools', summed up many students' opinions.

The headteacher is providing good leadership. She is ensuring a sharp focus on raising standards and achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. However, it is too early for the full impact of her visionary leadership to have had full effect. Whilst leadership and management are satisfactory overall, as is governance, the quality and impact of management is inconsistent. The monitoring of teaching and learning for example, whilst satisfactory, is not yet consistent or rigorous enough to demonstrate rapid improvement. Similarly, the monitoring of the school's progress towards its targets is not sharp enough to allow the school to evaluate standards and achievement with sufficient accuracy.

The headteacher has the confidence of the majority of parents and students who say that the school is improving under her leadership. They are especially pleased with the very wide range of enrichment activities offered by the school in the arts, sports and foreign travel. 'These

opportunities have helped broaden my children's horizons and nurtured their interest in the world around them', was a typical parent comment. However, about a fifth of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed concern at the behaviour of students. This was only apparent to inspectors in lessons which failed to engage students meaningfully in their learning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education for its students. A broad range of courses and small teaching groups, for example, have secured satisfactory achievement and standards. Some aspects of the sixth form are good. Carefully structured activities ensure good integration between the students who come from Year 11 and those joining from other schools. As a result, relationships are good. Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students enjoy the sixth form and their commitment to the school community is strong. For example, they enjoy helping younger, vulnerable learners. There is a good range of post-16 courses carefully geared to students' expressed preferences. The wide range of additional opportunities offered, from Chinese language and law to formal work with primary school pupils, adds to students' enjoyment and sense of responsibility. These help prepare students effectively for life after the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory: teachers make learning interesting but only the best really stimulates students or makes them intellectually curious. Students develop good levels of confidence and independence because teachers encourage them to show initiative and to offer their opinions. Whilst those responsible for leading and managing the sixth form have good systems to analyse how well students have performed, they are over-optimistic about achievement, which is satisfactory. Issues such as the underachievement of some boys and students' performance in different subjects have not been fully followed up. Nonetheless, leadership and management are satisfactory. Sixth Form leaders have been successful in giving students good care, guidance and support to help them make appropriate choices about higher education and employment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 4
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better
- Ensure the monitoring of teaching and learning is more consistent and effective
- Improve the monitoring of the school's progress towards its targets to ensure standards and achievement can be evaluated with accuracy.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter Year 7 with above average standards. By the end of year 9 they make satisfactory progress and maintain these above average standards, although in 2007 results in mathematics and science declined at both expected and higher levels. Standards at the end of Year 11 have been broadly average for the last three years indicating significant underachievement considering the students' starting points at the start of Year 10. In 2007 the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, for example, was below the national average. It was broadly average when GCSE results in English and mathematics were included. In 2007 the school missed its targets by a wide margin. All groups of students, including those with learning difficulties

and/or disabilities made inadequate progress. However, a very small number of students with more significant learning difficulties make at least satisfactory progress. There are clear indications that standards are rising in some areas, for example in Year 11 English. Despite this, evidence overall does not indicate that standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 4, are rising fast enough. Standards in the sixth form are broadly average. This represents satisfactory achievement in line with students' broadly average standards on entry to the sixth form.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Attendance is above average. It has improved because the school has successfully established in students' minds the value of attendance. Students say clearly they feel safe in school. They generally enjoy school but find some lessons dull because they are not challenging enough. Students are confident and articulate. Behaviour is satisfactory. It is best in lessons where teaching is stimulating and students are active participants. Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. There are high participation rates in the many sporting enrichment activities. The school actively promotes healthy eating through a range of healthy options on offer in the school's canteen. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding. It is strengthened by the specialist status. Students are pleased that the school goes to great lengths to listen to their opinions. They are proud that they have instigated improvements to facilities and were consulted on the school uniform, for example. They enjoy taking on responsibilities such as becoming buddies to younger or more vulnerable students. Students are also rightly proud of their links with a school in Africa which groups of students visit regularly and for which the school raises significant funding. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's specialist arts status is used effectively to support cultural development, for example, through the performance of live music in assemblies. Students have plenty of opportunities to experience the world of work. However their preparation for future economic well-being is only satisfactory because many students' attainment does not match their capabilities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality and effectiveness of teaching is improving because the school has introduced a range of initiatives which are starting to impact positively. Presently teaching and learning are satisfactory; however, the quality of teaching is still not consistently good enough to impact fully on students' achievement and overcome the long history of underachievement. The best teaching is well planned and conducted at a good pace. The tasks teachers set for the students are both entertaining and challenging. Through effective group work students engage in their own learning and this encourages them to think for themselves. In these lessons as students are so involved in their learning their behaviour is never less than good. It is clear that all teachers are striving to incorporate the new initiatives to bring their teaching up to this standard but it is not yet consistent. In too many lessons, teachers concentrate more on teaching rather than its impact on learning. Some teachers talk too much while students are expected to listen

