

Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133672
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	316187
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Graham Loach

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	728
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Mike Finlay
Headteacher	Mr John Sharples
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2005
School address	Grammar School Road Latchford Warrington Cheshire WA4 1JL
Telephone number	01925 636414
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School is an Anglican school, jointly sponsored by and serving the dioceses of Liverpool and Chester. It is smaller than most secondary schools and situated in an area of some social and economic disadvantage. The great majority of students come from White British backgrounds and very few students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. A significant proportion of students join the school part way through their school career. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is above average. The school is seeking specialist college status in music.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory education based on a strong caring ethos that permeates all activities. Students' spiritual, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Students respond by behaving well and there is evidence of improving attendance reflecting the welcoming ambience of the school.

Since becoming a church school, the numbers seeking admission have risen and the school has accepted students from other schools who were poor attenders or at risk of exclusion. In most cases these students have responded to the positive culture and settled in well; however a consequence has been a dip in the school's attainment figures.

Standards are broadly average and students' achievement overall is satisfactory, but girls do not do well enough and there is inconsistency in performance across subjects. Teaching is satisfactory with some that is outstanding. The majority of teachers are enthusiastic and motivate students, but some lesson planning does not always indicate enough activities to challenge all ability levels and there is inconsistency in the quality of marking. The headteacher and senior leaders recognise that there is a need for more robust monitoring and self-evaluation at whole school and department level.

Students benefit from the good curriculum and strong partnerships with other institutions. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. The recently opened youth club, 'The Boiler Room' has been welcomed by students and parents. Music is a clear strength within the school. Students use music to enhance the curriculum and to learn of other cultures.

Parents are very supportive of the school; they refer to excellent relationships between teachers and students. Students are happy in school, their opinions are listened to and they appreciate the care and support available to them. They feel safe and know who to turn to in time of need.

There has been overall satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Procedures for child protection and risk assessment are robust. The quality of the school's leadership and management demonstrate the school's capacity for further improvement and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise students' achievement, particularly that of girls.
- Strengthen lesson planning to increase students' active involvement and improve challenge for students of all abilities.
- Ensure consistency in marking so that students know what they are doing well and how to improve.
- Implement more robust systems to ensure that teaching is consistently good and the quality of self-evaluation improves.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory overall. Most students enter the school in Year 7 with standards broadly in line with national averages and make satisfactory progress. GCSE results for 2007 were adversely affected by students who joined the school during Years 10 and 11.

In 2007, students in Year 9 gained results in English, mathematics and science that were in line with the agreed targets. At GCSE level the proportion of students attaining at least five grades A* to C has risen from the 2006 figure and is in line with the agreed target. Numbers attaining at least five grades A* to C including English and mathematics remain well below the national average. There is variability in subject performance. Students do well in design and technology and music. The school recognises the need for improvement in English. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve in line with expectations when compared with similar students in other schools.

In 2006 and 2007 there was some underachievement by girls and, in 2007, a high proportion of students left without any formal qualifications. Following the decision to enter some students for English and mathematics in Year 10 all the current Year 11 are on target to leave with at least one GCSE grade. Thirty students gained the Junior Sports Leaders Award and the school makes good provision for students to participate in work-related learning off-site.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students value being part of a caring community where they can enjoy a sense of belonging and be known as individuals. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, students respect each other, they are cooperative, reflective and mindful of the needs of others. The school provides a safe and secure environment in which students are happy and behave well, this is also reflected in improvements in attendance, which is now average.

An effective student council ensures that students' views have a growing impact on many aspects of school life. Students develop leadership qualities through a range of mentoring and coaching roles. They recognise the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and participate in a broad range of activities and sports. The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme is given high priority and a range of visitors, such as health professionals, police, fire service staff and youth workers enrich the programme. A recently launched after-school club called 'The Boiler Room', is highly valued by students and parents.

Work experience and other events ensure that students develop vocational skills and understand the world of work, but weak levels of basic skills hinder the progression into training or further education of too many students. Students are fully involved in the life of the school and the local community. Many show their awareness of the needs of others by actively supporting a range of charities and causes and by involving themselves enthusiastically in local church activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The majority of lessons observed were at least satisfactory and there were some examples of outstanding teaching. The strong caring culture of the school influences students' attitudes such that behaviour is invariably good in lessons.

