

Ellesmere Port Catholic High School

Capenhurst Lane, Whitby, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH65 7AQ

Inspection dates

13–14 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Senior leaders and governors have an overgenerous view of the quality of education at the school. Governors have not held senior leaders to account diligently enough.
- Leaders have not used additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils effectively.
- Pupils make inadequate progress in mathematics. Leaders do not provide effective support to mathematics teachers to help them to improve their teaching.
- In recent years, disadvantaged pupils, boys and the most able have made poor progress.
- Many middle leaders have been unable to secure enough improvements in the quality of teaching in their own subjects.
- Some teachers have low expectations of what pupils can achieve. There are times when learning does not challenge pupils. Some teachers do not have a clear understanding of what pupils already know and can do.
- Leaders have not ensured that all teachers apply the school’s behaviour policy consistently. Some pupils have developed poor attitudes to learning.
- A high proportion of disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent from school.
- Some teachers do not apply the school’s literacy policy well. Pupils are not supported consistently well to develop technical accuracy in their writing.
- The curriculum provides limited opportunities for pupils to learn about the issues that they may face in relation to their sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Although the curriculum is broad, it is not helping pupils to make sufficient progress in some subjects.
- Students make weak progress in many subjects in the sixth form. Students’ overall progress is inadequate. Leaders have not ensured that the principles of the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) 16 to 19 study programmes are fully met.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from a range of effective support.
- Pupils make good progress in history and modern foreign languages due to stronger teaching in these subjects.
- Pupils receive effective careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG).

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - governors hold leaders to account more diligently for their actions
 - senior leaders and governors develop a more accurate view of the quality of education that pupils receive
 - middle leaders and teachers receive the support and challenge that they need to bring about consistent and sustained improvement to teaching and pupils' achievement
 - leaders become more discerning in their use of the pupil premium funding so that it has a greater impact on improving the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils
 - leaders support staff to manage pupils' behaviour more effectively.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils, particularly the most able, boys and those pupils who are disadvantaged, make stronger progress across the curriculum by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - apply the school's literacy policy and support pupils to develop the technical accuracy of their writing
 - assess accurately what pupils can and cannot do and use this information to plan work that challenges pupils and enables them to deepen their learning.
- Urgently improve pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics by ensuring that:
 - leaders develop a clearer understanding of the issues that are preventing pupils from attaining well
 - teachers are supported effectively to improve their practice.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - reducing further pupils' rates of absence and persistent absence, particularly among disadvantaged pupils
 - supporting pupils to develop the habits of effective learners
 - providing more planned opportunities for pupils to learn about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

- Improve the 16 to 19 study programmes by ensuring that:
 - teaching enables students to make significantly better progress across the curriculum, especially in mathematics and English literature
 - the principles of the DfE’s 16 to 19 study programmes are met by providing students with opportunities to undertake work experience or work-related training that links to their needs and plans.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The standard of education at Ellesmere Port Catholic High School has declined since the previous inspection. Senior leaders have been unable to stem this decline quickly enough. Weaknesses at every level of leadership, coupled with leaders' overly optimistic view of the school, mean that there is insufficient capacity to move the school forward.
- Senior leaders do not provide effective strategic leadership. The headteacher and her senior team are committed to the school. To this end, they are keen to pursue initiatives to improve outcomes for pupils. However, many of their worthwhile initiatives fail to be fully realised, such as the school's new behaviour policy. They have made too little difference to pupils' achievement over time.
- Senior leaders spend a lot of their time monitoring the work of staff at the school. Leaders' judgements, however, are overgenerous. They do not reflect a true picture of the quality of education provided by the school to its pupils. This means that the improvement plan is not fit for purpose because leaders' starting points do not accurately reflect the school's current position.
- Leaders have not acted to improve the school quickly enough. This is especially the case in mathematics, which was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. Leaders do not understand the issues that are preventing pupils from attaining well in this subject. For example, leaders are of the view that weak teaching in the past is the reason for pupils' poor performance in mathematics. They consider teaching in the department to be 'good'. This is inaccurate. As a result, endemic weaknesses in the quality of teaching in this subject continue to hamper pupils' progress.
- Some middle leaders have not been able to secure enough improvement in the quality of teaching in their subject. Senior leaders have improved the quality of their support to these middle leaders. However, the impact of some subject leaders is limited, meaning that the quality of teaching and learning in their departments has not improved.
- Leaders have not used additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils effectively. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils in a number of subjects in the past has been inadequate. The improved progress of those disadvantaged pupils who left the school in 2018 was tentative. Leaders have recently reviewed their pupil premium strategy and new systems have been introduced but it is too early to gauge if these will have any impact on the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- The leadership of provision for pupils with SEND is effective. Leaders ensure a smooth transition between primary and secondary school for this group of pupils. Leaders have effective systems to identify pupils' needs. They work closely with teachers and teaching assistants to support pupils. Furthermore, leaders check to ensure that their work in this area is making a difference to pupils' progress. As a result, pupils with SEND typically make good progress overall.
- Leaders have used training to strengthen the quality of teaching in the school. This is having a positive impact in some departments. Improved teaching in some subjects is leading to pupils making stronger progress than in the past. However, this is not true

