



National Association for Able Children in Education

NACE Challenge Award Assessment Report (September 2024)

Summary of strengths for provision and outcomes

- This is a school in which students can safely make new discoveries, accept challenges, and take risks. Learning is a joyful experience, shared equally by teachers and students. One student said, “our teachers trust us to come up with intellectual arguments and our knowledge is respected and seen as equal with the teachers’.”
- All teachers are committed to providing a cognitively challenging experience both within and beyond lessons. Middle leaders are empowered to implement subject specific frameworks to support adaptive teaching, based on the whole school model. This provides each subject with a unique identity, allowing students to flourish through a wide range of challenges.
- Outcomes for students are consistently high. In 2023 progress 8 was 0.9 and attainment 8 was 82.4 with all students gaining 5 or above in mathematics and English. The quality of overall provision was evident in that all students, regardless of background or potential barriers, progressed almost a grade beyond baseline expectation, gaining high grades across all subject areas.
- These high standards have been maintained in 2024 with an 85% success rate for grades 7 to 9 at GCSE and a similar percentage for A* to B at A level. Following these high levels of performance, almost all students progress onto university, with some taking a Gap Year and others accessing professional apprenticeships.
- The school has a curriculum challenge model which provides demanding and stimulating experiences for students. Habitual challenge is central to teaching and learning. The seven elements of the model are: scheduled; extension; enrichment; overarching; excellence; ancillary and innovation.
- Among the enrichment opportunities offered to students are the Close Reading Group and the Elite Challenge Award: opportunities for students from key stages 4 and 5 to engage in academically and intellectually challenging reading and research. They build skills in preparation for ELAT or similar examinations and Oxbridge applications. The award is achieved following a 90- minute assessment which demands both conceptual and linguistic analysis. Students have expressed their enjoyment and enthusiasm for writing at this standard with some successfully entering wider writing competitions or applying to Oxbridge colleges.

- Elite participation for mathematics and sciences are encouraged through STEM projects and mathematics or science Olympiads.
- A wide range of participatory opportunities exist across all areas of the curriculum, with clubs or external partnerships providing experience, challenge, and enrichment. Music plays a strong part in the life of the school with over forty ensembles. Students also have sporting and performance opportunities which include an annual dance show.
- A Global Citizenship programme develops charity and community work enhanced by a wide range of community-based initiatives. Outreach to local primary schools is an important commitment for the school with teachers and students supporting learning and ambition.
- The CCHS Institute programme caters to more able students both within and beyond the curriculum, offering a wide range of academic enrichment opportunities.
- The school is aware of the risks to wellbeing for highly able students. The pastoral system is exemplary. A well-structured and robust system is in place providing help and advice on issues such as perfectionism, anxiety, mental health, and well-being and includes support for young carers. Parents receive information on the support available and have access to additional guidance through parent webinars.
- Parents are delighted with the experiences their children receive and the ways in which they are able to blossom. Parents who have more than one child in school speak of the ways in which their children are treated as individuals with different needs and capabilities. They recognise the ambitious culture where their children do not realise they are being challenged and love it. They say that their children are confident in their learning. They are allowed to determine their own rate of learning in a trusting environment.
- Younger students said that if they did not know something or had difficulty the teacher would take them back to the correct point in their learning and then provide appropriate questions or challenges which allowed them to move forward. They had great confidence in the care and support given by their teachers. The older students had well developed metacognitive skills and spoke about the ways in which they could now think and learn. One student said: "having secure knowledge helps you come up with new ideas. The fun thing is, connecting the knowledge. When one thing reminds you of another it gets exciting - like knitting in your brain."
- The school has made a commitment to widen participation and accepts up to thirty students a year who are eligible for free school meals and have the potential to achieve well. Their learning is supported and tracked so that potential barriers to learning are identified and addressed.

Summary of strengths for teaching and learning

- The school has a shared language and understanding of all that curriculum embodies. In the broadest sense learners are expected to become: articulate; creative; enquiring; knowledgeable; principled; reflective and resilient.
- Teachers are well informed with strong subject knowledge. Their professional learning includes developing an awareness of current educational research and its

effectiveness within classroom practice. The teaching and learning handbook provides detailed information on how to implement teaching principles and strategies. Adaptive teaching, principles of instruction, interdisciplinary teaching, creativity, and metacognition are among the toolkit of pedagogical instruments being used in classrooms.

- Ten lessons were observed. These evidenced the positive impact that this expertise has on the taught curriculum. These included observations from all key stages and included both core and wider curriculum. Additionally, a lunchtime performance celebrating culture was seen. This not only demonstrated the talent of the students but also showed the strong and supportive school community present at the event.
- The joy of learning, which exists in the school, can be partly attributed to the strong interpersonal relationships which exist in the classrooms. Students are intellectual but humble learners. Their teachers are highly skilled, respectful, and sensitive to the needs of those in the classroom. All practice seen was learning led which made the tasks almost invisible as the learning came to the fore. The learning moved at pace with pauses for discussion or reflection after which learning moved to greater depth or breadth.
- Teachers have a deep understanding of pedagogy. In all classes the careful choice of activities lifted the lid on learning. Students stepped up to the challenge and made thoughtful and insightful contributions. In Latin this was seen when an art stimulus was used for conversation based around perceptions at that time.
- The quality of discussion and questioning allowed students to develop their thinking and bring latent knowledge to the fore. In all the observed lessons, students were able to refine and deepen their understanding through dialogic discourse and intellectual challenge. An example of this was seen in a biology lesson during which students acquired new knowledge relating to glucose and starches and linked this to their prior understanding of photosynthesis.
- Teachers orchestrated retrieval in a sophisticated and highly effective manner at all points in the lesson which enabled students with varied experience to step forward. This was particularly evident in a history lesson in which students were able to use their knowledge of the Tudor period to discuss existing and emerging religious beliefs.
- Students were in control of their learning and both teachers and students were comfortable to take a step back in the learning to reflect or reconsider and then move forward. In mathematics lessons, the big question was the initial focus of the lesson and provided the greatest challenge. As students approached the problem and engaged in discourse, the teacher was able to identify a key learning point within the conceptual zone. Together they could deconstruct their ideas and then reconstruct their thinking, through support, to improve their processing and achieve a solution.
- Outside lessons, direct tutoring support has been implemented using former students so that the tutor has a relationship with subject leaders. Potential underachievement is then tracked, and students receive targeted support.