

Hilbre High School Humanities College

Frankby Road, Wirral, Merseyside, CH48 6EQ

Inspection dates

12–13 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Some students, given their starting points, are not making the progress that might be expected of them in English, mathematics and a wider range of subjects.
- Not enough teaching is good and outstanding to drive forward learning effectively in lessons. Too often teachers have low expectations and work is not designed to challenge students, particularly the most able, some of whom are underachieving.
- Attitudes of some students are not always positive enough to help learning. They do not work hard enough unless their teachers encourage them to. Too many students do not bring the right equipment to lessons.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students are not making good progress from their starting points as not all teaching is challenging enough.
- Leadership and management require improvement. Performance management arrangements are not clearly impacting on the achievement of students. Some middle leaders do not effectively monitor the progress of groups.
- Targets set for students are not appropriately challenging for some students, particularly for the most able. Improvement plans do not clearly indicate how the impact of actions taken will be measured.

The school has the following strengths

- There is some good and outstanding teaching in the academy. Teachers are working with each other constructively to improve their classroom practice and this is raising achievement.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strongly promoted across the academy.
- Achievement in science and languages is good.
- The principal and senior leaders know what needs to be done to improve. Steps taken have improved the quality of teaching, particularly in English. Progress of the most able is also improving. Several new initiatives are beginning to show positive impact on students' achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 part-lessons, taught by 37 teachers. Five of these were jointly observed with members of the senior and middle leadership team. Two registrations and two assemblies were also observed.
- Inspectors spoke to two governors, a school improvement advisor, senior and middle leaders across the academy and students from every year group.
- Inspectors looked closely at a range of documents including information on teachers' performance, the academy's self-evaluation and improvement plan, an external review report on the provision in English, records of the quality of teaching, newsletters and internal and external data on students' attainment and progress.
- Inspectors considered the 68 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Pankaj Gulab, Lead inspector

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Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized 11-18 secondary school. Hilbre High School Humanities College converted to become an academy school on 1 July 2012. When its predecessor school, Hilbre High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, its overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory.
- There are 10% fewer girls than boys.
- The proportion of students known to be supported through the pupil premium (additional funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and the children of families in the armed forces) is average.
- The percentage of students who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average, as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is three times the national average.
- The academy has two specially resourced units for students who have special educational needs. One is for students with autistic spectrum disorder and the other for moderate learning difficulties, which together cater for 15 students in total.
- The academy uses the following organisations to provide an alternative curriculum for a handful of students; Cornerstone Training Limited, The Vocational College, Maritime and Engineering College North West and The Beechwood Sports Science Curriculum.
- The principal is a local leader of education and provides support for a recently appointed headteacher of a local school.
- The academy operates a collaborative sixth-form provision with Pensby Boys' and Pensby Girls' schools.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that more is good and outstanding to raise achievement further, especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - teachers' expectations of students, particularly the most able, are raised
 - teachers take into consideration what they know about their students to plan lessons to develop their eagerness to learn so that students of all abilities make at least good progress
 - marking across the academy more consistently reflects the best practice in the academy in which students know how well they are doing, what they need to do to improve and are given the opportunity to act on the advice.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that target-setting arrangements are appropriately challenging for all students
 - helping middle leaders assess the impact of their work on individuals and groups
 - making the use of performance management more effective by setting more demanding targets for the proportions of students that make good progress
 - making it easier to see the impact of actions proposed in academy plans by having clear measures that can be tracked through the year.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The 2013 group of Year 11 students arrived in the academy with average English and mathematical skills. On leaving, the standards reached by the end of Year 11 are broadly average for mathematics but lower for English. The proportion of students who attained 5A* to C grades including English and mathematics in 2013 was 10 percentage points lower than the national figure at 50%.
- The proportion of students making expected levels of progress and better in both English and mathematics is lower than nationally. Levels of progress measures in mathematics are close to the national average but much lower in English. The academy has identified what went wrong in English last year and has taken steps to tackle the weaker progress in English. Inspection evidence from the analysis of school data, observing English lessons, analysis of students' work and discussions with students show that students are now making much faster and more secure progress. Students are now achieving as well in English as in mathematics.
- Measured on average point scores, the attainment of students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average for similar students in both English and mathematics. However, in the academy students known to be eligible for free school meals attain one third of a GCSE grade lower in English and about half a GCSE grade lower in mathematics than their classmates. The gaps are smaller than the national gap because students not supported by the pupil premium funding are not doing as well. School data, confirmed by inspection evidence, show that the standards for both groups are rising as a result of a sharper focus on meeting the needs of disadvantaged students and expecting more of all students.
- The performance of disabled students and those with special educational needs in English and mathematics is close to the national average. Students are supported well in the academy and are making better progress than in the last academic year.
- A handful of students benefits positively from specific placements with alternative providers. Their safety and progress is closely monitored and most leave with qualifications and skills that will help them with their next steps.
- The academy has started a focus on reading this academic year by having sessions when students 'drop everything and read'. This, alongside a literacy focus in most lessons, is positively driving forward students' literacy development. Numeracy skills are yet to be more widely developed across the curriculum.
- Students in the specially resourced units generally make good progress from their individual starting points because they have positive attitudes to learning and receive support of good quality from teaching assistants in the main part of the academy.
- Girls generally achieve better than boys. However, tracking data show that the gap is now narrowing securely. The narrowing gap for various groups in the academy is evidence that it satisfactorily promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination.
- The achievement of the most able is strong in science and modern languages. However, early entry arrangements in the past have resulted in lower than expected standards being reached in English and mathematics, because students were satisfied with the first grade they attained.
- Early entry for GCSE examinations has been used by the academy in the past and this has resulted in students not making the levels of progress that might be expected of them. This is particularly evident for the most able students. The academy no longer enters students early, although a legacy remains of a small number of students in the current Year 11 who moved on to other courses after sitting their exams early. The impact of abandoning early entry is therefore having a positive effect on achievement.
- Progress in the sixth form is broadly in line with national averages for almost all subjects. It is weaker overall for the academic than for the vocational courses. The collaboration with other schools to enhance the curriculum is making it possible for students to follow a wider range of

