

Congleton High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132748
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	341334
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Toft HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
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	1,074
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Hinckley
Headteacher	Mr David Hermitt
Date of previous school inspection	November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors spent 20 hours observing 37 teachers, visited two assemblies, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents for school evaluation, improvement planning, curriculum and staff development, safeguarding, attendance, and records of the tracking of students' progress. They also read the responses to inspection questionnaires, 361 from parents and carers, 153 from students and 86 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of initiatives to improve leadership and management since the last inspection, including those associated with the school's engineering specialism
- consistency throughout the school in the effectiveness of teaching and assessment in promoting learning, achievement and progress
- the accuracy of self-evaluation and its contribution to the school's capacity for sustained improvement.

Information about the school

This school is larger-than-average. It has specialist status for engineering. Since September 2009 it has been a foundation school. Ninety four per cent of students are of White British heritage and the remainder are from a range of minority ethnic groups. All but four students have English as their first language, and none is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities, though an above average number of students have a statement of special educational needs. The school has forged partnerships with a number of schools, colleges, universities and companies, here and overseas, aiming to widen provision for learners aged 14–19. It has attained a number of awards including the Inclusion Quality Mark, Investors in People, International School Award and BECTA Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It has improved significantly since the last inspection and is highly regarded in the local community, rightly so. Its happy and civilised atmosphere is much appreciated by the students, most of whom feel proud to attend the school. This is reflected in their above average rate of attendance, sharp punctuality and good behaviour. The quality of education is good. Standards, overall, are above average and have been so in the main for some years. A previous dip in standards in English has been tackled vigorously and the progress being made by students in this subject is now good, as it is in the rest of the curriculum. Students are lively and interested young people, keenly engaged in their studies and wider activities. They develop well personally and leave the school as confident and articulate individuals.

The school is highly inclusive; staff go to considerable lengths to ensure that all students and groups are well supported to engage in their studies. The way in which staff are organised to teach students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is exemplary. Students learn well because they are motivated by stimulating and knowledgeable teachers and learning support staff. Teachers convey enthusiasm for their subjects. Teaching is good overall. However, some aspects, though satisfactory, fall short of this high standard in a small number of lessons when some homework lacks relevance or is not handed in on time to be marked; the reluctance to learn of a few students is not dealt with firmly enough; some marking does not give students clear advice on how to improve; and some of the morning tutor sessions are not used productively to monitor students' progress, and this relates to the concern of some parents and carers about a lack of information on this progress. The curriculum is balanced and very broad with some innovative features which do much to enrich students' experiences. Much effort is taken to personalise the curriculum for older students and this contributes considerably to their interest and enjoyment. The school gives a very high priority to the safety of students.

The school is led by a highly effective headteacher. He has developed strong teams of senior and middle leaders and ensured that all staff are empowered to contribute to the school's impressive record of improvement. Governors provide a good balance of support and challenge. The school has a very accurate understanding of its performance and makes very good use of data to secure this. It has highly effective procedures for planning and managing improvement. Its capacity for further sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

By the end of this academic year, secure highly consistent learning in all parts of the school by ensuring that:

- all teachers routinely use their marking of students' work to inform students how to improve
- all staff have high expectations and ensure that students concentrate and work hard
- all homework set is relevant and suitably challenging, and that it is handed in on time and marked appropriately
- all guidance by tutors contributes effectively to the monitoring of students' progress and helps the school to communicate this progress to parents and carers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment overall at the end of Year 11 has been well above average in recent years. The unvalidated GCSE results in 2009 were the school's highest ever with, for example, 86% of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C and 99% gaining five or more grades at A* to G. This reflects the inclusive quality of the school. This rise eradicated a dip in some aspects of performance which occurred in 2008. Some subjects, including those linked to the school's engineering specialism, perform particularly well. The causes of the past underperformance in English, compared with other major subjects in the school, have been effectively addressed. This has raised standards in the subject throughout the school, as was seen in lessons and in the school's assessment records, though it will take time to show in external examination results. Value-added information for the last three years shows that aspects of students' progress were significantly below average. This was influenced by the relative weakness of examination results in English. It did not reflect the fact that, in 2009 for example, 17 qualifications were gained by students in Year 11 at AS level. Given this fact, the recent improvements in English, the school's assessment information and the unequivocally good or better progress in nearly all of the lessons observed, progress has improved. It is now good throughout the school for all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This reflects the good quality of learning and the high levels of enjoyment and engagement seen in the great majority of lessons.