and not contribute. Occasionally students are expected to copy from the board for extended periods or do mundane tasks like cutting and sticking. This soon leads to a lack of engagement. Consequently the pace of learning drops and as their frustration grows students' behaviour deteriorates. Teachers mark students' work regularly but the quality of the comments they provide is inconsistent in helping students understand what they need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and has been recently developed so that it offers a wider range of courses and qualifications to meet students' needs and aptitudes. Year 7 students are now offered an 'opening minds' course which is helping them to develop their thinking and learning skills. Older students entering Key Stage 4 are offered a wide range of options including vocational and applied courses, so that aspirations are increasingly being met. The school's performing arts specialism has had a positive impact on the curriculum, as seen in the broad range of arts based courses offered. This has helped to enhance students' confidence and engagement in school. The effective programme of personal, social and citizenship education teaches students about many aspects of health education and helps prepare them for the world of work. Provision for information and communication technology is good. Consequently, students' skill levels are high. Provision for basic literacy and numeracy skills is improving as the school's focus on improving standards starts to impact. A very wide range of enrichment activities is offered, particularly in the arts, sport and foreign travel. Participation rates are high and students say how much they value and enjoy them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory in the main school, but in the sixth form are good. This is reflected in the better achievement made by students in the sixth form. Policies and procedures for keeping students safe meet statutory requirements and are reviewed regularly. Students are confident in approaching staff with any problems and know that teachers will do their best to help them sort things out. Students say that bullying is rare but when it happens it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students are happy with the levels of advice they receive to help them choose subjects as they move up through the school. The school does all it can to provide students with information to inform them about career and further education options. Effective links have been forged with outside agencies to support vulnerable students. Provision for these students has been enhanced by the newly established 'inclusion resource centre' to support emotionally vulnerable students and those who find it difficult to engage in school life. Support for students' academic monitoring and development is satisfactory and improving. Students say that they now have a better grasp on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However, it is too early for these recent changes to have had a full impact on raising standards and achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has rightly identified tackling underachievement and improving the quality of teaching and learning as major priorities. In this she has been focused and energetic. She has provided the school with a clear sense of direction. Effective teamwork is developing in pursuit of improvement, although some leaders and managers are responding more enthusiastically and effectively than others. Detailed development plans are now in place for each subject area as well as a programme of regular subject reviews. However, too much detail in these plans often masks priorities and there are not clear enough checks to measure the progress being made. While senior leaders understand the agenda for improvement, their ability to translate this into effective action is variable. The processes for gathering and using assessment data to give a clear, accurate overview of standards, achievement and the progress the school is making are underdeveloped. Checking on what learning goes on in classrooms is becoming a useful management tool. However, some leaders have not yet developed the necessary skills to do it with the rigour and consistency needed to help drive up the quality of teaching and, therefore, standards and achievement. Some astute, recent appointments are strengthening the school's capacity to improve. Procedures for self evaluation are satisfactory and include the opinions of a wide range of stake holders including the students. Governance overall is satisfactory. In the past, governors have not held the school to account rigorously enough. However, this has improved and they are now knowledgeable and eager to support the headteacher in her quest to tackle underachievement. They are making effective use of the regular information they are receiving to ask pertinent questions.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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	3
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?	3	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	4	
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?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Malbank School and Sixth Form College, Nantwich, CW5 5HD

Thank you for making us welcome when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed meeting and talking with many of you. What you had to say helped us in reaching our judgements.

We found that the sixth form provides its students with a satisfactory standard of education. Sixth form students make satisfactory progress and most attain standards in line with their abilities. We were impressed with the range of enrichment activities available to all of you and how many of you participate in them.

We have, however, decided the school requires a 'Notice to Improve'. This will mean the school will be inspected again in about a year's time to see what improvements have been made. We have decided this because standards and achievement especially in Key Stage 4 have not been as high as they should be for a number of years, although there are signs of improvements in some areas. In order to bring about the necessary improvement we are asking the school to do the following:

- Raise standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 4
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least consistently good
- Ensure the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is more rigorous and effective.
- Improve the monitoring of the school's progress towards its targets to ensure standards and achievement can be evaluated with more accuracy.

Your school has some real strengths. It helps you develop into mature and confident young adults. It makes sure you have a very wide range of enrichment activities on offer in sports, the arts and travel. It also takes good care of you and is concerned for your safety and welfare.

We are confident that you will work hard with your teachers to make sure that the necessary improvements take place.