

Neston High School

Raby Park Road, Neston, Cheshire, CH64 9NH

Inspection dates 15–16 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good progress overall as a result of consistently good teaching which has improved over time.
- Up to 2012, students achieved standards above the national average because teaching was improving and examinations enabled students to show what they knew and understood.
- Leaders and governors tackled unexpectedly low achievement in mathematics in 2012 with determination and clear actions and as a result, progress and attainment in mathematics is improving to levels prior to 2012.
- Leaders, well-supported by governors, have taken steps to reduce the gaps in performance between those students who find it harder to make progress and other students.
- Teachers expect a high level of effort from students and plan their lessons so students have to find out information for themselves and work things out with the minimum of help from teachers. Teaching is especially good in the sixth form.
- Students behave well in lessons and around school. They feel safe in school. The school helps them to develop good communication skills and follow courses that are well-matched to their talents and ambitions so they are well-prepared for the future.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress from their starting points and achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3, to ensure that all students make outstanding progress.
- Leaders and managers do not yet check data on behaviour and attendance with the same rigour as data on students' progress and attainment.
- Leaders do not always take the progress of students into account when judging the quality of teaching. As a result, the proportion of students making the same or better progress is not yet higher than in most schools in the country, although it does compare favourably.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 53 staff teach 52 parts of lessons, five of which were observed jointly by inspectors and the headteacher and four senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, a range of senior and other leaders, with the Chair of the Governing Body, a parent governor and a community governor, students from each year group and a telephone conversation took place with one of the school’s external advisers.
- The team looked at a range of documents written by the school including the school’s evaluation of the quality of its provision, plans for future improvement, records of meetings, information on students’ attainment and progress, records relating to behaviour, attendance and the curriculum and policies relating to the safeguarding of students.
- Inspectors took account of 118 parents’ views expressed in the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), a number of electronic messages from parents and a letter delivered to the school by a parent.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional Inspector
Jane Holmes	Additional Inspector
Kathleen Harris	Additional Inspector
Michael Blaylock	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Neston High School opened as an academy in July 2012. It is larger than the average-sized 11 to 18 mixed school. There are more boys than girls in the school.
- Nearly all students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding, which is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, students looked after by adults other than their own parents and children from service families, is lower than that found nationally, but is increasing.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is similar to the proportion found nationally. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is lower than the national average.
- The school makes arrangements for a small number of students to attend a course at Reaseheath Agricultural College.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has a number of awards including International Schools Advanced Award, Sports Mark Award, has a Good Practice report for Learning Outside the Classroom, Dyslexia-Friendly Status, has recently received the Continuing Professional Development Quality Mark and has been recognised as a Teacher Learning Academy Centre.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching to accelerate the progress of students by:
 - improving the frequency of marking and feedback to students so students can improve the quality of their regular class-work and homework
 - providing opportunities for students to respond to feedback from teachers so they can work on what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management further by:
 - continuing to improve the school's support and intervention to make sure that students supported by pupil premium funding, and those with special educational needs, continue to narrow the gap between their progress and the progress of other students in the school
 - rigorously evaluating the impact of teaching on learning in order to accelerate the progress of students
 - ensuring that the school's processes and practice in the good quality collection and analysis of students' progress and attainment is applied equally rigorously to behaviour and pastoral provision so all students can meet the high standards expected by the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The achievement of students has improved overall over time, although a significant number of students achieved below expectations in mathematics in 2012. Overall, students make good progress from their average starting points. In 2011 students' achievement was above the national average and had improved from below national levels the previous year. Students currently in Year 11 are set to reach challenging targets in attainment and progress, and more than half of them have already reached this standard.
- The school allows students to reach their targets before the end of Year 11 by taking examinations early, including in mathematics, so that they can study an additional subject to GCSE level or reach the higher grades later in the year.
- Students make very good progress in their literacy and numeracy skills, particularly in Key Stage 3, because of the extensive arrangements for individuals, small groups and full classes to have reading sessions where the material is well-suited to their ability. In many lessons, students are questioned closely so they have to explain or give examples in order to justify their views or explain their thinking. As a result, they develop their communication skills and understanding.
- The school has taken decisive steps to improve the progress and attainment of boys, of disabled students and those with special educational needs and those students supported by pupil premium funding. As a result, these groups have successfully narrowed, but not yet closed, the gap between their progress and attainment and that of the main body of students in the school. This is clear evidence of the school's commitment to equality of opportunity to succeed.
- Students who are eligible for pupil premium funding are achieving grades just over half a grade lower than other students in the school and this gap is smaller than in 2012.
- The use of pupil premium funding is carefully recorded, and funds are added to by the school's own budget, to provide additional teaching if any student supported by this funding falls behind. The funding also provides additional literacy or numeracy practice or any personal support to ensure that they are settled and able to learn.
- The small numbers of students who follow courses away from the school site make excellent progress. They speak very highly of how the qualifications they are set to gain will help them to achieve their chosen career and how much the experiences out of school have added to their confidence and communication skills.
- Students enter the sixth form working at lower levels than those found nationally. Students' achievement from their starting points is good and attainment and progress in AS and A-Levels have improved over time. Students are able to succeed in a range of tailored programmes in addition to the traditional AS and A-Level courses offered. As a result, they make good progress and are well-prepared for their future education or employment.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching helps students make good progress. Teaching has improved over time. Some teaching is outstanding.
- Relationships between teachers and students are strong in the school and as a consequence, most students become confident learners.
- Teachers expect students to work hard and plan work for them which makes students think carefully and find answers for themselves. In a lesson on counselling skills, the teacher skilfully demonstrated a poor counselling session which prompted students to identify the weaker skills, to explain the impact the weaknesses would have on the client and describe the skills needed for effective counselling. The practical demonstration provided a very good starting point from which students learned successfully.
- Teachers use questions consistently well to help students come to a conclusion themselves. In a Year 7 French lesson, the teacher probed the answer of one student by asking 'How do you

know?’ so students were able to include detailed information and write sentences using connectives.