Students feel very safe in school and this is reflected in discussions with inspectors, the evidence from the school's survey of parents' and carers' satisfaction, observation of the security of the building, the vigilance with which staff supervise students and the civilised atmosphere which exists throughout the day. Students are mature, considerate and courteous. Behaviour is good and was consistently so throughout the inspection. The school has very effective procedures to secure good behaviour and it has a very low rate of exclusions. The curriculum deals well with how students can stay healthy. Students understand the importance of exercise and diet, and are very aware of the dangers of substance misuse. There is a strong sense that they want to make the choices necessary to live a healthy life. The students are proud to be members of this school. This is reflected in their above average

attendance rate and good punctuality to lessons. They respond positively to the many opportunities to contribute to school life and to the community. The combined effect of the academic curriculum, pastoral support, enrichment activities and the experiences provided to learn about the world beyond school, including in industry, gives students an outstanding basis to secure employment and economic well-being on completing their education. There is a very low incidence of leavers not being in gainful employment, training or further study. The very broad curriculum and range of activities give students ample opportunity to develop socially, reflect on life, consider moral issues and make judgements, distinguish right from wrong and develop an understanding of the diversity of cultures. They respond thoughtfully to these opportunities.

These are the grades for students' outcomes

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Students' attainment ¹	2
The quality of students' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which students feel safe	1
Students' behaviour	2
The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which students contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which students develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Students' attendance	2
The extent of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Learning is good throughout the school, as a result of consistently good teaching and the positive attitudes of students. In 85% of the lessons seen, teaching and learning were good or better. Good lessons were characterised by fast pace, productive use of time and levels of challenge which stimulated interest and engagement leading to good or better progress. The quality of teaching has improved solidly since the last inspection, helped by the clear focus of managers on its improvement, the extensive opportunities for staff training, the sharing of good practice and the use of technology to enliven presentations. Teachers have good subject expertise and pass on their enthusiasm to students. Assessment in most lessons informs students well about the quality of their work and how to improve it. Though marking is generally carried out well, there are some inconsistencies between staff in its usefulness to students. The school has a robust system for tracking the progress of individual students and specific groups, using it well to set learning targets. Students know their targets and review them regularly. Learning support assistants are well deployed, making a significant contribution to students' progress. The quality of learning among pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good and

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

for some it is outstanding. This is due to the excellent provision and support for their learning.

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. It is broad, balanced and comfortably meets statutory requirements. It is efficiently timetabled and staff plan its delivery well. Great care has been taken to design the curriculum to capture the interests and meet the varied needs of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. It does both very well. An excellent range of external partnerships contributes much to the provision for developing students' academic and workplace skills. The flexible enrichment provision (known as 'Option K') for students in Years 10 to 13 provides a breadth not often seen. Trips and after-school activities are much appreciated by students who participate in them in large numbers.

All students receive a high quality of care, guidance and support. The vast majority are content with the way in which they are looked after in school. Arrangements to welcome students new to the school in Year 7 are very effective, and well regarded by the students. Throughout their time in school, students are well prepared to move on to the next stage of their education and have good opportunities to consider their career and study options. Form tutors are trained to support this and they make a major contribution. Students with specific difficulties are well provided for and the school has ample evidence of how it has helped such individuals. The school has very effective procedures to promote high attendance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets students' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management are good throughout the school and some aspects are outstanding. The school has high ambitions to improve. It has wisely organised its substantial development work through three critical areas: learning, teaching and leadership. With the aid of a crystal clear school development plan, and sophisticated planning procedures which have involved many of the staff, the school has concentrated its energies to secure good improvement in outcomes for students. Cooperation among staff is strong. Their hard work, high morale and unbending commitment to helping students are palpable. The headteacher provides admirable and visionary leadership and he has been highly effective in developing a strong capability among the senior and middle leaders. They give him stalwart support in the drive to provide a high quality of education. This is helped well by extensive and manageable procedures for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the school. Occasionally, however, this monitoring lacks focus on pockets of practice which, though satisfactory, are below the high levels existing throughout most of the school, for example in the relevance of some of the homework set.

Procedures for safeguarding are outstanding. The school has a clear strategy and robust systems including excellent record keeping, staff training and liaison with external agencies. The school is very inclusive and all statutory duties for inclusion are fulfilled. It is highly effective in promoting equal opportunities and the interests of all groups of students. Community cohesion is promoted well. The school understands clearly the religious, ethnic and socio-economic composition of the student body. The curriculum includes a good coverage of cultures locally, nationally and globally and the school is very outward looking with close links to other establishments here and overseas. It evaluates the contribution this provision and the strong guidance system make to students' awareness of other cultures. The school has forged extensive partnerships which contribute outstandingly to broadening students' experiences and deepening their learning. These are particularly notable in the school's engineering specialism. This has been used strategically to improve provision in various ways throughout the school, for example in the teaching of industrially orientated design and technology and science, in the provision of high-quality work experience and in the collaborative teaching of diploma courses.

