

Neston High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111398
Local Authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	337678
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Angela Westington 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1566
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	305
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr R Chrimes
Headteacher	Mr Steve Dool
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 36 lessons, registration and tutor group sessions, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of the school's documentation, including: its self-evaluation; the school's improvement strategic plans; headteacher reports to the governing body; reports on the school's work by external agencies; a range of school policies, including those on safeguarding and health and safety; the school's monitoring reports on the quality of teaching and learning; its internal assessment and target-setting data; and the latest unvalidated national examination results.

Inspectors looked in detail at the provision for a small number of potentially vulnerable students. They also analysed 174 parental and 144 student questionnaires.

- Are all groups of students doing as well as they could do?
- How well does the school manage the imbalance of boys and girls to limit any adverse impact on provision and standards?
- Why have standards in English not been as good as those in mathematics?
- Have the strengths reported at the last inspection been sustained and/or developed further?

Information about the school

Neston High School is larger than average. It is a stable school with a lower than average percentage of students entitled to free school meals. There are few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is above average. There are more boys than girls in the school and in some year groups the imbalance is considerable. The school has specialist science and visual arts college status. The school has a number of awards including: International Schools Advanced Award; Healthy Schools Award; Sports Mark Award; Inclusion Quality Mark; Eco Schools Green Flag Status; Learning Outside the Classroom Award; and Investors in People. It has recently been recognised as a Teacher Learning Academy Centre.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Neston High School is a good school. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and strong leadership. It has some outstanding features, particularly in the excellent quality of the partnerships it has forged with parents and other partners. It has sustained many of the strengths identified at the previous inspection and has developed others. The extent to which students contribute to the school and wider community is excellent and in all other respects students' outcomes are good. Boys and girls are doing as well as each other and no one group of students is achieving less well than the rest. The quality of teaching and the curriculum are both good and the effectiveness of the school's care, guidance and support for students is outstanding. Overwhelmingly, students report being happy at school and parents express high levels of satisfaction with the school's work.

The school's partnerships with other agencies to promote students' learning and well-being are excellent as is its engagement with parents. In all other areas of its work, leadership and management of the school are good. Leadership and management of the sixth form are also good.

Since the last inspection, there has been a sustained effort by school leaders and staff to improve further the academic results achieved by students. Governors challenged the school, for example, over its English results at Key Stage 4. As a result of the actions taken the proportion of students gaining a good pass in English at GCSE has increased and the most recent national test results for English are on a par with those for mathematics. Examination results in the school's specialist arts subjects at GCSE and A level continue to be excellent. Progress in the science specialist subjects is satisfactory, and examination results are moving closer to the targets that have been set. In the sixth form, the proportion of students gaining grades A and B at GCE A level is rising, although overall test results remain broadly average.

Leaders are highly committed to developing and improving the school further. The school has well-embedded systems for collecting and analysing an extensive range of data on the performance and progress made by students. The data is used well to set challenging targets for individuals and groups. However, other forms of monitoring are less well developed or rigorous and, consequently, the school's evaluation of some aspects of its work is over generous. Examples of this include the school's judgements about the quality of teaching and learning across the school which, although good overall, are variable, and the quality of the provision and students' progress in the sixth form. Despite the steady improvements in some aspects of the sixth form, students' progress remains satisfactory overall.

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Nevertheless, the school's ability to maintain and improve outcomes for all groups of students, especially academic outcomes, whilst initiating and securing new developments is clear evidence of its good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make use of rigorous, evaluative monitoring to gain a more secure view of the quality of learning in lessons
- Increase the number of good or better lessons, in order to:
 - - improve progress in the sixth form
 - - reduce the variability in teaching throughout the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' above average attendance rates and their participation in school and community events are strong indicators of their enjoyment of school and positive relationships. In discussion, students told inspectors they enjoy their lessons, appreciate the school's attractive environment and like the range of activities that they can participate in. Students' behaviour is good, in lessons and around the school, and this contributes positively to their learning. They work well in lessons, are attentive and motivated. Students make most progress in lessons where the quality of teaching is good or better but even in lessons which are not as good, they behave well and make satisfactory progress. Their good attitude to work is a key factor in the progress they make in lessons. As a result of the school's strong focus on valuing every student, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, all groups make similar progress to their peers.