for other departments. Leaders have not had the same influence in some subjects, especially mathematics. As a result, the quality of teaching is uneven. It is not good enough to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they should across the curriculum.

- Leaders have introduced a new behaviour policy, which has raised expectations of how pupils should behave in school. In the short term, these heightened expectations have led to an increasing proportion of pupils being removed from lessons and/or serving detentions due to poor behaviour. While the new behaviour policy is helping some pupils to regulate their behaviour, it is not having the same impact on others who do not behave as well as they should. This, in part, is due to the inconsistent approach adopted by staff to manage pupils' behaviour in lessons and across the school.
- The majority of staff who shared their views with inspectors were positive about pupils' behaviour. However, a significant proportion of staff expressed concerns, particularly about the quality of the support that they receive from senior leaders to manage poor behaviour.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. This is because leaders give attention to the courses that pupils wish to follow. Pupils have access to a range of academic qualifications, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and some vocational qualifications in key stage 4. The proportion of pupils securing a qualification in the EBacc is currently very low. However, there is a welcome increase this year in the number of pupils choosing to study a modern foreign language. Although the curriculum is broad, weaknesses in the quality of teaching mean that the curriculum is not having a positive impact on the progress that pupils make in some subjects.
- There are opportunities for pupils to be involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities in areas such as sport, music and drama. These enrichment opportunities, alongside an effective programme of assemblies, contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is designed to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. Pupils explained to inspectors that the PSHE curriculum does not cover issues that they or their peers may face regarding gender identity and sexual orientation. As a result, pupils rely on what they learned at primary school and what they learn at home and elsewhere to deal with these issues.
- The school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- Governors underestimate the weaknesses of the school. This is because they have relied too much on overly optimistic reports from senior leaders. Consequently, they have not held leaders to account with sufficient rigour.
- The governing body is aware of key issues, such as the poor rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils. However, governors have not challenged leaders diligently enough since the last inspection. As a result, it is only recently that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has begun to improve.
- Governors have failed in their statutory responsibilities to check on how leaders spend additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. They have not asked the right questions of leaders, such as why this funding has had little impact upon the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.

- Governors have been successful in monitoring the work of senior leaders with responsibility for pupils with SEND.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Procedures for recruiting and appointing staff are appropriate and all required checks are carried out and documented clearly.
- Leaders promote a culture of safeguarding. Staff receive regular safeguarding training. Consequently, all staff know the procedures to follow if they have concerns about a pupil.
- Leaders' record-keeping of their work with external agencies is well organised. Leaders engage effectively with parents and carers on safeguarding issues.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, stated that their children feel safe at school. Pupils spoken with during the inspection said that they are taught to keep themselves safe online and in the community. They trust staff and feel confident that they could talk to someone if they were worried or in need of support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- In recent years, teaching across a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science and geography, has not allowed pupils to make the progress that they should in key stage 4.
- Due to improvements in the quality of teaching in some subjects, including English and science, pupils in key stages 3 and 4 are making greater gains in their learning than pupils in the past. However, this is not the case in mathematics, where current pupils continue to make weak progress.
- Some teachers have established highly positive relationships with their pupils. They know pupils well and they expect the best of pupils. As a result, an increasing proportion of pupils display positive attitudes to their learning. However, not all teachers have high enough expectations of pupils. Too many teachers accept work from pupils which is poorly presented or incomplete.
- Some teachers do not apply the school's literacy policy well. In many subjects, pupils' work contains errors in their spelling, punctuation and grammar. For instance, in mathematics, pupils' incorrect spellings of subject-specific vocabulary often go unaddressed by teachers.
- Some teachers do not use information about what pupils can already do to plan learning. This prevents many pupils from making good progress. However, there are examples of stronger practice, for example in modern foreign languages and history. In these subjects, teachers' effective challenge enables pupils to deepen their learning over time.
- There is variability in how well teachers use questioning. There are times when teachers use questioning to encourage pupils to think about issues in greater depth. However, there are other instances when questioning is not used effectively to probe

