

Birkenhead High School Academy

86, Devonshire Place, Prenton, Wirral CH43 1TY

Inspection dates 13–14 October 2015

Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders, staff and governors have contributed to the transformation of this all-through academy into a high-achieving and pulsating community of learning, aspiration and endeavour.
- Leadership of the academy places the progress, aspirations and needs of girls at the centre of all activity.
- The academy is led by an exceptional Principal who has both vision and purpose. She is very ably supported by an outstanding team of senior leaders.
- Strong leadership from middle leaders ensures well-run and high-achieving subject areas.
- Uniformly high-level teaching skills enable all girls to deliver of their best and seek to be even better.
- The behaviour of girls is exemplary. They support each other exceptionally well.
- Throughout the school, from the youngest to the oldest, the girls embrace learning.
- Outcomes for girls at all phases of education are excellent.
- Disadvantaged girls do as well and often better than their peers.
- Girls with disabilities or special educational needs make the same rate of progress as their peers.
- Girls at all educational phases are offered a broad and vibrant curriculum.
- The enrichment curriculum is exceptional in its range and quality.
- Transition from early years to junior, senior and sixth form phases is very well planned.
- Excellent relationships between staff and girls ensure that girls are happy and feel safe across all age ranges.
- Governance is a strength of the academy.
- The Girls' Day School Trust as sponsors make a significant contribution to the work and vision of the academy.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed further a writing-rich environment across all activities in the early years.
- Work with parents, stakeholders and external organisations to further strengthen the academy's strong culture of ambition so that girls can have the widest and most aspirational choices possible on their continued journeys onwards to university, other higher education destinations and the world of work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- This academy is a wonderful and highly effective learning community. Girls from three years of age to 19 grasp opportunities to embrace learning. They espouse respect and responsibility, cooperation, self-confidence and hard work. Leaders, staff and governors should be proud of the transformation they have wrought in this academy over the last three years. The staff and girls do very well but are the first to say that they must do even better. Learning is at the heart of all activity.
- The academy is led by an exceptional and inspiring Principal with true vision. She sets an ambitious and aspirational tone for all. She has moved the academy from selective to comprehensive and in doing so has raised the performance of girls and staff alike. She is supported by a multi-talented senior leadership team who are firm of purpose and resolve. Together they set a tone of effort and enterprise that inspire all.
- Self-evaluation is robust, accurate and honest. Leaders know the work of the academy exceptionally well and there were no surprises in any of the inspection findings. Weaknesses are quickly identified. Action plans to enable improvement are speedily implemented and monitored. Every aspect of self-evaluation is focused on maximising the progress of girls.
- The academy has a wealth of information about the girls' performance and this is put to widespread and very well focused use to understand every aspect of achievement. The tracking and monitoring of girls' progress is thorough and informs learning activities and individual intervention programmes.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is outstanding. The standards set for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are exceptionally high. High-quality continuous training and mentoring further enhances teachers' skills and ensures that staff know the girls and their learning and support needs. There is a buzz among teachers about learning; here teachers talk to each other about how to further improve their teaching.
- Middle managers are resourceful and take full accountability and responsibility for their areas of learning; they lead them very well. The five faculty heads also lead on different academy-wide responsibilities and work as a strong and incisive group to promote ideas and opportunities across the curriculum.
- Leaders set robust targets for teachers. High levels of accountability are balanced by quality coaching support. Academy appraisal systems are comprehensive.
- The curriculum is academic in tone and content. It provides opportunities for all girls whether they are commencing their learning journey in the early years or finishing their academy journey in the sixth form. The junior school offers a vibrant environment and rich curriculum. Four broad choice strands at Key Stage 4 offer possibilities for all ability levels and aptitudes. There is a strong focus on literacy and reading from the start. The library is a hive of activity.
- The jewel in this academy's crown is its exceptional additional and enrichment curriculum. Every lunch hour and after lessons an array of clubs, activities, performances, sports practice and matches and artistic and cultural meetings abound. Corridors are filled with the sound of Schubert and Bach and echoes of public speaking practice and drama rehearsals. Added to this are the winter and summer half-term and Easter holiday additional study programmes. During these holiday periods, girls are offered an additional 280 hours of learning across the broad range of senior school and sixth form subjects. Take-up is high and the provision is highly valued by parents.
- The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is integral to the academy's values. Assemblies, enrichment activities and events cover such aspects as the nature and responsibilities of citizenship within a democratic society.
- Pupil premium funding is used well. Disadvantaged girls make rapid progress during their time at the academy and by the end of Key Stage 4 gaps have closed and they do as well as their academy peers and often better.
- The planning and practice of transition arrangements between the different phases of education are outstanding. Work in the Reception phase in developing self-confident, resilient and purposeful learners is embedded further as girls move into the junior, then senior and finally sixth form phases. From phase to phase this purposefulness and zest for learning is passed on. Those who are new to the academy in any particular phase quickly imbibe it.

