

Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College

Melbourne Road, Blacon, Chester, Cheshire, CH1 5JH

Inspection dates

5–6 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Whilst attainment and progress is improving, not enough students are doing as well as they could, especially the most-able.
- Not enough teaching is consistently good and outstanding. Some lessons do not ensure that the needs of all students are taken into consideration and that the level of challenge is appropriate.
- Students are not given enough opportunities to find things out for themselves, develop their ideas and deepen their understanding.
- The opportunities for students to extend their writing need to be further developed
- Strategies being implemented by leaders to improve teaching and progress have not yet resulted in consistently good achievement for all students.
- The way in which leaders evaluate their performance is not sufficiently linked to final outcomes for all students.
- The attendance of a small group of students is not good enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and governors are determined to improve the school further. They are ambitious and have high expectations.
- The progress that students are making is improving as a result of better teaching and consistent policies introduced by leaders, especially the headteacher.
- In 2013, students supported by the pupil premium and known to be eligible for free school meals achieved better GCSE grades than all other students in the school in English and mathematics.
- There is some outstanding teaching, notably in physical education, history, information and communication technology (ICT) and Spanish.
- Behaviour is good and students feel safe. Students show a positive attitude to their lessons and disruptions are rare. Students are polite and respectful to adults.
- The curriculum now ensures that all students are on appropriate courses, receive targeted support and that they develop skills to help them progress and make the right choices.
- Teaching assistants are effective, ensuring the progress of the students that they support.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 30 part-lessons taught by 30 different teachers. Joint observations of lessons were also carried out in partnership with three members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders, heads of subject departments and a selection of staff. Inspectors also met with groups of students of differing ages and abilities. A meeting was also held with the educational consultant who supports the school on behalf of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including information and work showing students' progress and attainment, school improvement plans, monitoring documentation and records related to behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors were unable to take into account the views of parents as insufficient responses were made to the on-line questionnaire, (Parent View). One parent did contact the inspection team to express their view. Questionnaires were completed by 35 members of staff.

Inspection team

Derek Davies, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mary Liptrot

Additional Inspector

Pamela Hemphill

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Blacon High School is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children of service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well below the national averages.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school makes limited use of alternative provision with West Cheshire College and one independent provider, Adventure Playground.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, ensuring that students consistently make at least good progress, and more students make even better progress, by:
 - providing activities that match the needs of all students, especially the most-able
 - all teachers having high expectations of what students can achieve, enabling them to learn for themselves and manage their own learning
 - giving students more opportunities to develop and extend their writing.
- Further strengthen leadership and management, at all levels, by accurately monitoring and evaluating how well they are doing, sharpening their focus on the impact and outcomes for all students.
- Continue to work with the specific groups of students' families that are having an adverse effect on attendance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because, whilst some students make good progress, not enough students are doing as well as they could, especially in English and mathematics.
- Over the last three years, including the school's unvalidated 2013 results, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at A* to C, including English and mathematics, has improved. Whilst GCSE passes are below the national average, for some students, taking into account their starting points, they have made good progress, but this is not consistent.
- The proportion of the most-able students making very good progress is well below the national average and was even lower in 2013.
- The gap between the performance of boys and girls, who do better, is greater than that seen in most schools.
- Students supported by the pupil premium and known to be eligible for free school meals in 2013 achieved better GCSE grades than all other students in the school in English and mathematics. This shows that the school is successfully closing any gaps in performance for this group of students and promotes equality of opportunity.
- From their starting points, students achieve particularly well in art and science.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs supported by a statement of special educational needs have not always made particularly good progress compared to other students. This is improving in Key Stage 3 due to appropriate support and teachers identifying these students in their planning and matching activities to their needs.
- The progress that students make from their starting points is strongest in Key Stage 3, with the exception of the most-able students.
- Students who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium receive additional support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, there have been significant improvements in their ability to read and many often make rapid progress, sometimes beyond the level that would be expected for their actual age.
- The school encourages reading across the curriculum as well as intensive support programmes to develop reading skills. Registration time is used to positively promote reading within Key Stage 3.
- The information provided by systems to monitor how well students are doing gives a clear view of the progress of all students. This information is also used widely by teachers and other leaders to identify next steps.
- Information and guidance has improved for students, also now involving outside agencies and the local college. This ensures that students are prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Early entry to GCSE examinations in English and mathematics ensure that students are entered for examinations appropriately so that they achieve their best.
- The school has reviewed courses taken in other establishments and now provide most courses within the school. The few students taking courses outside the school receive good support and generally achieve well.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because not enough lessons are good or better.
- Too often all students are provided with the same work and teachers do not plan sufficiently for the progress of all students, especially the most-able.
- Teachers do not always provide enough opportunities for students to find things out for themselves. As a result, this does not enable students to develop fully their ability to learn by themselves. Likewise, the level of challenge for the most-able students is inconsistent.
- Teaching assistants play an important role in the learning of specific students. They are clearly

integrated into lessons and support and challenge students so that they are able to progress.