and develop pupils' understanding.

- Some teachers make sure that pupils can consolidate their previous learning. This means that pupils can build on their prior knowledge. This is especially the case in science, where teachers are effective in checking that pupils' knowledge of subject-specific vocabulary is embedded.
- Teaching assistants and other adults use their time effectively across the school to support pupils' learning. The positive relationships that they have fostered with pupils with SEND and the small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language help them to make good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Most pupils who spoke to inspectors say that bullying is rare and, when it does happen, staff deal with it effectively. However, this view is not shared by all pupils. A small proportion of pupils feel that staff are not effective in resolving incidents of bullying. A small minority of parents share this view.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive. Many pupils are confident and articulate and give of their best. However, there is a significant minority of pupils who do not possess the skills or the determination to be successful learners.
- Pupils benefit from an effective CEIAG programme that starts when they join the school in Year 7. Staff have fostered links with local companies. As a result, an increasing proportion of pupils are successfully applying for apprenticeships. A large and successful careers fair takes place annually for pupils and students of all ages, providing opportunities to learn from advisers from a wide range of commercial, industrial and professional backgrounds about workplace opportunities.
- Staff know and care for their pupils well, particularly those pupils with SEND. Inspection evidence indicates that the school is a safe place.
- Pupils value the tolerant and caring ethos promoted by leaders at all levels. However, in the school's PSHE programme, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn about and reflect upon issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. As a result, some pupils do not understand the negative consequences of homophobic language.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They learn how to keep themselves safe through the school's PSHE curriculum.
- Leaders monitor closely the personal development, behaviour, welfare and attendance of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Following the last inspection, leaders have been slow to respond to pupils' increasingly poor attendance rates. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils. Despite

some recent improvement, a very high proportion of disadvantaged pupils continue to be regularly absent from school.

- The number of fixed-term exclusions has increased. This is, in part, due to the implementation of a new behaviour policy to raise expectations. The number of internal exclusions and detentions has also risen significantly during this school year.
- Most pupils are generally polite and friendly. They behave well and show respect to each other and visitors to the school. However, some pupils explained to inspectors that their learning is often disrupted by poor behaviour.
- A small proportion of pupils arrive late to their lessons and they do not bring the correct equipment for learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Outcomes have declined markedly since the last inspection. Test results show that Year 11 pupils who left the school in 2017 made inadequate progress across the curriculum during their time at the school. While the Year 11 pupils who left the school in 2018 made better progress than their counterparts from the previous year, their progress was even weaker in mathematics. Outcomes are therefore inadequate because pupils underachieve considerably in mathematics.
- Pupils who have left the school over the past two years have not attained well. The proportions of pupils who attained a strong or standard pass in both English and mathematics have been well below the national averages. The proportion of pupils achieving the EBacc has been very low.
- The progress of boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils has been particularly poor in recent years. This is because teachers' expectations of these pupils are not high enough. Furthermore, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been hindered by leaders' ill-considered use of the pupil premium funding and governors' failure to monitor that use.
- Leaders presented evidence to indicate that pupils in the school are making better progress than those who left the school in 2017 and 2018. Their information indicates that pupils, particularly in key stage 3, are making stronger progress and that the differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others in school are beginning to diminish. However, inspectors found evidence of significant inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the assessment of the work of pupils in key stage 3. This creates doubt about the validity of the information presented by leaders.
- A scrutiny of pupils' work and inspection of pupils' books in lessons showed that pupils' progress in mathematics is inadequate in key stages 3 and 4. They also indicated that boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils are not making significantly better progress than in the past.
- Pupils with SEND are making significantly better progress than in the past because of the careful leadership provided by the school's two special educational needs coordinators. Pupils with SEND make good progress because they benefit from a range of appropriate and careful support with their learning. This is also the case for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils are also making better progress in English and history as a result of

improvements in the quality of teaching in these areas. Pupils continue to do well in the performing arts and technologies, and they make good progress in modern foreign languages. Nonetheless, the proportion of pupils choosing to study a modern foreign language at key stage 4 declined following the previous inspection.