- Resources are outstanding. The academy recently won funds to refurbish Second World War air raid shelters in their grounds into an air raid shelter museum. It will be used for history and contemporary affairs additionally and visited by pupils from other schools.
- Parents and carers are kept well informed and many play an active role within the academy. Parents' evenings have a high attendance rate of over 95%. Workshops are also organised for parents from early years onwards to encourage them to become more active participants in their daughters' learning.
- The academy has maintained a very effective and productive working relationship with the local authority. Through the Girls' Day School Trust academy staff and girls have numerous opportunities to meet and share with schools across a variety of locations. The academy gains much from its work with the Girls' Day School Trust.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are a strength of the academy. Governors bring a very wide range of professional experience which informs and enhances the academy's development and drive.
 - Governors have given particularly strong support to the Principal and the senior leaders as they have moved the academy from a selective entrance to a more comprehensive one.
 - Governors understand the effectiveness of teaching across all phases within the academy and its impact on girls' achievement.
 - Governors have good oversight of the academy's finances, including how pupil premium funding is used and the impact this is having on the achievement of disadvantaged girls.
 - Governors monitor academy performance management very well.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- High expectations and aspirations are promoted by teachers. Girls respond with enthusiasm and consistently make good and better progress. At the heart of this outstanding provision are the uniformly high-level skills and commitment of teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers have a very sharp focus on progress.
- From Year 1 to Year 11 girls have a zest for learning. Teaching and learning in the junior school is marked by girls embracing challenge and building aptitudes as resilient and independent learners. Teachers respond by refined questioning that elicits deeper thinking and reasoning from the girls. Girls work effectively in groups and pairs, demonstrating cooperative learning skills. Girls sharpen their speaking and organisation abilities through the challenging and well-planned activities set.
- In the senior school, skills built up at the junior level are further refined and enhanced. The foundation of resilience and independence in learning now gathers momentum. Girls know what learning is. No time is wasted. Classrooms are hives of learning activities and endeavours. Excellent planning by teachers ensures that the needs of all students are met and that all have opportunities to engage in extension activities. Many girls develop good research skills. Many teachers take risks to promote additional stretch and challenge. Relationships are excellent and further add to the strength of the learning culture across the senior school.
- Teachers are ambitious and offer challenge to the girls. In a Year 7 art lesson, girls had studied Hannah Hoch's montage 'The Father'. They were able to understand and appreciate her collage and its context set within German Dadaism. They had each undertaken a collage inspired by Hoch's work and were able to draw on her influences and approach within their montages. The session was rich in vocabulary. Their finished work demonstrated that they had grasped the essentials of Hoch's art. Girls discussed their finished collages in pairs and to the whole class with confidence. It was a very challenging exercise that they all embraced.
- New approaches to assessment were developed and embedded initially in the junior school. They are thorough and are the fruition of much work by leaders, teachers, students and parents; all understand their operation and purpose. Successful practice was translated from the junior to the senior school and is now fully operational across that provision. Assessment is built around working towards, securing and mastering understanding and knowledge and thus accelerating progress made.
- Marking is regular. Girls respond to teachers' comments and take advice. Marking provides a good guide for girls in reassessing where they are and the next stages in their learning journey. Girls learn to see marking as a productive and two-way process across the school.