Partnerships with parents and carers are good and well supported by procedures for keeping them informed. The vast majority of parents and carers are satisfied with this, though some feel they lack information. The school accepts that providing this information requires more consistency among staff. Governance is very strong and all statutory duties are met. Governors are alert and well informed about the school's performance. They support the school with authority and are rigorous in evaluating outcomes for students. They respond innovatively to changing requirements, for example by reorganising their committee structure to raise the priority of student safeguarding. Financial management is strong and much has been done to improve staffing, accommodation and resources. The school gives good value for money.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Provision in the sixth form is good. The wide range of subjects and courses and intensive support and guidance are much appreciated by students, whose levels of satisfaction are high. This is reflected in high attendance and retention rates as well

as a very strong engagement in the lessons seen. Students feel safe in school and value the opportunities open to them, in both the academic curriculum and the enrichment activities. Opportunities to take responsibility are ample and students contribute willingly to the running of the school and within the local community, for example in primary schools and in helping the elderly. Attainment is above average and progress is good. The school has robust procedures to monitor students' progress, identifying underachievement or personal problems. Through internal support, with external assistance if necessary, students are effectively helped to remain on track. Sixth form disciplinary procedures and a risk register are useful in identifying the need for support and in helping with the monitoring progress. Teaching and learning are good and students made good or better progress in all of the lessons seen. The sixth form is well led and managed. The school evaluates provision accurately and has a clear view of the sixth form's performance. The school engages well with parents and carers and involves students in their own learning and reviewing of progress.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers of over a third of students responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. The vast majority were very positive and supportive of the school's work. Many praised specific aspects of its work, including the breadth of the curriculum, the quality of teaching and the care given to students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A number of parents and carers cited concerns about specific aspects of the school's performance. Some of these reflected the impact of the recent disruption caused by heavy snow, and the effects on communication of a breakdown of part of the school's computer systems at the end of last term. These were beyond the power of the school to prevent and the inspection revealed that, in both cases, managers had done all that was possible to resolve the problems arising. Some parents and carers were concerned about behaviour and bullying. The inspection revealed that most of the incidents cited were from the past and had been dealt with appropriately by the school. Inspectors found no evidence of bullying; the students spoken to stated convincingly that it was not a problem in the school. There are strong procedures to secure good behaviour and both to prevent and deal with bullying. Behaviour during the inspection was good, and there was no evidence to suggest that this was other than the norm at this school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Congleton High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 361 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,074 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	110	31	209	58	29	8	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	119	33	224	62	11	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	107	30	208	58	35	10	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	99	28	219	61	27	8	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	87	24	238	66	19	5	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	79	22	205	57	59	16	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	59	16	222	62	65	18	5	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	85	24	218	61	19	5	5	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	82	23	234	65	33	9	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	91	25	208	58	40	11	11	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	67	19	211	59	40	11	8	2
The school is led and managed effectively	122	34	203	56	20	6	4	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	128	36	196	54	23	6	5	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>the following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Congleton High School, Congleton, CW12 4NS

After our inspection of your school I would like to tell you about our conclusions.

- Congleton High is a good school with some outstanding qualities. It gives you a good education and prepares you well for the future.
- The standards you reach are above average and they are steadily improving. The school has dealt well with some past underperformance. In the lessons we saw, you made good, steady progress in your learning.
- You behave well, turn up to school on time and attendance rates are high.
- We were very impressed by your mature and considerate attitudes and your obvious wish to do well in your studies and take part in activities.
- The school gives you good care, guidance and support and it does an excellent job in promoting your safety.
- You have a wide range of interesting subjects and courses and the choice available to older students is most impressive.
- Teaching is good and staff work hard to help you make progress. Much of your work is well marked. You understand your targets very well.
- You have ample opportunity to participate in lessons, think for yourself and learn about people from different backgrounds.
- The school serves the needs of the local area well and is rightly popular with your parents and carers.
- The school is very well led and managed and leaders are always seeking ways to improve.

To help with this, we have asked them to develop consistently good practice in all classes in these areas, ensuring:

- that you always concentrate on your work in lessons
- that homework is always completed
- that marking shows you how to improve
- that all guidance sessions are useful in helping staff to check your progress.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all well for your future learning at Congleton High School.

Yours sincerely

Peter Toft
Her Majesty's Inspector

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