

Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College - A Specialist Mathematics and Computing School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111416
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325376
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Sue Harrison 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 (total)	1056
Sixth form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T Crotty
Headteacher	Ms S Lee
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
School address	Eaton Road Tarporley Cheshire CW6 0BL
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Age group	11–18
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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 located in the large village of Tarporley in Cheshire and serves a wide rural area. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Almost all students speak English as their first language and are of White British origin. Students' attainment on entry to the school spans the whole range of ability but is above average overall. The school gained specialist status in mathematics and computing in 2003 and reached the standard for becoming a high performing specialist school in June 2007. The school has a number of links with businesses and the local community as a result of its specialism: its dual use library is open to the public and adult education classes run on its site. It gained a second specialism in languages in April 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school because of the positive relationships between staff and students and managers' determination to bring about continuous improvement. The school's specialist status has had a major impact in creating a culture where students and staff are working together to reach increasingly challenging targets.

Examination results are above the national average and show an upward trend. In 2008, unvalidated examination results indicate that the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C was 71%, with 83% gaining five or more A* to C grades overall. Students make good progress in the majority of subjects. Since the last inspection, the school has taken very effective action to ensure the progress of boys matches that of girls. Teaching and learning are good in the majority of lessons and there is an increasing focus on staff development to bring about further improvement where necessary.

This is a happy school, where the relationships between students and between staff and students are overwhelmingly positive. The majority of parents are very supportive of the school. A minority of parents express concern about specific aspects of their child's education. The most common complaint concerns the arrangements for parents' evenings. As a result of this, the school has put in place a new system this year.

Arrangements to help students make the transition into the school are exemplary. Students' personal development is good and they make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school and the local community. They receive good care and support to help them make the most of their time in school and there are effective arrangements in place to support vulnerable students. The curriculum is good and is regularly reviewed to ensure it matches individual needs and national priorities.

The headteacher and senior leaders have a very clear understanding of what the school does well and the weaknesses to be addressed. There has been effective action to address issues identified at the last inspection and the school has good capacity to make further improvements. The school identifies curriculum leaders as key drivers in making further improvement. There has not yet been sufficient emphasis on sharing good practice between curriculum leaders, for example in teaching and in the implementation of the new assessment policy.

Partnership working is excellent, particularly in the context of the school's rural location. It has very good links with primary schools, local colleges and student support agencies. The school is very much at the hub of its local community and is developing increasingly effective links with local businesses.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students are very positive about their experience in the sixth form. Attendance is high and retention within courses is good. Teaching and learning are good in most lessons. Examination pass rates and the proportion of students gaining high grades are generally at or above the national average. Given the inclusive nature of the admission criteria to enter the sixth form, this represents good progress in the majority of subjects. However, unvalidated results in 2008 were not as good as in previous years. The school is analysing the reasons for this and an action plan is being developed. Aspects of academic guidance have been strengthened. Examples include the extension into the sixth form of the main school system for tracking students'

progress to help address any underperformance, and the introduction of a learning mentor role. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these measures.

The curriculum is good. The school offers a wide range of GCE AS and A level provision, including some applied courses. The school's specialism has led to a wider choice of courses in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Other new courses such as media studies are being introduced in response to changing needs and to ensure clear progression pathways from Key Stage 4. The school works very well in partnership with other providers to ensure students in Year 11 receive clear guidance about options available to them at the school and elsewhere. Pastoral support and personal development are both good. Students are developing effective work-related and citizenship skills through the curriculum, through their responsibilities within the school and through their excellent work in the wider community. A high proportion of students progress to their chosen course at university and guidance is good for those leaving to follow other routes. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the tracking of students' progress in the sixth form is rigorous and leads to effective action where necessary to address any underperformance.
- Improve the systems to share good practice between curriculum leaders.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The standard of students' work is well above the national average and examination results show an upward trend. In 2008, unvalidated examination results indicate that the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C was 71%, with 83% gaining five or more A* to C grades overall.

Students make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 and good progress overall during their time at the school. Actions taken since the last inspection have been successful in addressing the issue that boys were not making as much progress as girls and achievement data shows that this is no longer the case. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least as good progress as their peers and in some cases better.

The impact of the school specialism can be seen across the whole school in terms of student motivation and their achievement of increasingly challenging targets. It has also led to significant improvement in the progress students make in ICT, where examination results have improved dramatically and are now well above average. The school has a clear understanding of areas where further improvements can be made in students' achievements, for example in a minority of subjects in Years 10 and 11. It also has a good tracking system in place to identify potential underachievement of individual students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school has a warm, friendly and positive ethos. Students are polite and happy. They behave well in lessons and around the school. They relate well to each other and with staff. One student told us that 'the school is like a family' because they feel valued, safe and well cared for. They have good awareness of how to keep healthy and feel well equipped with the knowledge and skills required for successful future achievement. This is shown in their high take up of education at the end of Year 11.

The overwhelming majority of students enjoy coming to school and make an outstanding contribution to aspects of school life. For example, they are increasingly involved in working with staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning through the school's 'Outstanding Lesson' project.

Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. They enjoy working together to raise money for local, national and international charities. They respond very well to opportunities in class and through the good range of extra-curricular activities to develop relationships with each other and to work in teams. This helps to create a cohesive community. They are aware that all forms of bullying and racism are unacceptable and they are confident that, where such incidences occur, they are swiftly dealt with. However, the school recognises that it could do more to develop students' experiences of cultural diversity in Britain.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good with some examples of outstanding practice. Through focused training and discussion, the school has developed a shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning. 'Professional Learning Communities' have been created to develop and refine good practice. In the best lessons, planning is detailed and activities are organised carefully to achieve learning outcomes. The pace of learning is brisk; students have many opportunities to work in pairs and groups and are fully engaged in their learning. Behaviour is good. ICT is used well to promote learning. In these lessons, students are able to understand what they have achieved and can clearly see what they have to do to reach the next level. In other lessons, planning is not as sharp so that some opportunities to develop learning are missed. Some of these lessons are too teacher led and students are not encouraged sufficiently to think for themselves. The school has developed an assessment policy, which is designed to help students to understand what they need to do to improve. There are examples of effective practice, although the policy is still being implemented and it is not yet having sufficient impact on teaching and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and effectively meets the needs of students including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is responding well to national guidelines aimed at making the Key Stage 3 curriculum more flexible to meet individual need. The school's specialist status has helped to enhance the curriculum in a number of ways. One interesting example is work on the development of thinking skills which started in the mathematics department and is now helping students in other subjects.

There is an appropriate range of options available for Key Stage 4 students including a vocational pathway, offered partly in conjunction with a local further education college. The second specialism of modern foreign languages is helping to ensure a high take-up of languages at this key stage.

An effective programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education is offered which helps to promote awareness of safety, health and well-being.

Enrichment is strong, particularly the variety of visits and trips which are organised for students and the range of sporting and other physical activities on offer. Participation rates are monitored carefully and are high. Provision for literacy and numeracy is good and there are effective arrangements in place to deliver work-related learning. The provision of ICT courses has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good. Students very much enjoy their education and are active participants in the school community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good and contributes strongly to students' progress, enjoyment and well-being. The arrangements for settling students into school, and to ensure they manage change effectively throughout the different key stages, are outstanding. This is because staff give extensive time through well planned residentials for students to build excellent relationships with each other and with staff. Students tell us that it helps their self-confidence, enjoyment and achievement throughout the school.

All staff are involved in creating good levels of care and support. Systems are in place to ensure health, safety and child protection. The school keeps a close check on the welfare of vulnerable students and there are excellent links with outside agencies to support this work. The recent addition of the inclusion centre, known as 'SAFE', is helping to develop further the arrangements for care and support. One function of the centre is to create a quiet place for students in need of extra support.

Students are well informed about option choices, careers and course opportunities beyond school. There are regular reports to parents on students' progress. Students know their targets and are generally aware of what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior colleagues provide strong leadership. They demonstrate sharp awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a strong drive for continuous improvement. The views of parents, students and other stakeholders are sought and acted upon, for example parents' evenings are changing as a result of feedback received.

There has been good progress in addressing all the issues identified at the last inspection. The specialist college status in mathematics and computing is very well managed and is having a positive impact across the whole school. For example, the system to track students' progress, which was developed by the mathematics department, is now implemented successfully across the main school and is helping to drive up standards. Systems for the setting of challenging targets are robust in the main school and under development for the sixth form.

Curriculum leaders are enthusiastic and are seen as pivotal elements for further improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Although there are increasing opportunities for middle managers to lead whole school initiatives, there has not been sufficient sharing of good practice between curriculum leaders.

The inclusive ethos of the school, and the success of students of all abilities, confirm its strong commitment to equality of opportunity. The school promotes community cohesion well and is seen as a focal point within the local community. This is exemplified by the excellent links with

primary schools, the on-site community library and considerable involvement with charities, home and overseas.

Governors know and support the school well, constructively challenging senior and middle managers. They have worked well with the senior team to deal with issues identified in the previous inspection and ensure the school's finances are managed carefully and efficiently. The leadership of the school clearly demonstrates the capacity and determination to bring about further improvements.

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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?	2	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College – A Specialist Mathematics and Computing School, Tarporley, CW6 0BL

As you know, your school has recently been inspected. Thank you for giving us your views of the school during the inspection. I am writing to tell you about our findings.

We agree with the view of the majority of you and your parents that Tarporley continues to be a good school. There is a rising trend in examination results and, as many of you will know, last year's provisional examination results broke the school record when 83% of these students gained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C! For 71% of them this included getting A* to C in English and mathematics. We judged teaching and learning to be good or better in many lessons and that you make good progress in the majority of subjects during your time at the school. Achievements in the sixth form are also generally good, although the provisional examination results in 2008 were not as high as in previous years.

We were particularly impressed by your enthusiasm and enjoyment of school life, and by your contribution inside the school and in the local community. The majority of you work very well with the staff and there is a supportive and caring atmosphere in the school. I'm glad you enjoy the many trips and other activities that take place outside lessons.

We think the school is providing an interesting curriculum to try and meet individual needs and is working well with partners outside the school to support you and help you to make choices. The arrangements to help new students settle in are particularly impressive. You are developing a good range of personal qualities and skills to help you when you leave school.

The headteacher and senior leadership team have a very good understanding of what is good about the school and what can improve it further. We have asked them to make two particular improvements:

- to make sure that tracking of students' progress in the sixth form leads to effective action being taken where necessary to help those who might be underperforming
- to help curriculum leaders to share good practice in teaching and assessment across subject areas.