- When necessary, teachers provide work for some students that is adjusted to make sure those who learn more slowly can make good progress by completing a task in several steps, and those who already understand can apply their understanding to more complex situations.
- Lessons are purposeful and students know what they are trying to achieve. Most teachers explain skilfully the knowledge or understanding each stage or level requires so students can check their own work or that of their peers and know what they need to include in their answers to reach the higher levels.
- Students’ work in class is not marked with sufficient regularity in all subjects so students are not always reminded of what they have already mastered and what they need to work on. This information is given in detail by teachers in longer pieces of work kept in a separate folder but is not reinforced in general marking. Moreover, written feedback, particularly in the form of questions to students, is not regularly responded to so students are not fully aware of the teachers’ expectations in their written work.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Students make good progress as a result of teachers using new and interesting approaches to develop deeper understanding and engagement in lessons. In a sports lesson, the teacher engaged the students’ interest by referring to the training experiences of students in the class to help them identify the importance of the client’s likes, dislikes, history of injuries and variety in planning a personal training programme for a recreational runner.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The vast majority of students behave well and work hard in lessons, and are polite and respectful around the school.
- They say they feel safe and this is echoed by an overwhelming proportion of parents and staff. Students support each other and express their views confidently as they know they will be listened to. This supports their moral and social development effectively.
- They know about the different forms bullying can take and are taught very effectively about the risks in using social networks and mobile phones. They agree there is little bullying and if it happens, they are confident to turn to staff for support in the knowledge it will be dealt with.
- The many international links and experiences that the school offers, and sensitive and thoughtful discussion in lessons of the ‘amazing universe’ and the threats to the environment from modern life styles promotes good spiritual and cultural understanding.
- The response to any lowering of the high standards of behaviour expected by the school is clearly staged so students have a chance to make the right choices. The school provides specific time and opportunities for students who might misbehave to reflect on the consequences of their behaviour on others so it is not repeated. The impact of these opportunities on helping the different groups of students in the school to avoid repeating the behaviour, are not currently recorded or analysed in sufficient detail to ensure that the school is fully aware of the strengths and areas that could be improved.
- The majority of students attend well. Students supported by the pupil premium funding attend slightly less regularly than other groups in the school, although the gap in attendance levels is reducing.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and his leadership team, supported well by governors, have been effective in improving teaching over time. The unanticipated decline in attainment and progress in mathematics was swiftly responded to and results in examinations and the school’s data indicate that the steps taken, including the appointment of some new subject leaders, are being effective in improving students’ progress. This demonstrates the capacity of leaders and governors to

continue and accelerate the school's rate of improvement.

- Senior and subject leaders have an accurate view of how well the school is performing from the rigorous checks on progress. However, the school's evaluation of teaching is not yet fully based on the progress students make in lessons. Leaders use the outcomes of their evaluation to ensure that plans to improve further are detailed and comprehensive.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school with very few who would not recommend the school to others. The school has invested in a national project to ensure success in talking to parents and in engaging those students who may have difficulties meeting the high expectations of the school.
- The curriculum meets the needs of students well and those who follow courses outside the school's curriculum make impressive progress in areas that will benefit them in the future. The curriculum in the sixth form is particularly imaginative in the range of courses offered. Extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport, are well-attended by all groups in the school. Sixth-form students spoke appreciatively of the school's positive response to their request to include rugby in the sports offered.
- All leaders and governors are clear about how performance management procedures are used to improve teaching. Teachers' performance is monitored closely and good and outstanding teaching that supports student progress is recognised in pay awards and opportunities for advancement. The school's arrangements for tailoring professional development to the needs of staff are good, with the vast majority of staff saying that training provided to improve their teaching is effective.
- The school's external partner, the headteacher of a local high performing school, has a role in challenging the headteacher and governors and is effective in advising governors on targets for the future.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students are particularly robust and meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors make a very effective contribution to the school's vision for the future. They are clear about how important good and outstanding teaching is in achieving the vision. They monitor the evaluation of the quality of teaching closely and know what needs to be done to increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding. Governors hold the headteacher and senior leaders to account for all areas of the school's provision and are aware of how students perform in relation to national levels. They are beginning to use the new data set for governors to extend their understanding still further of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement. Governors check that strong performance is recognised and support the school's senior leaders in improving subject leadership. They attended a national training event to ensure that they understand how pupil premium funding is used and how to identify its impact on the progress of groups of students.

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	138318
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	413381

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
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	1663
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	355
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reginald Chrimes
Principal	Steven Dool
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0151 336 3902
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