

# Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111396
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	378295
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 March 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Michael Cladingbowl 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>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	449
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Keith Butcher
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sue Yates
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 March 2009
<b>School address</b>	Melbourne Road Blacon Chester CH1 5JH
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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Michael Cladingbowl  
Lynne Selkirk  
Neil MacKenzie

Her Majesty's Inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 37 lessons, taught by 34 teachers, and observed the behaviour of the students in and around the school. Meetings were held with groups of students, governors and staff. Inspectors took account of 188 responses to student, staff and parental questionnaires, listened to Year 7 students read, scrutinised the work in the students' books and considered a wealth of other documentation provided by the school. No responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were available.

## Information about the school

Blacon High School is a smaller than average-sized secondary school with 449 students on roll. Students are nearly all White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is higher than average. The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is higher than average as is the proportion who are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school is situated outside of Chester city centre and serves an area which includes higher levels of deprivation than are typically found nationally. The school is a Specialist Sports College, holds the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Inclusion Mark, is an Investor in People and is part of the Blacon Educational Village. The school was a National Challenge School until 2010 and met the government's floor standards (minimum standards expected by the government) in 2011. The headteacher was appointed in September 2010 following a two year period in which there had been three previous headteachers.

**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

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>

## Key Findings

- This is a satisfactory and improving school. It is not good because inconsistencies in teaching, achievement and behaviour have not been eliminated.
- The school has improved significantly since the last inspection. GSCE results are improving, although raising attainment in English and mathematics remains a priority for the school. The number of students who achieve five or more GSCE or equivalent A\* to C passes is higher than in similar schools but weak basic skills still hinder students' progress. Strong partnerships with local primary schools help students make satisfactory or better progress after they join the school in Year 7. Students who are disabled and those who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall.
- School leaders and managers set high expectations for teachers and students and monitor their performance closely. Regular checks on teaching help to ensure that students make at least satisfactory progress but not all policies agreed by senior leaders are translated into classroom practice. Targets for some pupils could be more challenging.
- Teaching is satisfactory. It is most effective when it is energetic and confident, resulting in the students being enthusiastic and resilient learners. In some lessons, teaching lacks variety. Recent appointments have strengthened the quality of teaching across the school.
- The students' conduct in lessons and around school is usually good but attitudes to learning vary. Students feel safe in the school and they are well cared for. A small number of school action plus students need to improve their attendance.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' achievement, including in English and mathematics, further by:
  - strengthening opportunities immediately to improve speaking and listening, basic writing and presentation skills
  - setting even more ambitious targets by the end of this year, particularly for those students who join the school with below average levels of attainment
  - ensuring that all students who are supported at school action plus attend regularly so that any poor attendance does not adversely affect their progress.
  
- Promote even better attitudes to learning by:
  - extending immediately the regular monitoring of conduct to include a greater focus on attitudes to learning
  - sharing more frequently best practice in planning for learning activities that excite, interest and engage the students.
  
- Strengthen the impact of leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that all middle leaders work vigorously with staff to improve the quality of learning in classrooms, including by implementing all agreed policies, and review this each half term.
  
- Develop the quality of teaching immediately by:
  - promoting basic skills more routinely in all lessons
  - giving greater daily guidance to students about how to improve their work as part of routine marking
  - creating more varied opportunities for learning in lessons.

## Main Report

### Achievement of pupils

GCSE examination results have risen since the last inspection. The proportion of students achieving five or more GSCE or equivalent A\* to C grade passes, including English and mathematics, has risen from 25% in 2009 to 42% in 2011. While these results remain below the national average, the students make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11 from what are lower than average starting points.

Results in some vocational GCSE courses are strong and have boosted the proportion of students achieving five or more GSCE or equivalent A\* to C grade passes to 85%, which compares very well with all schools nationally. Until recently, few students studied for five or more academic qualifications but greater numbers in Year 10 are studying geography, history, a modern foreign language and triple science, which gives those students greater opportunities to achieve across more subjects. While more girls than boys are in the higher-attaining sets, there are few notable differences between the achievement of boys and girls, or between any ethnic

groups. In Key Stage 3, boys do marginally less well in English. Parents and carers are satisfied with the progress that their children are making.

Progress and the quality of learning in lessons are at least adequate, including for students who are disabled and those who have special educational needs. The quality of learning in students' books and portfolios reflects the students' levels of prior attainment and show at least adequate or better progress. However, weak basic skills in presentation and writing limit the rate of progress for some students. Moreover, students' involvement in lessons is sometimes inhibited by a lack of skill in speaking and listening. Taken together, these weaknesses in basic skills can undermine students' resilience and confidence in their ability to learn.

Effective intervention through one-to-one study support, the accelerated reading programme, specific literacy lessons, and support in the inclusion centre have been instrumental in ensuring that the lowest and highest-attaining students, including those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable students and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, make satisfactory or better progress. Year 7 students who struggle most with reading are identified early and given extra help, which enables them to become more confident and wider-ranging readers. Irregular attendance adversely affects the rate of progress for a small number of the school action plus students.

### **Quality of teaching**

Teaching is satisfactory. Much of the teaching is good, and in a few cases outstanding, but too often it lacks variety and this leads to disinterest in learning. Students and parents and carers are positive about the quality of teaching in the school and comment that it has improved although some lessons fail to excite, engage and interest the students.

