

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Upton-by-Chester High School

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

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 February 2025

Outcome

Upton-by-Chester High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish in this school's nurturing and inclusive environment. Students in the sixth form are particularly appreciative of the school's support for their academic achievement and personal growth. Pupils develop positive relationships with staff. This helps them to feel known and cared for, despite the large size of the school. A culture of trust and respect is evident. For instance, at a charity karaoke event organised by sixth-form students, staff were loudly and enthusiastically cheered on by pupils.

Staff are determined that pupils will achieve highly. The vast majority do. Pupils understand that their attitudes to learning make a difference to how successful they are. They behave accordingly. This helps to ensure that classrooms are calm and purposeful places where learning is very rarely disrupted.

The pupil-produced 'Upton Voice' newsletter is a joyous celebration of pupils' individual and collective achievements. It brims with examples of the wide-ranging and exciting enrichment opportunities that the school provides. For instance, pupils attend residential trips, perform in the school production and engage in the wealth of clubs that are available through the 'engage' programme. These opportunities allow pupils to explore new talents and interests and help them to grow in confidence. Most pupils are highly positive about their school experience.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has redesigned its curriculum to ensure that it is broad, balanced and ambitious from Year 7 to Year 13. Leaders have taken effective action to increase the number of pupils studying the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. For example, local

employers are invited into school to talk to pupils about the value of learning a modern foreign language.

In each subject, careful thought has been given to what pupils will learn and the order in which they will encounter new knowledge. Staff are experts in their subjects. They use this expertise effectively to help pupils understand, and practise applying, new content. Teachers frequently check how well pupils know and remember what they have learned. However, on occasions, these checks are not as effective as they could be. As a result, some pupils, in particular some disadvantaged pupils, develop gaps in their knowledge that are not readily identified and addressed.

The school has prioritised ensuring that disadvantaged pupils attend school and achieve well. Its comprehensive approach to improving rates of attendance has been fruitful. Disadvantaged pupils, like their peers, attend school well. The school identifies any barriers to learning that these pupils may have, including any special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Well-trained staff use the school's agreed strategies to support pupils to successfully overcome these barriers. In the main, these pupils learn well.

The school promotes a culture of reading. Pupils of all ages encounter a broad range of high-quality texts that encourage them to reflect on important themes and issues. The school's support for pupils in key stage 3 who struggle with their reading is a strength. Skilled staff help these pupils to catch up quickly with their peers. However, this specialist support does not extend into key stage 4. A small number of older pupils do not benefit from the most effective support to enable them to read more fluently.

An extensive careers programme provides pupils with a wealth of information about the different opportunities that are available to them when they leave school. For example, pupils attend 'careers breakfasts' where local employers share insights into different roles and industries. Students in the sixth form, and pupils in Year 10, make the most of work experience opportunities to further deepen their understanding of the world of work. The careers programme is supplemented by opportunities for pupils to develop a range of skills, from the art of debating to effective teamwork. This helps to ensure that pupils are ready to embark on their next steps with confidence and enthusiasm.

The school ensures that pupils learn about the important issues that they might face in modern society. For instance, they understand how to keep themselves safe online. The school provides a wide range of leadership roles which encourage pupils to contribute to the school community and to help to ensure that it is a safe and welcoming place for all. For example, pupil leaders champion tolerance and diversity and peer mentors support others through difficult times. Bullying is not tolerated.

Leaders at all levels are highly ambitious for the school. Governors and leaders work closely together to review and refine the quality of education that the school provides. They know the school's strengths and areas for development very well. Much work has recently been done to strengthen the curriculum and to ensure that it is delivered consistently well. Typically, staff appreciate the actions that leaders have taken to limit the

impact on their workload, including changes to the feedback policy. Staff are very proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasions, teachers' checks on what pupils know and remember are not as effective as they could be. As a result, some pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils, develop gaps in their knowledge that are not addressed swiftly. The school should ensure that its strategies to check what pupils know and remember are embedded consistently well.
- The school's approach to supporting a small number of pupils in key stage 4 who find reading more difficult is underdeveloped. Consequently, a few older pupils do not receive the most effective support to help them to improve their reading. The school should ensure that older pupils receive the support that they need to read confidently and fluently.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in May 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	111422
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10348076
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1759
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	312
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Julie Minion
Headteacher	Lee Cummins
Website	www.uptonhigh.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 April 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses one registered and three unregistered alternative provisions for a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of staff.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- An inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority and a consultant who works with the school.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors considered the responses shared through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and for pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including the school's policies and records relating to pupils' attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

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Deborah Bailey

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