



# Blacon High School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 111396  
**LEA** Cheshire  
**Inspection number** 278679  
**Inspection dates** 11 January 2006 to 12 January 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ms Susan Wareing HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Melbourne Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Blacon
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		Chester, Cheshire CH1 5JH
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01244 371 475
<b>Number on roll</b>	587	<b>Fax number</b>	01244 374 279
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr K Butcher
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 February 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr J Dykes

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

Blacon High School is a smaller than average mixed 11-16 comprehensive school. It has recently acquired specialist sports status with art as a second specialism. The school population is relatively stable, with few minority ethnic pupils or pupils whose first language is believed not to be English. The school serves an area of marked social disadvantage with more pupils than average entitled to free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also much higher than the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 3**

Although the school considers its overall effectiveness to be good, inspectors judge that it is satisfactory. Its strengths include the positive relationships within the school and with the wider community. Pupils and parents are generally supportive of this small school where members of staff know their individual pupils extremely well and most teachers are skilful in managing pupils' behaviour. However, attendance remains lower than the national average and exclusion rates remain high.

Raw standards at both Key Stages are below average, but in 2005 there was an improvement in grades A\* to C at GCSE and progress at Key Stage 4 was significantly above average. Good analysis is carried out of information on pupils' educational progress. Much could now be gained from the earlier use of this information to raise standards across the whole school. The quality of teaching and learning seen by inspectors was satisfactory overall with a significant number of good features. The level of challenge offered during lessons observed, especially to more able pupils, was too variable. The vocational pathway is not currently open to a wide enough range of pupils in Key Stage 4. A period of acute instability in staffing in 2004/05 hindered the progress of Key Stage 3 pupils, especially in English and science. However the school has worked hard for the improvement in achievement at Key Stage 4 since the last inspection.

The school is rightly proud of its recent success in gaining specialist sports status. This is beginning to contribute to the school's capacity to improve through the partnerships it is fostering. It is also contributing to the value for money which the school offers, which is satisfactory overall.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Sharpen the monitoring and evaluating of all its improvement activities, so that intended outcomes for pupils' are clearer and easier to measure, in order to raise standards more quickly, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Ensure that all pupils for whom it is appropriate may follow a vocational pathway.
- Implement securely and effectively the new strategy to improve attendance.
- Reduce the number of exclusions.
- Seek, through the school's developing partnerships, further ways of involving parents and governors more fully in the life of the school.
- Ensure that in planning for improvement, whole school initiatives such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum are brought together into a coherent whole in order to drive improvement forward at a faster pace.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' achievement and standards are judged to be satisfactory by the school. Inspectors agree that achievement overall is satisfactory, although raw standards are below average at both Key Stages. Pupils enter the school with standards that are well below the national average and their Key Stage 3 and GCSE results in 2005, compared with all schools, were similarly well below average. However, the progress of Key Stage 4 pupils is significantly above average and in the top five percent of schools nationally. In 2005, although Key Stage 3 achievement in science and English were adversely affected by severe staffing difficulties, the number of pupils who obtained five or more A\* - C grades at GCSE increased. Girls performed better than boys by a greater margin than that seen nationally. Pupils generally make at least satisfactory progress in lessons and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to that of their peers.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The school asserts that pupils' personal development is good and inspectors agree with this judgement. Pupils have a sense of belonging within a supportive atmosphere. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Suitable sex education and guidance about drugs and alcohol are provided through the "Respect" programme. Pupils are encouraged to adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles and are involved in a broad range of sports and other activities. Healthy options have been added to the school canteen menu and pupils are allowed to drink water in lessons. The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school is generally good but a minority of pupils are disruptive in lessons and the number of exclusions is high. Attendance is below average. The school is implementing a new action plan to improve it and this is beginning to have an impact. Most pupils enjoy school and they share in decision-making through the school council. The issue of bullying and harassment is taken seriously and most pupils and parents feel that incidents are dealt with effectively. Pupils are encouraged to make a very positive contribution to the community through a range of charity events, sporting activities and the arts. The school ensures that pupils experience the world of work and a range of volunteers from businesses and the local community are actively involved as effective mentors for pupils.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Inspectors confirm the school's evaluation of teaching as satisfactory overall at both key stages. A significant proportion of teaching that inspectors saw was good with many strong and some outstanding features. In the minority of lessons where teaching is outstanding it is characterised by an imaginative variety of differentiated approaches,

infectious enthusiasm, total pupil involvement and a challenging pace. The school has invested time and energy in developing teaching and learning styles and this is beginning to have a positive impact in some lessons. In most lessons there is clear evidence of the successful application of the Secondary Strategy in planning and assessment. In almost all lessons the relationship between teachers and pupils is positive and this results in lessons being conducted in a generally harmonious atmosphere. In these lessons the pupils are actively involved in the development of ideas and make good progress.

However these positive features do not yet appear consistently enough in all lessons. In less effective lessons the level of challenge is inappropriate, especially for more able pupils and teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to explain or reflect on their learning. Questioning does not involve enough pupils sufficiently to help them to understand their work and the behaviour of a minority impedes the progress of the majority of learners.