courses. Stronger teaching observed in the sixth form is also securing better progress currently. The introduction of directed study periods and learner journals for all students this academic year is proving to be effective in tackling issues early and is securing better progress. The personal development of sixth-formers is catered for well and they benefit from good advice, information and guidance which results in the vast majority going on to employment, education or training.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, while the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is growing, a small amount is inadequate and too much still requires improvement. This acts as a brake on accelerating progress at a faster rate in some lessons. Work in students' books shows that the progress that students make varies too much from subject to subject.
- Where teaching is good or better students respond well to teachers' passion for their subject and the high expectations they convey. Lessons are designed to stimulate students' thinking and encourage their engagement. This results in enjoyment and high quality learning. In an English lesson, for example, the teacher made good use of the expertise of a poet who captured students' attention through linking First World War images to a poem. These images helped students generate ideas for their own poem and helped them to incorporate literary devices and emotions into their rhymes, all of which contributed to good learning.
- Where teaching is weaker, the work set for students is not always hard enough and does not always interest them sufficiently. This leads to them being bored and the pace of learning slows. Questioning is not probing enough to draw on students' previous learning. At times students are engaged in 'busy' work rather than activities that are designed to develop their knowledge skills or understanding.
- There are good examples of marking in the academy but this is not consistent across subjects or within subjects. Where marking is most effective, teachers are very precise about how students can improve their written work and this is followed by opportunities for students to do so. This makes a valuable contribution to student progress. In one set of mathematics books, for example, marking was clearly structured with the teacher setting a follow-up activity and then identifying the space in which it was to be undertaken. Students were given time and opportunity to reflect on the teachers' comments and to complete the additional activity. This consolidated and developed students' understanding and promoted better learning. However, much marking was not as rigorous or as helpful as this.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Behaviour in lessons is variable and often dependent on the quality of teaching that they experience. In too many lessons some students do not fully apply themselves to the work set. Instead, students wait for the teacher to tell them what to do next, rather than ask for additional work or seek out further challenges using the resources that they have. A small but significant number of students arrive at the academy without the correct equipment that will help their learning progress smoothly.
- Students behave well socially in most spaces. During breaks they gather together in groups and interact positively. They move responsibly between lessons but some are slow at getting to their next location. Older students sometimes congregate in corridors and are not sensitive to the space needed for others to move past them. The academy's system of self-locking doors increases the negative impact of late-comers as the flow of the lesson is interrupted to allow them to enter. Some students drop litter in classrooms and around the academy.
- Students dress smartly in their uniform as they are proud of their academy. Students are courteous and polite to visitors and other adults, and engage positively in conversations to convey their opinions.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students of all ages comment

that bullying of any kind, including homophobic bullying, is rare. They have confidence in adults dealing effectively with any concerns they might raise. Students are aware of how to stay safe when using new technologies and recognise bullying when it occurs because individuals are different.

