

# Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School and Specialist Science College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111428
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cheshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	310596
<b>Inspection date</b>	12 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Patrick Geraghty 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 category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1133
6th form	195
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Jackie Beard
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr D Oliver
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17 January 2005
<b>School address</b>	Selkirk Drive Holmes Chapel Crewe Cheshire CW4 7DX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01477 534513
<b>Fax number</b>	01477 534489

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## **Introduction**

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

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning, the curriculum, care, guidance and support and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, senior management team and students; observations of teaching and learning, checking students' work and school documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## **Description of the school**

This school serves a socially mixed, although prosperous, extensive rural community centred on the village of Holmes Chapel in Cheshire. Over 60% of students travel to and from school by bus, some from outside the school's 10 mile catchment area. The school caters for students across the ability range, although attainment on entry is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is well below the national average while the proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is average. Just over 3% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school became a specialist science college in 2003.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Standards are consistently high with a strong improvement trend which has been sustained for several years. Teaching is lively, purposeful and committed. Students bring a sense of excitement and enjoyment to their learning. Attendance and behaviour are outstanding. One student summed up the general attitude, confidently noting 'This in every sense is our school and our learning community.' Students are actively engaged in year councils, school leadership teams and a variety of extensive enrichment activities. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The headteacher has actively focused on the development of leadership roles and aspirational targets for staff and students alike and in so doing has enabled the development of a vibrant learning community. The integration of the Every Child Matters themes into all aspects of school life is exemplary and inspiring. The leadership and management of the school are outstanding.

Standards are very high and improving. Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 are consistently and significantly above national averages. In 2006/07, for example, Key Stage 3 results for English, mathematics and science at all levels were significantly above national averages. In 2006, 70% of students gained five GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics, and this level was maintained in 2007. Over a sustained period the school has demonstrated a strong improvement trend. Progress at both Key Stage 3 and 4 is very good and the most recent evidence indicates that this aspect is strengthening. Students' work is marked regularly with constructive comments identifying areas for further development. Challenging targets are set and progress monitored carefully. Attendance and punctuality rates are excellent. Students' behaviour is exemplary. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Internal observations show 90% of teaching and learning is good or better. Senior managers regularly take 'learning walks' through the school, observing lessons to pinpoint strengths and to ascertain where further support and coaching are needed. The 'learning walks' augment departmental observations and both inform staff development and the teaching and learning strategy. The sharing of good practice is embedded into the school culture. Teachers are good at conveying the excitement of their subject to students. Students respond to this with enthusiasm, high commitment and a sense of challenge and enjoyment. A wide variety of teaching strategies are used to challenge students and encourage their participation, including discussion and debate, group and paired work, role play and simulations, and student presentations. Lessons are well planned with excellent support materials. Classrooms are well resourced and there is good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote learning.

The school has improved the breadth and appropriateness of the curriculum since the last inspection. A Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) course in childcare has been successfully introduced. Another example of the school's commitment to a diversified curriculum is the link with Reaseheath Agricultural College. A group of students attend the college for a full day each week to develop their animal care and farming vocational skills. This is then augmented with a personalised curriculum at the school for the rest of the week. The programme has been running for over a year and has resulted in improved attendance and behaviour and better learning and skills application by these students. The Youth Achievement Award has been successful for other groups of students in developing their skills and attitudes. Issues raised at the last inspection around RE and citizenship are now largely resolved. However, the

school acknowledges that further curriculum improvements are required including the development of a fuller vocational curriculum at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students value the large variety of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. Participation in sports and cultural activities is high.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The Every Child Matters themes have been used to re-focus guidance, support and curriculum processes; they are woven into the quality systems and practice so that the school 'lives' the agenda in all that it does. This has been promoted by the creation of an 'inclusion hub' which incorporates a 'one stop shop' approach to student welfare. All issues around students' learning and welfare are monitored by a dedicated and professionally trained team who provide staff with up-to-date information and progress reports on every student. Tracking systems are effective. There is excellent and speedy support for students who are causing concern or in need of additional support. Transition and induction arrangements are well planned. The school works well and in close partnerships with all stakeholders and support agencies. Students settle into school life quickly. One Year 7 student spoke for all in saying, 'After a few weeks this place was just normal for me; it's a partnership, I am ambitious and the school is ambitious for me.'

Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding and he is ably supported by an excellent senior management team. The vision of the senior team, which places learning at the centre of all school policies and initiatives, is enthusiastically shared by staff and students. Leadership responsibility and aspirational targets for all are strongly promoted. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the outstanding contribution by the sixth formers to the whole school community. There is a comprehensive quality assurance system that results in accurate evaluation and development plans. Senior managers have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, are self-critical and constantly seek further improvement. However, the school's self-evaluation form is presently not fully integrated into this otherwise strong quality assurance system. There is excellent monitoring of progress. Communications with parents are generally good, although a small minority of parents raised poor communication as an area of concern in the parental questionnaires. Accommodation is good and well maintained. In particular the spacious and modern school restaurant and sixth form bistro offer an excellent lunch and breaktime environment. Governance is a strength. Governors have a clear commitment to the ethos and direction of the school and are very well-informed about students' achievements, the quality of teaching and learning, and financial matters. Governors assess their work against specific targets and act as critical friends to the school.

Science College specialist status has had a significant impact on the school. Other curriculum areas have integrated science themes, such as 'the planets' and debates on creation and cosmology, into their lessons. Specialist College status has impacted on the development of ICT in teaching and learning. The impact on science has been most dramatic, leading to the introduction of triple science, astronomy, and elements of the public understanding of science. Links have been developed, through the 'comet' project, with primary schools.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

Provision in the sixth form is good and leadership outstanding. The school has a well established and popular sixth form. A wide range of GCE A-level courses are offered. The school acknowledges the need to develop a wider vocational offer. There are highly effective quality assurance and tracking procedures to monitor student progress. Additional learning support

is good. Standards at GCE A level are well above national averages and students make good progress. Guidance and induction procedures are thorough. Careers and higher education advice is very good and a high percentage of students progress to higher education. There is a comprehensive tutorial programme. The leadership of the sixth form instils and encourages a commendable sense of responsibility within the students. Sixth form students make an outstanding contribution to the whole school and are excellent role models for younger students. There is a strong emphasis in the sixth form on leadership and students are involved in a wide range of whole-school activities including mentoring, chairing the individual year councils, taking assemblies and giving presentations to the whole school, and organising transition and induction days.

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

- Develop a wider vocational curriculum at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.



**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?	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	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?	1	1

<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.



**Annex A**

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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	

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**Annex B**

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

Thank you very much for welcoming the inspection team into your school recently. We greatly enjoyed talking with so many of you about your work, interests and how much you enjoy and give to your school. We found that your school is outstanding.

What we liked most was:

- the high standards that you achieve
- the excellent teaching you receive and your challenging and lively response to it
- your enthusiasm for learning
- your excellent behaviour
- the outstanding care, guidance and support you receive
- your excellent participation in sport and enrichment activities
- the outstanding contribution made to the whole school by the sixth form
- your exceptional contribution to a school which is an inclusive and vibrant learning community.

With your help your school now needs to:

- develop a wider vocational curriculum at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

We are sure that you will continue your enthusiasm for learning. On behalf of the inspection team I wish you well for your future education.