Generally, lessons are planned to meet the needs of all students, including those who have special educational needs and the higher-attaining students. Most lessons are taught with enthusiasm and an evident desire for the students to succeed. In the better lessons, often characterised by the teacher's abundant energy and confidence, the students respond with excitement and curiosity, and their progress and enjoyment are palpable. A singing lesson for Year 7 students, for example, caught and kept the students' attention remarkably well. The lesson encouraged students to find their voice in a well-structured, fun and rich activity, making a range of references to different cultural traditions along the way. Similarly, Year 10 students of history were encouraged by a skilful blend of subject knowledge and questioning to use knowledge about post First World War American economics to reflect on the world of work, which led to visible gains in their confidence and understanding as the lesson developed.

When lessons focus overly on what students will do rather than on how they will learn, they can lead to a mismatch between the learning objective and the lesson activity. In a few lessons, teaching is too focused on controlling the students' behaviour. Learning in these lessons is only satisfactory and often the teachers work harder than the students. Not all teachers routinely promote better basic skills but

this must become commonplace if the students' learning is to accelerate to match the school's ambition for the students.

Assessment is used adequately to support learning. A sturdy system to track the students' progress against their targets is in place across the school but teachers do not use it always when planning the detail of lessons for individual students. Routine marking often praises the students' effort rather than describing what it is that they need to do to improve and the targets set for lower-attaining students are sometimes too low. Not all lessons end with an opportunity to reflect on what has been learnt.

Some teaching assistants provide very good support, for example, intervening at the point of composition in a Year 11 English writing lesson, but in a few lessons they do much of the work for the students instead of encouraging them to think, speak or write for themselves.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory. The school is an orderly community and students feel safe and well cared for. All of the Year 10 students spoken to during the inspection praised the school for what they described as an improvement in the students' behaviour since the last inspection. Other students in the school agree that behaviour is usually at least satisfactory. At break and lunch times students get on well with each other and are polite and friendly. In their responses to the questionnaires sent out at the time of the inspection, nearly all parents, carers and staff were satisfied with behaviour in the school and many commented that it had improved. These mainly positive views of students, staff and parents and carers are supported by a steady decline in recorded instances of poor behaviour since the last inspection.

A few parents and carers commented that poor behaviour sometimes leads to disruption in lessons but where this does occur it is dealt with swiftly. In a few lessons, negative attitudes to learning lead to minor disruption and this means that students make slower progress than they could. Any known incidents of bullying are reported on fully, and taken seriously, including cyber and homophobic bullying. Careful discussion with the students involved, and the parents or carers, help to make sure that it is not repeated, that students feel safe to express themselves, and that those who have bullied understand the impact of their actions. Consequently, instances of bullying are rare. Some of the students, whose circumstances make them most vulnerable, spoke convincingly about the school's capacity to support them sensitively if they are treated unkindly.

Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. The rate of attendance is in line with the figure for similar schools, as is the figure for the number of days lost to exclusion, which has fallen steadily since 2010/11. The rate of persistent absenteeism has fallen by a third and is in line with the national figure for similar schools.

## Leadership and management

The headteacher and the senior team have set a strong direction for the school, which is grounded in high expectations and ambition for all the students. Governors, staff, parents, carers and students have confidence in the school's vision, *Success Through Partnership*, which the headteacher has established throughout and outside the school.

Strong and well-organised systems monitor most aspects of the school's work, including the students' achievement, the quality of teaching and the students' behaviour. Senior and middle leaders review the quality of teaching and the students' work regularly and action plans are set to bring about further improvement. Following performance reviews, many teachers have improved their practice and some new teachers have been appointed. Training is generally well targeted, although not all middle leaders have made sure that key school-wide policies are implemented fully, for example, in relation to marking work, setting and recording homework in students' journals, and reviewing learning at the end of lessons. Recent improvements to the curriculum mean that subjects offered to students in Year 10 and Year 11 meet the students' needs and Year 7 students benefit from an adjusted curriculum that emphasises literacy. Aspects of the students' personal development are good, particularly their social and moral development, although spiritual and cultural development have less prominence.

Strong partnerships with local primary schools ensure that strengths and weaknesses in students' prior attainment are known when students start at the school, particularly those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, although the school has not ensured that lessons systematically improve basic skills for all the other students. With this exception, senior and middle leaders have a coordinated and determined approach to school improvement and this has led to better achievement, teaching and behaviour. While inconsistencies remain, there is strong capacity for further improvement

Governors are well informed and able to offer friendly but critical advice to the school. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and leaders and managers promote equality and tackle discrimination as part of the regular monitoring of students' progress, race equality incident and bullying logs.



## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



8 March 2012

Dear Students

**Inspection of Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College, Chester, CH1 5JH**

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when we visited your school. We enjoyed speaking with you, and reading and listening to your views. Your school is satisfactory but we agree with you that it is improving.

We were particularly impressed by the work done in the school to improve examination results by making sure that lessons are not disturbed by poor behaviour and by helping teachers to plan lessons that you all enjoy and can do well in. We know you want to your school to be good. It could be if:

- even more of you did well in lessons and in examinations, including in English and mathematics, and by working hard at your speaking, writing and presentation skills
- you always remembered to ask teachers what it is you need to do to improve your work and your teachers have been asked to set you even more challenging targets and to show you how to achieve them
- all of you had very positive attitudes to learning in every lesson and teachers can help you by checking on this more carefully and by making sure that all lessons interest and excite you.

I look forward to hearing about how well you get on with doing all this.

Yours sincerely

Michael Cladingbowl  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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