Where there is good and effective teaching, lesson objectives are clear and shared with students. In these lessons teachers ensure good progress by using their secure subject knowledge to plan lessons that are well matched to students' needs. The best lessons are taught at a brisk pace and use a variety of activities to involve students and maintain the momentum of learning. Teachers and students make good use of information technology.

In less successful lessons planning is minimal and insufficient attention is paid to the differing needs of students. When this happens there is a lack of enthusiasm at teacher and student level. Excessive teacher talk occasionally results in students switching off and becoming bored. The answering of questions is sometimes dominated by a small group of students with others, mainly the girls, being ignored.

The use of target setting and the tracking student progress are still at a developmental stage. Although there are examples of good practice the quality of marking is not consistently good enough. There is variation across and within departments but there are instances where work is unmarked and there is an acceptance by teachers of unfinished or poorly presented work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a curriculum that caters well for the needs of students and meets statutory requirements. In Years 7 to 9, students experience an appropriate range of subjects and are given effective support. A recently introduced GCSE in expressive arts is having a clear impact on attitudes and engagement of Year 9 students, who are excited by the challenge of completing the course in one year. A broad range of academic and vocational courses is provided in Years 10 and 11, within distinct pathways. Vocational courses, such as a horticulture course, are offered in partnership with local colleges and other providers. These broaden students' experience and develop essential life skills but are too recent to show their full impact on standards. A small group of students benefit from a flexible programme including work placements and training. The music curriculum and the high quality of performing groups such as the school's steel band are outstanding features. The curriculum is further enriched by many extra-curricular activities and visits that enable students to develop individual talents and to contribute to the life of the school and the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Day-to-day care and support for students is strong. Teachers and other adults who work in the school know the students well because there are effective channels of communication throughout the pastoral system. Students say they feel safe and generally free from bullying. They trust adults and know where to turn for help should they need it. The care offered by key

staff, including the chaplain, student counsellor and key workers, is very good. Parents hold very positive views of the school and appreciate the care their children receive. Child protection arrangements and those to safeguard students are fully in place. Health, safety and welfare arrangements are robust. There is satisfactory support and guidance for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is effective liaison with a range of agencies to provide valuable support for those students who are most vulnerable or find difficulty engaging in learning. Older students receive good guidance when choosing their options or making careers choices. The mentoring of small groups of students in Year 11 has had some success in improving their achievement. However, academic guidance varies too much between subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and senior leaders have nurtured a positive culture in which students behave well and are often keen to learn. Since the last inspection attendance has improved and exclusions have reduced. The school has won the strong support of parents. Managers are aware that standards and achievement need further improvement and plans are in place to tighten the rigour of monitoring of teaching in order to improve consistency. The school has recently established a number of working groups to implement a very comprehensive development plan. There are initiatives to improve teachers' use of data to identify students who are not making as much headway as they should, and departments are called to account for students' progress. However, senior leaders and some heads of department are over positive in their evaluation of their effectiveness. The school benefits from the careful support and encouragement of the governing body. It gives satisfactory value for money and has sound capacity for further improvement.

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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?	3
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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 Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School, Warrington, WA4 1JL

The inspection team enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for being so pleasant and helpful when we came to your lessons, talked with you in discussion groups or met you around the school.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education and the staff look after you well. You told us that your teachers are very approachable and deal quickly with any bullying, racist incidents or other problems that might occur.

We were impressed with the respect and consideration that you had for each other and your awareness of the needs of other people. The quality of provision for music is excellent and enjoyed by many of you. We also think that the youth club, 'The Boiler Room', is an exciting new venture.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and you told us of some outstanding teachers who made lessons really interesting and enjoyable. However, girls are not doing as well as we think they should and progress in some subjects is better than in others. I have asked that more lessons include activities that will challenge each one of you.

I have also asked for there to be more regular checks on classroom activities and for the school to assess the progress that is being made. Although you often mark your own work I have asked that your work be marked on a more regular basis and that you are given more indication as to how you might improve your work.

Almost everywhere we went we found that you were keen to learn and behaved really well. The improved attendance levels indicate that more of you enjoy coming to school. Improving achievement is another target that you can help your school to meet.