- A strong literacy culture has been developed across the junior and senior school. Literacy skills and appreciation are honed at the junior level. Girls spoken to were eager to talk about their current reading book. Many girls enjoy the excitement and adventure of reading. Lessons across both the junior and senior school are language-rich and girls build up an impressive vocabulary.
- Numeracy is increasingly well promoted across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote girls' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The academy is a harmonious and inclusive community. Girls enjoy each other's company and are highly supportive across all age groups. They are committed and self-confident learners and support each other's learning and aspirations. They show interest and admiration for each other's successes.
- Girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Girls enjoy an array of sporting, cultural and intellectual activities. They embrace responsibility. The senior students act as 'big sisters' for the junior girls, providing exceptional role models.
- Girls are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They develop a strong understanding of civic responsibility. They celebrate national events using 'Queenie' as a figure head for the celebrations. 'Queenie' is a twenty-foot 'gigantes y cabezudos' (giants with big heads) model dressed as Queen Elizabeth the Second. For example, 'Queenie' will be wheeled out to celebrate the opening of the new Second World War air raid shelter museum in academy grounds.
- Career guidance is well developed across the senior school. Attendance is above the national average for all groups of girls. Exclusion rates are very low.
- Girls wear their uniform with pride throughout the age ranges. They demonstrate a mature respect for the academy environment, which is very tidy and exceptionally well kept. It presents as a marvellous and stimulating environment in which to learn and play.
- The academy places great emphasis on the welfare of students and pastoral and welfare systems are fine-tuned to their needs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of the girls is outstanding.
- Relationships between staff and girls are excellent. Girls are courteous and polite to each other, other adults and visitors. Discipline and excellent behaviour are largely self-regulating.
- Girls spoken to said that incidences of bullying were exceptionally rare. Girls discuss the different types of bullying including cyber, racist and homophobic bullying. Girls develop an excellent understanding of how to keep safe through tutorials, assemblies and special focus events. They are made aware of issues regarding extremism, radicalisation and child sexual exploitation.
- Girls spoken to said that they feel very secure and safe within the academy. They also said they felt excited at coming to school each day to learn.

Outcomes for pupils are outstanding

- Girls' outcomes are outstanding.
- By the end of Key Stage 4 almost all girls are making strong progress when compared to national averages. In English, almost all girls make expected progress and well over 60% make better than expected progress. In mathematics, again almost all girls make expected progress and over 40% make better than expected progress. Girls are doing exceptionally well when compared to their peers nationally.
- Disadvantaged girls do as well as their peers in school for expected progress, in both mathematics and English, and better than their peers nationally in both subjects. The gaps that exist when girls enter the senior school are closed rapidly. Gaps are closed rapidly in the senior school across all core subjects. For better than expected progress, disadvantaged girls at the academy do far better than other students nationally.
- The academy is part of the Progress 8 project where results for the 2014/15 cohort demonstrate exceptional progress and high value added.

- The progress made and attainment reached by the most-able girls is excellent.
- The progress of disabled girls and those who have special educational needs in 2014/15 across both the junior and senior school was strong because their needs are very well assessed and intervention sessions to promote improvement are quickly organised.
- The proportion of girls gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was significantly above the national average in 2014/15 and confirmed a strong three-year trend.
- Girls make very good progress in reading, writing, mathematics, speaking and listening and science at Key Stage 1. They significantly outperform their peers nationally across all these areas. Gaps between disadvantaged girls and their peers are narrowed. Girls develop during this time very positive attitudes to learning.
- The progress made by girls at Key Stage 2 is exceptional. Here the foundations for high achievement are further embedded. Here also gaps between disadvantaged girls and their peers are quickly narrowed. For example, at Key Stage 2 disadvantaged girls outperform the non-disadvantaged girls in all subjects at Level 4+. Where gaps still exist, the academy has identified them and is taking suitable action to close them quickly. The monitoring of progress is very sharp.
- Girls are prepared well for the academy sixth form. The academy also is very open to girls making other choices, such as apprenticeships or courses at further education colleges. Its mantra is 'what is best for the girls is best for the academy'.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- Girls build their self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning during their time in the Reception class. The skills and attitudes developed during this phase transfer seamlessly to the primary phase. Girls move to the primary fully prepared and eager.
- The proportion of girls reaching a good level of development is above the national average. Girls do exceptionally well in developing their speaking skills and self-confidence. Strengths also emerge in reading and number and in their understanding of technology and the wider world.
- Additional funding is used well to narrow gaps for disadvantaged girls. All disadvantaged girls achieved a good level of development in 2014/15.
- There is exemplary practice in how well girls explore and use media and materials. Great stress is placed on developing their imaginative skills. They respond to all of this with energy, growing confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Leaders acknowledge the need to develop a richer writing environment across all activities.
- Phonics (letters and the the sounds they make) is well taught. Girls display a good understanding of phonics knowledge.
- Teachers place significant emphasis on developing the girls' imaginative skills. Teachers' skilful questioning advances girls' thinking skills and enhances the development of their speech and communication.
- Teaching staff have the highest expectations for the behaviour and development of the girls. Good use is made of teaching assistants.
- Teachers use the observations they make to extend and shape the learning of the girls. This ensures that girls make rapid progress over the course of their time in the Reception class.
- Learning is very well resourced, with stimulating and imaginative environments both indoors and in the outdoor spaces. Girls can move safely and are safe from harm. Adults are well trained in procedures to make sure that girls are safe in the academy.
- The monitoring and tracking of the girls' development and progress is excellent. Leaders are very clear about the provision's strengths and areas for improvement. They are quick to respond to changes in the intake such as the high proportion of summer births entering in the 2014/15 cohort.
- Girls' behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. Relationships across the Reception Year are excellent. There is a very strong and successful emphasis placed on the development of personal, social and emotional skills.
- Leaders work very effectively with parents. Workshops for parents help them to both better understand the learning and progress of their daughters and become more active participants in that learning.

