

Upton-by-Chester High School

St James Avenue, Upton-by-Chester, Chester, Cheshire, CH2 1NN

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- In all years and subjects in the main school, students are making good progress from their starting points. In the sixth form, students make exceptional progress and reach very high levels of attainment.
- The school's new headteacher has improved procedures in many areas, and has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and leadership across the school. This improved teaching has improved outcomes for students.
- Teachers have good relationships with students, and challenge them to achieve effectively. They use their good subject knowledge to shape learning to engage students well and promote a love of learning.
- Students' behaviour is good. Students are generally polite and well mannered, and have good relationships with one another. They are good citizens and contribute to charitable and community events alongside academic learning.
- Governors are well informed. They are managing resources effectively to ensure that the school has a stable and effective leadership and governance. They support the school's social, moral, spiritual and cultural work very well.
- The whole school has a committed drive to improve teaching and learning for all pupils. Staff are well trained, lifelong learners and there is a positive ethos underpinning the work of the school that students appreciate.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some of the most-able students are not consistently making the very best progress they are capable of in mathematics and science in Key Stage 3.
- Not all leadership systems are yet as robust as they need to be to secure outstanding behaviour and achievement from all students.
- Not all teachers are consistently demanding the very best spelling, punctuation and presentation of work from all students in Key Stage 3.
- Not all teachers' feedback to students helps them to improve their learning as strongly as the best practice seen in the school. This means that students make more progress in some classes than in others.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across the curriculum. Several joint observations of single lessons and some of teaching across departments were held with senior leaders. Inspectors also visited 'PLAN' (pastoral, literacy and numeracy) time and specific interventions in the special educational needs department.
- The 195 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account.
- The 67 returns to the Ofsted staff questionnaire were also analysed.
- Inspectors scrutinised a large number of school documents, including self-evaluation documents, plans and actions for improvement, the records of teaching and progress and records of behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors also scrutinised documents relating to the very small number of students who are educated off site.
- A large number of students' books and folders were seen across almost all departments during the inspection. As the lower sixth were on study leave, fewer examples were seen from this group of students.
- Inspectors met with: representatives from the local authority; senior and middle leaders; those responsible for students with disabilities and special educational needs; and those responsible for student behaviour. Inspectors met with a large group of governors representing the governing body.

Inspection team

Rebecca Lawton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Peter McKay	Additional Inspector
Tudor Griffiths	Additional Inspector
Victoria Atherton	Additional Inspector
Alan Parkinson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Upton-by-Chester is a larger than average secondary school with an on-site sixth form.
- The school site is large and includes a sports facility recently acquired by the school, with extensive facilities for the students and the community.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium is lower than average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school holds a number of national and international awards, including for international work, work with computing, the arts and for the school's strengths in cultural development.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed, who has been in post approximately 18 months.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rigour of procedures at middle leader level, to have a greater impact on students' achievement, by:
 - ensuring that all staff have consistently high expectations of students' presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar from the very start of their time in school
 - ensuring that the most-able students in mathematics and science in Key Stage 3 are consistently making the accelerated progress of which they are capable
 - ensuring that the feedback that staff give to students on their work is consistently supporting further progress and is supporting literacy across the curriculum.
- Improve the rigour of the analysis of behaviour information, in order to identify any trends quickly and respond more rapidly in order to secure outstanding behaviour overall.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The school is improving under the good leadership of the new headteacher and all staff are committed to the drive for the very best outcomes for students. The whole-school community, including governors and parents, support the school's work in all areas very well.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance and have secured improvements to key aspects since the last inspection. Leaders and governors are ambitious and have high expectations. Their drive to be outstanding in all areas is evident from the school's plans and actions. Some aspects, such as the school's work on safety and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students, are reaching these levels of excellence.
- In 2014, the school had unusually low results in one of the English papers for Year 11 students. This anomaly was tackled quickly and action taken; current Year 11 students are on track and will not be similarly affected. However, this result did impact on a number of measures for the school's performance, as English results are a key measure. All other subjects remained good during this time and many have improved since this last set of published information.
- Middle leaders are well trained, have good knowledge of their departments and their students, and are making improvements year-on-year to student outcomes in many cases. They share expertise well and are leading learning and progress across the school. However, some processes are not always as robust as planned. Therefore, improvements are being made to ensure that all are as effective as possible in all areas. For example, not all staff are using the school's feedback and marking policy as effectively as those in the best departments. Monitoring and tracking has not yet ensured that this is consistent.
- Pupil premium funding is well managed. There are few gaps for those students that are supported by this funding by the end of Key Stage 3. Many students supported by this funding achieve very well in final GCSE and A-level examinations, and exceed national expectations.
- The curriculum is well balanced and challenges students to achieve well in all areas of learning. The school's sporting and cultural areas are supported particularly strongly. Students have a rich and varied experience during their time in school. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain and are well informed about the law and their rights and responsibilities. They have good opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Democratic processes are common in lessons and students are taught to develop their independence and critical thinking well in PLAN lessons. A wide range of speakers, trips and extra-curricular events is open to all students and these are well attended.
- Literacy is well supported in the English and modern foreign language departments but is less strong across other areas of the curriculum. Some departments, such as science and mathematics, are not consistently demanding the correct spelling of key words or full sentence answers.
- The school is committed to equality of opportunity and is continually reviewing its provision to ensure that none are disadvantaged or discriminated against. For example, the school day has been organised to make lunchtimes more pleasant and to use registration to support literacy and numeracy as well as pastoral provision. The school fosters good relationships between staff and students.
- The school meets statutory requirements for safeguarding and child protection. Safeguarding training is frequent and systems are effective and robust. The school's work in this area is particularly well developed and supports students exceptionally well.
- The local authority has very limited contact with the school, although the school makes use of the resources and specific expertise it provides for individual cases, such as the hearing impairment expert. Relationships are positive and the school is active within the local authority in other ways.
- The leadership of the sixth form has ensured exceptional outcomes. Very good pastoral support for its students is one example where the school has reached outstanding status.
- The guidance students receive on careers and further education choices at Key Stage 4 is of good quality. The school provides a range of experts and opportunities and students appreciate and use these facilities to make informed choices.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good spread of experience and expertise across its members and has high expectations and ambition for the school. They challenge the school to provide the very best for the students, and reward performance with pay in line with performance management policies. They tackle underperformance rigorously and were active in monitoring the actions taken following the unusually low English results.
 - Governors use data effectively to evaluate the school's performance and monitor the impact of the pupil