Standards are above average by the end of Key Stage 4, particularly as a result of the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics over recent years and, more recently, in the proportion gaining two A* to C grades in science. The provisional results for 2009 show a further improvement in the proportion of students gaining good passes in a number of subjects. Mathematics has consistently been a high performing subject and this remains the case. The undoubted success story though is art and design, one of the school's specialist subjects, in which almost all students who enter the examination gain a good GCSE pass. In 2008, over a third gained A* or A. Given the students' starting points at age 11, the school's examination results represent good progress overall.

Students make a very strong contribution to the school and local and wider community and they participate in a wide range of events such as the 'Eco Picnic'. They take all roles and responsibilities very seriously. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are equally involved in taking on responsibilities. Many students are involved in fundraising activities, for example, raising several thousand pounds for 'Water Aid'. Students are knowledgeable about the factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle and very many of them take up the opportunities offered to them through the school's wide range of sporting and outdoor activities. Parents and students say that students are safe

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in the school. Those students that met with inspectors were confident that there was an adult in the school that they would be able to approach should they be anxious or worried about something.

Students show respect towards others and are considerate and thoughtful. Their social development is outstanding especially, for example, in the case of those who participate in conflict-solving activities among other students in their role as peer mentor. Students enjoy discussing moral issues in their humanities lessons. They are well prepared for the world of work; parents and students confirm this. The new range of courses, work experience and activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award go a long way to ensuring that students feel well equipped for the next phase of their life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

An outstanding range of out-of-school-hours opportunities supports students' academic progress and personal development. Recent developments in the Key Stage 3 curriculum, such as the Year 8 'themed learning' on Africa, which combined geography, religious studies and art and design are proving to be exciting and interesting for

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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students. A wide range of courses are provided at Key Stage 4 with very good opportunities for vocational education and pathways into education post-16. The school's specialist status in art has been used well to develop and support improvements in other areas of the curriculum, for example, in design and technology. A recently revised programme of personal, social and health education is supporting students' development well. There is much that is new and developing but the changes have not yet resulted in outstanding academic outcomes. The school manages the imbalance in the numbers of boys and girls well, being flexible in the composition and numbers of sets, and introducing boy or girl only sets for particular subjects if necessary.

The quality of teaching is good overall but it is variable. Inspectors observed some teaching that was outstanding, but mostly teaching that was good or satisfactory. The most common feature of the less effective teaching was the over domination of the lesson by the teacher, which limited the opportunity for students to participate more fully, making them passive learners. In the better lessons observed, students were more actively involved in their own learning and assessment. Scrutiny of the school's own record of lesson observations revealed too much emphasis on the teaching and too little emphasis on the quality and extent of learning taking place in lessons.

The school's procedures for the care, support and guidance of students are excellent. Detailed academic and pastoral records are maintained. Transition arrangements from the feeder primary schools begin in Year 5 and are comprehensive. Many students in Year 7 reported that they had participated in the summer events held at the school prior to entry in Year 7 and, consequently, felt well prepared for the move. The transitions from Key Stage 3 to 4 and from Key Stage 4 to the sixth form are well managed. Students report that they are well informed about their options.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is no doubt that the headteacher and leaders and managers have ambitious plans for the school and that they communicate their vision well. Staff morale is high and there is a happy buzz about the school. Managers at all levels, including governors, are focused on continuous improvement. They ensure that their challenge for staff is matched with professional support: hence the development of the Teacher Learning Academy. The impact of this combination of challenge and support is beginning to be seen in the improvement in academic results.

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Governors are aware of their responsibility to the potentially most vulnerable groups of students and take their duties in respect of equality of opportunity seriously. For example, they ensure that no student is barred from participating in activities which require expensive equipment, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, for lack of funds.