- In the period following the previous inspection, leaders did not ensure that reading was promoted effectively. This resulted in a decline in the reading culture within the school. Leaders, and especially the school librarian, have introduced a number of initiatives to promote the importance of reading for all pupils. The literacy coordinator has also introduced new initiatives. These initiatives are beginning to improve the reading skills of pupils who join the school having not attained the expected standard in this subject at primary school.
- The proportion of pupils leaving the school and going on to education, employment or further training has remained high. This is partly the result of the strengths in CEIAG. Despite this, the low attainment of pupils in the past two years has restricted the range of options that are available to them once they leave the school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- There has been a pronounced decline in students' outcomes over the past three years. For the last two years, students have made significantly less progress than others nationally. Leaders' information indicates that the progress of students currently in Year 13 is even weaker than their counterparts from the last two years.
- The progress that students make varies across subjects. Over the last three years, the progress made by students in English literature, media and mathematics has declined markedly.
- Leaders do not have a clear understanding of why this underachievement has occurred and the actions that they now need to take to address the decline in outcomes. They do not have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form.
- Leaders have not ensured that the principles of the DfE's 16 to 19 study programmes have been fully met. They have not ensured that students complete work experience or work-related training that links to their aspirations and their plans for the future.
- Leaders do not have a clear rationale for the design of the curriculum in the sixth form. Due to the small size of the provision, the courses that are offered are based upon students' preferences and teachers' expertise. As a result, the range of subjects offered is relatively narrow.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form varies between subjects. Pupils benefit from effective teaching in history and psychology. In these subjects, teachers' accurate assessment helps students to make steady and consistent gains in their learning. In too many subjects, such as mathematics, teaching is inadequate.
- During the inspection, some students explained how morale is low among some of the students. This is because they do not feel that they are given enough independence. They feel that some staff do not treat them as young adults. Students are disappointed that there is not a defined space in the school where they can relax

and socialise with each other.

- Many students in the sixth form appreciate the opportunities that they are given to take on leadership roles. For example, they welcome the chance to support the learning of younger pupils in different subjects.
- Students learn how to stay safe and how to manage risk. For example, students learn about the dangers associated with alcohol, drugs and knife crime. They also benefit from a range of enrichment opportunities, such as visits to universities.
- Students benefit from an effective programme of CEIAG. This equips them with a sound understanding of the different options available to them when they leave the sixth form. Nonetheless, their low attainment in A-level examinations restricts their options.
- Rates of students' attendance in the sixth form are high. Students attend regularly and, generally, they demonstrate positive attitudes to their studies and behave well.
- Arrangements to keep students safe are effective.

School details

Unique reference number

111451

Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10087928

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 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	884
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Coucill
Headteacher	Mrs C Vile
Telephone number	0151 355 2373
Website	www.epchs.co.uk/
Email address	admin@email.epchs.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- A very small number of pupils spend part of their week attending placements at West Cheshire College, Armstrong Works and Ancora House (a pupil referral unit).
- The school is within the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury and its most recent section 48 inspection took place in October 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects, including some joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors carried out a work scrutiny with senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors met with a group of sixth-form students and three other groups of pupils. They also talked with others informally during breaks and lunchtimes. Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders and classroom teachers. A meeting was held with the chair, vice-chair and seven other members of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke by telephone with a representative of the governing body and a representative from the Shrewsbury Diocese.
- Inspectors took account of the 121 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the 108 free-text responses.
- Inspectors took into account the 34 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and the 45 responses to the online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and development plan, information about the school's performance and a selection of policies, including those related to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Timothy Gartside, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Gregory	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gary Kelly	Ofsted Inspector
Will Smith	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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