premium funding. They have a good grasp of the quality of teaching. They are actively involved in the life of the school, not only academically, but in social, moral, spiritual and cultural events, parents' evenings and forming good links with the local community.

- Governors have managed some difficult situations well and have brokered very good quality support where they felt it necessary. This has ensured that the school continues to make progress and improvements over time. They hold leaders to account and are fully committed to the school's long-term goals.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. The vast majority of students are well behaved, enjoy school and are active participants in their learning. They work well together, are courteous and polite, and appreciate the good teaching they receive.
- Students are generally keen to learn and respond well to questions in class. They are able to sustain attention and focus on tasks, and are active in investigating topics. They are responsible when using their tablet computers, and research and check information in lessons independently.
- Attendance has improved overall and is consistently above national averages, although a very small number of low-attending students remains. The school is working well with parents and other agencies to improve attendance for these students, particularly those in examination years. This ensures that this does not impact on the progress and attainment of these students.
- There are a very small number of students who are late to lessons during the school day. The school site is large. Although staff are aware of these students and are actively monitoring them, they do miss some learning due to this deliberate tardiness. The school is taking all reasonable actions to remedy this and is successfully improving the lateness of these very few pupils.
- Records show that incidents of poor behaviour are reducing and that the number of persistently absent students, exclusions and internal removals from classes is declining. However, leaders were unable to provide inspectors any analysis of the trends in the small number that remained. They could not say whether these incidents were from a particular department or teacher, or if they were the same students regularly. The headteacher has already appointed a new attendance officer who will in future be responsible for this information.
- Students and records indicate few incidents of bullying or racism. The students know how to report any issues they may have and are confident in the school's ability to resolve any problems. Pastoral support and curriculum elements support students' personal and social development well. The school has good systems to promote students' leadership skills, and students take part in a wide range of charitable and school-based groups, developing their confidence and experience.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Procedures are rigorous and applied and monitored consistently in all areas.
- The school site is managed well and free of litter and graffiti. Behaviour around school at the start and end of the day, between lessons and at break times, is well managed by staff and students.
- The school's work with external agencies and those supporting child protection, safeguarding and those students in particular need is monitored and managed very rigorously. Case studies show that this work has a particularly strong impact on these students and has been very effective.
- Very good quality, regular training and effective routines and procedures ensure that all students are safe and well cared for at all times. Students understand how to keep themselves safe around school, at home and online.
- The curriculum covers safety in all areas very well. The teaching of staying safe online is particularly strong, and teaching on relationships, health and social development is excellent.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good and has been good over time. Students are making good progress in all areas.
- Improvements have been made to how teachers give feedback to students on how well they have done

and on how to improve. In the departments that have fully embraced these strategies and are consistently applying them, students are making accelerated progress and are benefiting from this very clear advice and guidance.