- In the best lessons, where sometimes outstanding teaching was seen, teachers have high expectations of what they want students to achieve. These lessons are planned very well and teachers make clear to students what they are going to learn. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and use questioning effectively to encourage students to think for themselves and develop their understanding. In these lessons, students are keen to learn and make good progress.
- The use of student leaders, as seen in physical education, was excellent. Students planned lessons and delivered key skills to small groups of other students. Student leaders have also been involved in the training of teaching assistants.
- Where students are made to think for themselves, such as in a history lesson based on the rise of Nazism, students are deeply involved in their learning and develop skills at a much higher level. In less effective lessons, teachers fail to develop these learning skills sufficiently.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are promoted well in most subjects. The marking for literacy is generally consistent across the school, although students do not always follow up as expected.
- Written feedback to students is consistent, although the quality is sometimes variable. Leaders do regularly monitor the quality of work in students' books and ensure that staff are aware of the school's expectations.
- In some lessons observed, there were very good opportunities for students to discuss their views, but there are missed opportunities where students could develop their communication skills.
- Students' written work does not always provide sufficient challenge as well as opportunities to extend their writing and develop key skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students have a very positive attitude and are proud of the improvements in their school. Students are polite and well-mannered and demonstrate a great deal of respect for all those involved in the school.
- Students report that they feel very safe in school and have appreciated the care and support from staff. They have a good awareness about all types of bullying, including racism and homophobia; students understand how to keep themselves safe, supported by clear programmes and assemblies, such as those for e-safety and the school's confidential on-line system for students being able to record any concerns.
- Exclusions, as a result of alternative strategies used by the school, have reduced significantly, although further action is still required for a small number of students to ensure that they develop consistently positive attitudes to their learning.
- Behaviour management policies are used consistently by all staff and are seen by the students as being fair, with appropriate rewards.
- Staff and students all indicate that the school has improved because of the improvement in behaviour. Incident records used by the school to track attendance, exclusion and behaviour logs show clearly how behaviour has improved and what the school still needs to focus on further.
- In some lessons, students are not actively involved in their learning and fail to recognise that their progress would improve if they participated more.
- The school provides opportunities for students to develop as responsible individuals, such as student leaders or members of the student council.
- Attendance is not good enough because it is adversely affected by a small number of families. Strategies used by the school for these families need to be strengthened.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because, whilst there have been improvements, progress for certain groups of students is not good enough.
- Not all leaders accurately evaluate the impact of the school's work, balancing success in some areas with improvements that are still needed. Outcomes are not always measured critically and realistically against national averages.
- The headteacher has already secured significant improvements due to her resolute determination for the school to be successful. She is highly effective and, regardless of her uncompromising standards, has ensured that staff, students and key partners work together to achieve her ambitions for the school.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is creating a shared commitment from all staff to improve and learn from the best practice within the school. Joint lesson observations undertaken during the inspection indicate senior leaders' judgements of teaching are accurate.
- Leaders have reviewed how targets are set for students and they are now based on making at least good progress. Targets for those students supported by the pupil premium and known to be eligible for free school meals provide a high degree of challenge.
- The development of heads of subject departments is leading to greater effectiveness and consistency in how the school makes improvements.
- Improvement plans identify the correct priorities demonstrating that leaders are aware of the next stages of improvement. The systems in place for creating these plans are robust and involve all leaders.
- Teachers have professional targets as part of the school's performance management process that are linked to the progress pupils make and the new Teacher Standards. Training is regular and generally supportive. The mentoring of new staff is robust and ensures they have continuous support in the early stages.
- The school has changed its curriculum so that it now ensures that all students have the appropriate support and pathways that are relevant based on students' potential. There are opportunities for students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills within the curriculum.
- The science curriculum now provides a range of options to cater for all students.
- The school works well with local primary schools as part of the Blacon Education Partnership. This has supported transition to secondary school and enabled the school to build on the work carried out in the primary schools, such as by the sharing of data.
- The local authority, via an external consultant, is aware of the successes of the school and the areas for improvement. There is a need for more accurate reference to national expectations to ensure that the school has a realistic view of its performance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a clear understanding of the performance of the school, particularly in terms of:
 - the school's systems for checking the progress of those students known to be eligible for the pupil premium
 - the differences that the Year 7 catch-up premium has made to how students read and write
 - how the performance of staff is managed.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	111396
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	426183

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation Trust
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Peachey
Headteacher	Mrs S Yates
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2012
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