- Attendance has improved and is currently above the national average, with the percentage that is persistently absent being well below the national average. Academy records show that incidents of bullying and poor behaviour are reducing, with numbers of students having to be disciplined reducing when compared to the same period last year.
- Parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire, (Parent View), are positive about most of the academy's work and confirm students' views about safety. Although still positive, parents are slightly less confident that the academy makes sure students behave well.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The principal and her leadership team are very focussed on improving achievement through more effective teaching. A number of new leaders and a range of new initiatives are starting to drive up the quality of teaching securely with a consequent rise in achievement. Some very clear positive impacts can be seen in areas that have had a significant input and focus. One of these is the English department. The quality of teaching in English has improved rapidly. This was confirmed by an external review carried out by the local authority in November and further confirmed by observations carried out by inspectors.
- The vision of improving teaching is driven across all levels of leadership and management. Middle leaders are clear about their role in moving this forward. Focussed involvement of a seconded advanced skills teacher on a part-time basis, coupled with the regular weekly focus on the quality of teaching driven by an assistant principal is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Teaching and learning groups are attended well and sharing of top tips in a weekly newsletter for staff keeps a strong focus on the development of good teaching across the academy. Joint observations undertaken with inspectors confirm the accuracy with which senior and some middle leaders judge the quality of teaching.
- The academy is aware that the targets it sets for students are not yet fully challenging. Steps are being taken to make adjustments to ensure that a greater number of students are challenged to make more than expected progress. Several students speak about having already reached their end-of-year targets.
- Performance management arrangements clearly focus on the teacher standards and are structured well. However, the targets set that relate to the progress of students are not linked rigorously enough to teachers' performance and are not always challenging enough. As a result, almost all staff met their performance targets in 2013 but students' outcomes did not rise significantly. Links between salary progression and performance management are clear.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and adjusted to meet the needs of students. The curriculum has been adjusted to provide greater challenge for students, reflected in the new performance measures for this academic year. Year 7 catch-up money has been used to create smaller English groups for students with low literacy levels on entry to the academy. This is having a positive impact on the progress of these students. Literacy initiatives developed to further support student achievement are driven well in many subjects, but not all. Advice, information and guidance are good and students make pathways choices that are supported by parents and staff. This has led to numbers of students not in education, employment or training being very low at the end of Year 11.
- The collaborative sixth-form arrangements have enabled the academy to offer a wider range of courses for students. Adjustments in timing for the forthcoming academic year will ensure that students do not lose too much time moving between institutions. Leadership in the sixth form has been strengthened and strategies to engage students more effectively in their learning are having a positive impact.
- The enrichment curriculum is wide and varied with large numbers of students accessing the

opportunities provided. Students speak positively about these opportunities and this, along with the curriculum, promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

- The academy has good relationships with its parents and constructively involves them in options choice decisions for students in Year 9 and Year 11. Every Year 9 student receives a personalised interview about their future with a senior leader to which parents are invited.
- The academy seeks support and advice outside the academy and makes positive use of the local authority. Local authority advisors have supported specific curriculum areas and helped to develop the skills of middle leaders with some clear successes. As a result, achievement is rising securely, especially in English.
- The reversing of the decline in English performance and abandoning of the early entry policy, better progress for the most able, improvements in attendance and in the quality of teaching confirm that leaders and managers have the ability to make further improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors exhibit a passion for seeing the academy succeed. As part of their long-term strategy to ensure this they have carried out an audit of their own effectiveness and have recruited members with specific skills that will help the academy. They attend training to help them understand the information provided by academy staff. In addition governors rotate their attendance at the leadership board meetings which take place every half term to discuss various aspects of student achievement and the quality of teaching in depth. Governing body minutes show that academy managers are regularly challenged and asked to explain any underperformance. Governors monitor the impact of expenditure to support the achievement of those students supported by the pupil premium. Governors have been supportive and challenging in equal measure to bring about a more rigorous management of performance management with a sharper link to salary progression.

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	138355
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	426198

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1014
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Greg Kemp
Headteacher	Jan Levenson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0151 6255996
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