16 to 19 study programmes are outstanding

- Girls enter the sixth form as self-confident and resilient learners. They have maintained excellent progress through the junior and senior schools and bring high expectations and skills to their sixth form learning.
- Leadership of the sixth form is excellent. The academy's culture of high expectations and aspirations continues and is further imbued with even greater challenge. The academy has embraced the notion of all aspects of the 16–19 programmes of study. The girls' work experience and enrichment opportunities are wide and varied. Girls spoken to said that they valued this.
- The tracking and monitoring of girls' progress is thorough and well focused. Where leaders see areas for improvement they act with alacrity to tackle them. Staff embrace a continuing culture of responsibility and accountability. Continuous professional development for staff is excellent, well focused and is informed by the best practice within the sixth form.
- A broad range of pathways are offered in the sixth form, ranging from advanced GCEs to BTEC and GCSEs where necessary. The academy's emphasis on high-quality tutorial and extensive enrichment activities continues and enhances further girls' progress and development. Tutorial programmes inform girls on safeguarding, British values, community and contemporary world affairs. Parents are kept well informed on girls' progress.
- Leaders acknowledge the need to further work with parents and other stakeholders on promoting a still stronger culture of ambition so that girls can make the widest and most aspirational choices possible in their continued journeys onwards into university, other higher education destinations and the world of work.
- Teaching in the sixth form is strong. Teachers are very well prepared and have excellent subject knowledge. Lesson planning is thorough and informs learning activities and extension work. Activities match the needs of all girls. Assessment systems are thorough.
- Marking is regular and of high quality and informs girls of their current progress and next steps in developing their understanding. Leaders engage with teachers, and teachers engage with teachers regularly on different approaches to teaching and learning and how to make it even better.
- Girls are thoughtful, articulate and very grateful for the support and opportunities given to them. They are courteous and engaging. Girls are serious about their learning and work purposefully. They make an excellent contribution to the whole school. Their roles as 'big sisters' to girls in Year 7 has real impact in enhancing support and providing excellent role models.
- The academy has strong support and welfare systems to support girls. Attendance is high.
- Outcomes for advanced courses are excellent. Girls make at least good and often outstanding progress at GCE A-level and on BTEC courses. The very few girls that resit GCSE English and mathematics do well.
- Disadvantaged girls do as well and often better than their peers. Girls are well supported for the next step to higher education or employment. The academy is also good at promoting other progression routes such as apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	135877
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	10005568

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,096
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	167
Number of boarders on roll	NA
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr N Lawrence
Principal	Mrs C Mann
Telephone number	0151 6525777
Website	www.birkenheadhigh.gdst.net
Email address	c.mann@birkhs.gdst.net
Date of previous inspection	2–3 February 2012

Information about this school

- Birkenhead High School Academy is an all-through three to 19 girls' school.
- The academy's sponsor is the Girls' Day School Trust; governance is through an academy trust board and the local governing body.
- The academy has moved from a largely selective entry to a more comprehensive intake over the last four years. The proportion of girls eligible for the pupil premium has increased significantly since the last inspection.
- Academy staffing has undergone significant change since the last inspection, with an approximately 40% turnover of teaching staff.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy offers no alternative provision.
- Some sixth form subjects are taught jointly with St Anselm's College Boys School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in a wide range of subjects across the academy to different age groups and phases. Three lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Five extensive learning walks across all phases were undertaken by inspectors accompanied by a senior leader.
- Inspectors looked closely at samples of girls' written work in a range of subjects and year groups. They also watched girls' behaviour around the school. Visits were made to enrichment activities at lunchtime.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers and five groups of girls. Inspectors met with the Chair of the Governing Body. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation including: self-evaluation and development plans; information relating to girls' attainment and progress; information on attendance; documents and records about behaviour and safeguarding; records of checks on teaching and learning and of teachers' performance management; and the minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Ninety-four parents responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and inspectors considered their views. The lead inspector spoke to parents at their request. Inspectors also reviewed the academy's own records of feedback from parents and students. They also took account of the responses to a questionnaire from 60 staff.

Inspection team

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