The school makes a strong contribution to promoting community cohesion. It holds a prominent position in the local community and it knows the community well. Its excellent links within the locality and its outstanding range of partnerships have resulted in the students being involved in an ever greater number and variety of activities which enable them to work alongside other groups. The school has identified the need though to broaden students' understanding of the diversity of Great Britain.

The school's engagement with parents is excellent. Attendance at parents' evening is high and the parental questionnaires were overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work.

All statutory requirements are met in respect of safeguarding. Clear management responsibilities are in place as are the relevant policies and procedures. Child protection training is updated annually and staff are aware of the procedures to follow in the event of disclosure by a student.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students' achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Attainment in A level and vocational examinations is broadly in line with national averages. Given the students'

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prior attainment at GCSE, these results demonstrate satisfactory progress. Students make outstanding progress in the broad range of A level subject options within the school's visual arts specialism. Large numbers of students take advantage of opportunities for enriching their studies or contributing to the community through, for example, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, acting as a student leader or mentoring younger students.

The courses on offer are well matched to the needs of students, although plans to collaborate with other local sixth-form providers to provide an even broader range of opportunities are at an early stage. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory. Examples of good teaching were seen during the inspection but, in general, lessons give fewer opportunities than in the main school for students to be actively involved in their own learning and assessment. Relationships with teachers are good, and students appreciate the time and support offered to them in and out of lessons. Well-implemented measures for monitoring progress and providing targeted support help students to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students feel fully involved in decisions relating to their progress and working environment.

The sixth form is well led and managed. Recent years have seen a trend of improved examination results, particularly in the proportion of students gaining A and B grades. In addition, the gap in achievement in 2008 between students following arts courses and those following science courses was successfully and rapidly narrowed. However, the school should do more to analyse retention data and give more focus to developing teaching skills that are directly related to teaching in the sixth form.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

163 parents returned questionnaires. Of these, a minority expressed the view that they were not kept well enough informed about their child's progress. Inspectors looked at this and found otherwise. The school provides as much information as would normally be expected. A very small number of parents of students in Year 7 expressed their concerns about the arrangements made for students new to the school who have very particular needs. The inspection team pursued this matter in some depth and reported their findings to the governors and leadership team at the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Neston High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 174 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1261 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	91	44	104	50	6	3	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	86	42	110	53	0	0	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	81	40	99	48	6	3	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	40	100	49	5	2	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	92	45	93	45	3	1	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	67	33	106	52	12	6	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	48	23	124	60	16	8	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	74	36	105	52	1	0	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	82	40	106	52	3	1	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	76	37	108	53	5	2	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	57	28	108	53	7	3	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	93	45	93	45	2	1	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	116	56	79	38	2	1	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Inspection of Neston High School, CH64 9NH

As you know, my colleagues and I recently inspected your school. Thank you for making us welcome and helping us find our way around your school. Thank you especially to those of you who gave up your time to talk to us.

It was clear to us that you are very proud of your school. You should be. We agree with your comments that Neston High is a good school. In fact, we came to the conclusion that it is a good school with some outstanding features.

These are the particular strengths that we identified

- You contribute outstandingly well to your school and your community. Many of you participate in a wide range of activities and take on important roles and responsibilities, for example, being peer mentors and buddies. We think this is hugely important, so well done to you all.
- The school looks after you extremely well and takes your well-being seriously.
- The school takes its relationship with your parents and carers very seriously too and is outstandingly good at engaging with them for your benefit.
- The school is exceptionally good at developing partnerships and links with a wide range of agencies in order to improve your studies and to promote your well-being.
- The quality of teaching overall is good and you make good progress and reach above average standards in your work.

We have asked your headteacher and the school staff to look more closely at two aspects of their work. First, we would like them to monitor lessons so that they have a much clearer view about your progress on a more frequent basis and so that they can increase the overall proportion of good and better lessons. Second, we would like them to improve the progress made by students in the sixth form.

We are confident that you will continue to work with the staff at Neston High School to make your school even better than it is now.

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