- Not all staff are supporting students' literacy development equally well. In English and modern foreign languages, staff are consistently helping students to improve their language skills and are demanding correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. In other subjects, particularly in Years 7 and 8 in practical subjects, students struggle with spelling key words and are not consistently required to write using capital letters or full sentences. This is corrected by the time they reach Key Stage 4, where all students are expected to write equally well in all subjects.
- Teachers provide good resources for students and all students have access to a personal tablet computer. Teachers use these well to enrich the curriculum and extend opportunities for independent learning and research.
- Some parents were unhappy about the amount of homework students receive, although inspectors found that homework was regular and did support learning well. The school's online system does mean that a large amount of homework exists online and is not always clearly marked as homework within students' books. This does make it hard to find.
- Numeracy is well supported across the curriculum and students have well-developed skills in handling data and problem solving. However, students are not always required to present their work to a high standard. Consequently, some work in Key Stage 3 is messy and not always totally accurate.
- Mathematics is taught well and students make good progress across each key stage. A large number go on to take further qualifications in mathematics and these students achieve well.
- Bespoke interventions to improve students' particular learning needs are well designed and are having a positive impact on those students they support. Teaching assistants are well trained and are helping disabled students and those who have special educational needs to close gaps in their learning and make equally good progress as their peers.
- Reading is exceptionally well supported across school and is a regular feature of each day in school. The extensive literature available to all students through their personal tablets helps to ensure equal access to resources, but students also bring books in to read in PLAN time. All students, especially boys, are regular readers.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very strong and many teach A-level classes in their subject, which encourages aspiration for students in their classes. Some teach additional subjects, such as politics and sociology, which enriches the curriculum and encourages students to broaden their learning.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students start the school with levels of attainment that are generally at or slightly above average and are increasing over time. By the time they leave school, the proportion gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C has been strong over time, but dipped in 2014 due to the unusually low scores in English.
- Standards in English have now regained their previous level. Predictions are much higher for the current Year 11 cohort of student and are more in line with the trend in improvements over time.
- Standards in mathematics and science have been maintained, although the most-able students in Key Stage 3 are not making the same rates of progress as other students. This is due in some part to the teachers' focus on consolidating core knowledge before moving on to tasks that enable students to demonstrate further understanding and application of their skills for the very highest levels of achievement. As standards on entry to the school are getting higher, these students are increasingly ready for the higher level of challenge earlier in their school career.
- Disadvantaged students who are supported by the pupil premium funding are currently making good progress in all years, equal to that of their peers. Nationally published data shows that in Year 11 in 2014, the attainment of disadvantaged students in English was about two-thirds of a grade behind other students in the school and nationally. In mathematics, their attainment was about a grade and a third behind others in the school and nationally. In science, however, disadvantaged pupils were half a grade ahead of their peers in final examinations. Previous gaps in students' attainment in English and mathematics are closing.
- The school does not use early entry for examinations.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are making good progress and are very close to achievement equal to that of their peers in all areas. This is because of very good support and provision from all staff and particular support from specialists to help close any gaps in their learning by the time they take formal examinations.

- The school's work to ensure equality of opportunity is well targeted. The gaps between the progress of boys and girls is closing, although girls still perform slightly better in final examinations overall. Both groups are making good progress and achieve good levels of attainment, but girls currently make even better progress in some subjects.
- The achievement across the curriculum is good overall. Strengths in modern foreign languages and humanities subjects, and the balance of good teaching across the school, ensure a rich balance and good preparation for further education or employment.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and students' skills are exceptionally well supported in these areas. They engage in regular high quality sporting and artistic activities and events, and the school plans broad provision for all into the curriculum to showcase their talents and interests.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The number of students in the sixth form is balanced well to ensure good teacher to student ratios and sufficient numbers in the class to encourage debate and investigation. Students are monitored closely and make outstanding progress to challenging targets.
- Students attend regularly, and are motivated and inspired to make the most of the good quality resources and facilities available. Many return to school during study leave and attend additional sessions or book in individual support with subject experts to help them to reach the very highest levels of attainment. Tracking shows that they regularly make outstanding progress and a very high number reach the very highest levels of attainment.
- In lessons, students prepare well and use the excellent quality information and tasks delivered by teachers to extend their knowledge and understanding. Their conversations with teachers are supported by their own independent study and good knowledge of the requirements for their examinations. This prepares them exceptionally well for the end of their studies.
- Leaders manage the procedures and processes for the sixth form very well and have ensured that students reached the highest levels possible consistently since the last inspection. They are continually improving not only academic but also pastoral provision. They are now ensuring that students have the additional health and relationship content they have recently asked for in the continual dialogue they have with staff on the quality of the curriculum.
- Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Teachers are securing fast progress for students. They use their very strong subject knowledge to motivate students exceptionally well.
- Support for students who need to resit GCSE English or mathematics is of good quality. These students are not disadvantaged by these requirements and achieve equally well.
- Information and guidance for higher education and career options is of high quality and managed well. Students are consistently securing places in their chosen institutions and case studies show that students are excelling once they leave the school.
- Students are well supported to make changes and adaptations to their study routes. The small number who choose to finish their studies at AS are equally well supported in their decisions and routes. All students are well prepared for life in modern Britain and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They participate in a wide range of charities and develop leadership skills through democratic and international enrichment activities.

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	111422
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	461776

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
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	1,475
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Wilson
Headteacher	Paula Dixon
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2011
Telephone number	01244 981240
Fax number	01244 981248
Email address	admin@uptonhigh.co.uk

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