

Brine Leas High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111439
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325382
Inspection date	17 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Wareing 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 (total)	1057
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janet Furber
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Cliffe
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	Audlem Road Nantwich Cheshire CW5 7DY
Telephone number	01270 625663
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Introduction

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

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, aspects of teaching and learning and of leadership and management. Inspectors collected evidence from lesson observations, assessment data and documentation. Discussions were held with key staff, the chair and vice-chair of governors and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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

Brine Leas High School is situated in the market town of Nantwich in South Cheshire. It is popular within the community: there are more applications for places than the school can provide. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is well below the national average. Most students are of White British origin and very few students have a home language other than English. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. The school is located in an area of relative prosperity but there is some rural disadvantage. The school was designated as a specialist college of technology in 1998. A second specialism in languages was added in 2006 and a third in applied learning in 2008. The school has achieved the Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Brine Leas High School is an outstanding school. It provides a very happy learning environment in which students are helped to develop into exceptionally mature, confident and articulate young people. They consistently achieve exceptionally well.

In 2007, Year 9 students reached very high standards overall and made outstanding progress in the national tests in mathematics and science. Students' performance in their eight best GCSE subjects was also outstanding. The school's commitment to inclusion is shown by the fact that in 2007 almost all students in Year 11 gained a GCSE qualification, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

There is no significant underachievement at either key stage. Nevertheless, the school's highly effective systems for target setting and tracking students' progress have allowed very rapid intervention to reverse some small pockets of underperformance; for example, amongst some girls, middle ability boys and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school sets very challenging targets and met almost all of them in 2007. It is on track to meet all these targets in 2008.

Teaching is consistently good, with a significant proportion of outstanding lessons. This quality contributes to students' excellent achievement and to their visible enjoyment of lessons. Lessons are characterised by excellent behaviour, highly positive relationships and a sense of purpose that engages all students. Teachers' use of questions is skilled and allows activities to be exceptionally well matched to the needs of every student. Teaching assistants work very effectively with teachers to provide an excellent level of support to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, so that they progress at least as well as others, and sometimes better. Teachers' improved use of assessment information since the last inspection ensures that all students now know how well they are doing and exactly how to reach their next targets. In the outstanding lessons, the pace is more challenging and promotes greater independence and deeper thinking on the part of students.

Attendance is satisfactory. The great majority of students attend school very regularly. However, a small group of persistent non-attenders in Year 11 adversely affected overall levels of attendance in 2007. The school is making strenuous efforts this year to improve attendance to its previously good levels.

The curriculum is of outstanding quality. It is enhanced through the school's specialist status. Many improvements have been made since the last inspection. At Key Stage 3, all students now have a weekly lesson in information and communication technology (ICT). They also study drama and the school's language college status gives them the opportunity to learn two languages. As befits a technology and language college, all students in Years 10 and 11 take a technology and a language course. In addition, all follow GCSE courses in ICT and physical education. A wide variety of mathematics courses is available to challenge more able students, as well as extra-curricular study of astronomy, Spanish, Latin and psychology.

The school's applied learning specialist status promotes excellent joint provision, with local partners, of alternative courses for those students for whom some GCSE courses would not be appropriate. The support and checking on students' progress on off-site courses is extremely rigorous. A wide range of vocational courses is available to all who wish to follow them, including new Diploma routes.

There are many opportunities for visits, for example, to a school in Africa sponsored by the students, and to the First World War battlefields in Flanders. There are also local visits; for example, to theatres and mosques. Such visits provoke much mature reflection on the part of the students involved and strengthen their cultural and spiritual awareness. A strong feature of the school's provision is the links made in lessons between these extra-curricular visits and students' own experience. Students especially appreciate the extensive range of enrichment activities provided at lunchtimes and after school. The house system encourages very high levels of participation in sports, music, language and other activities and these contribute to students' confidence and respect for each other. A typical comment from Year 10 reflects many made to inspectors: 'You make friends with younger students in your house and realise that they can already do some things better than you. That makes you respect them.'

Students greatly value the many chances to take on responsibilities. They serve the school and its wider community well through membership of the school council and the Eco council. Students also organise charity fund raising and support younger students in a variety of 'buddy' schemes. These opportunities equip them very well to make an active contribution to the community. The school's focus on raising achievement ensures that students leave school very well prepared for their working life. The number of students who do not enter a course of further study, training or employment at the end of their time in school is exceptionally low. The school's work on healthy lifestyles is excellent. Students are very well informed about healthy eating and the dangers of substance abuse. They are made very aware of the need for safe practices around the school; for example, in workshops and laboratories.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. A parental comment reflects the views of many who completed questionnaires during the inspection: 'Brine Leas has been fantastic at inspiring our children to do well and encouraging them to want to achieve all round success.' The school's very close work with outside agencies provides students with an exemplary quality of ongoing care and support whenever they need it. Provision to support students' emotional health and for their academic guidance is exceptional. Procedures for child protection and arrangements for the safeguarding of students are very robust.

The leadership and management of the school are outstandingly successful in the impact that they have on students' achievement and personal development. The headteacher and closely-knit senior leadership team give the school a very clear sense of direction, energy and a culture of continuous improvement. The school's self-evaluation is honest and accurate, giving it a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Since the last inspection, systems for target setting have become much sharper and this has helped to drive improvement rapidly. Senior leaders support and empower middle managers to improve their departments by a rigorous process of departmental review.

The school's three areas of specialist status are very well managed and contribute much to the school's improvement. For example, specialist status has improved ICT facilities and enabled an excellent range of local partnerships to support primary languages initiatives, residential study courses for students and visits by expert professionals to enhance teaching and learning in departments.

Governance is excellent. The close involvement of governors in all aspects of school life is much appreciated by staff. They have detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are very confident in holding the school to account when necessary. The school's outstanding capacity to make further improvements is demonstrated by the high quality of its leadership

and management and the significant improvements since the last inspection. The school provides outstanding value for money in its outcomes for students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a wider range of strategies to improve attendance, especially in Year 11.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that the pace of more lessons is always challenging and promotes students' greater independence.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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
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 Brine Leas High School, Nantwich, CW5 7DY

I would like to thank you, on behalf of my colleague and myself, for the very warm welcome you all gave us when we inspected your school recently. We would particularly like to thank all those of you who gave up part of your lunchtime to tell us how you feel about your school. You told us how much you value taking part in the very wide range of sports, musical and language activities on offer at lunchtimes. It was good to hear that there is room for everyone to take part, through your house system.

I am very pleased to tell you that we found your school to be outstanding. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. We know how much you enjoy coming to school because the vast majority of you attend school very regularly, except for just a few Year 11 students.

We saw the great confidence and maturity that you develop, which help you to achieve excellent standards and make outstanding progress in your work. The good and often outstanding teaching and support that you receive and the wide range of subjects you can choose to study in Years 10 and 11 also contribute greatly to your success. The school works hard to give you opportunities to meet people from different cultures; for example, through contact with the African school that you sponsor and the visits to mosques. You have a real sense of responsibility towards each other. It was a pleasure to hear how keen older students are to look after younger ones; for example, by helping them as anti-bullying mentors or 'sum buddies' to improve their mathematics.

Since the last inspection, the staff have worked hard to improve teaching and learning and now give you clearer targets and advice on exactly how to improve your work. This has already helped many of you to make better progress.

We agree with the staff that the school should:

- find more ways of improving attendance, especially in Year 11
- make sure that more of your lessons give you chances to work and think things out by yourselves.

Thank you once again for your help during the inspection and best wishes for your future studies at Brine Leas High School.