The school has made good progress in implementing the regular tracking and assessing of pupils' achievement. In most lessons observed, pupils were aware of their targets, how well they were doing and what they needed to do to improve.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The school evaluates the curriculum as good. Although inspectors agree that it has significant strengths, they judge that it is satisfactory overall. The curriculum meets all statutory requirements. The Secondary National Strategy has been implemented and is enhancing learning. Pupils are clear about progression routes and the options system is flexible, but the range of vocational courses is very limited and restricts the pathways available to pupils. Literacy, numeracy and ICT are not yet sufficiently embedded across the curriculum. Staffing difficulties in English, mathematics and science hindered development in 2005, but new courses and strategies for improvement are now being introduced. The quality of music and physical education is outstanding. Although the challenge provided for the most able pupils is not always sharply focused, the school offers good opportunities for all learners. Good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensures that they make satisfactory progress and develop well. Careers education and guidance is very good and the school is well supported by an outstanding Connexions adviser. Work related learning within subjects is limited. There is a very wide range of extra clubs and activities and the programme for citizenship and personal, social, health and careers education is effective.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school evaluates care, guidance and support for learners as good and inspectors agree. There is a strong commitment to inclusion and raising achievement, but the school's strategies to improve attendance and reduce exclusions have yet to make a significant impact. The staff promote health and safety and form tutors display care and commitment with their mixed age groups. Child protection arrangements are

robust with regular review and risk assessments. Pupils are set challenging targets and their efforts are rewarded in a variety of ways. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive and guidance about choices and progression is effective. The "Every Child Matters" outcomes are embedded in the ethos of the school, and high quality displays reinforce the school's values. The school seeks to work with parents and a range of agencies to support pupils. Children in public care make good progress. The Pupil Support Area, which caters for learners with emotional and social difficulties, is a calm and supportive environment where pupils are given outstanding care and guidance.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Inspectors agree with the school that its leadership and management are satisfactory. Strengths include the clear focus set by the headteacher and senior leaders on raising achievement. This is understood by middle leaders who feel accountable but at the same time supported and trusted by their line managers. The headteacher has built capacity for improvement by expanding the senior leadership team. Middle leaders are also offered professional development opportunities through temporary senior responsibilities and attendance at relevant senior leadership meetings. The school's self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in its teaching is accurate. The school's planning for improvement needs to harness all whole school initiatives into a coherent whole in order to drive improvement forward at a faster pace. Teachers have a clear commitment to both their pupils and the wider community. The School Council has begun to offer a voice to pupils and existing governors are knowledgeable about and actively contributing to the school community. Governance is satisfactory overall. However there have been some difficulties in the recent past in attracting a sufficient number of parents to serve as governors.

Inspectors believe that there is capacity amongst both senior and middle leaders to drive improvement forward. For example the successful raising of significant funding for the recent award of specialist sports status represents a considerable achievement by the school. Its specialist status is already beginning to show impact across many areas of the school. This is also benefiting its partner primary schools and other community partnerships and has the potential to improve the school further.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Following our visit to inspect your school I would like to tell you what we found out about the school during the inspection.

- Blacon is a satisfactory school and it has made some improvements since the last inspection. Your teachers know you very well and there are many good things about their teaching. Some of the lessons we saw were outstanding, but not all lessons are as good.
- The range of subjects which the school provides is satisfactory overall, but we think that more of you should be able to study a vocational subject if you wish. You get very good advice on careers, particularly from your Connexions adviser and have a very wide choice of extra clubs and activities. We were especially impressed by the number of you who are involved in musical activities. We also know how much many of you appreciate the care and guidance you get from the Pupil Support area. We thought that it was outstanding.
- We know that a number of pupils cause disruption in some of your lessons and quite a lot of them have to be excluded. However, during our visit we were impressed by the good behaviour, maturity, politeness and confidence that most of you showed.
- The staff do a great deal to ensure that your time in school is safe, interesting and busy. As a result, very many of you enjoy coming to school and try your best to do well. Some students do not attend as often as they should and this limits their education.
- The headteacher and the staff are very committed to you and the people of Blacon and work hard to help you do better at school. Last year there was a lot of difficulty in having enough staff to teach you and this affected the progress and test results of some of you who were in Years 7, 8 and 9. However there was an improvement in the progress made by pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Most of you are rightly proud of your school and care well for its facilities. The building is well looked after and the plans for more exciting development, which can happen because Blacon is a sports college, will make a big difference not just to your sporting activities but to the whole school.

The school has improved in some ways since the last inspection and we think it has the potential to improve a lot more. The school needs to:

- raise standards and increase your progress, especially in Years 7-9
- make sure that when the staff plan any changes, they think very carefully about how your learning will improve as a result
- find more ways of improving attendance and reduce the number of pupils who have to be excluded
- get more of your parents involved in the school.

I would like to thank those of you who talked to the inspectors to let us know what you think of the school. We found this very helpful. I would like to wish you all every success for your future at Blacon High school.