



South Wirral High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105107
LEA Wirral
Inspection number 277298
Inspection dates 15 February 2006 to 16 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Ian Thompson CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Plymyard Avenue
School category	Community		Eastham
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Wirral, Merseyside CH62 8EH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 327 3213
Number on roll	1169	Fax number	0151 327 7798
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Barker
Date of previous inspection	30 October 2000	Headteacher	Mrs C McCormack

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average secondary modern school is a specialist visual and performing arts college serving an area of considerable social and economic deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above average. Students' standards on entry to the school are below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to average but the proportion with a statement of special educational need is above average. There are fewer than usual students from minority ethnic backgrounds with no groups of significant size. None is at an early stage of learning English.

Over recent years, the school has gone through a period of disruption due to extensive rebuilding.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This school is outstanding. It provides very good value for money. Inspection evidence confirms the school's overall view of its provision.

Students' achievement throughout the school is exceptionally good as a result of excellent teaching and the outstanding care, guidance and support that the school provides. The key feature of the school is the way that it develops students' confidence in a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere where it is acceptable to do one's best. All members of staff work with a common sense of purpose to help students enjoy coming to school so that attendance is good and improving. Students' personal development is remarkably good because of the exceptionally wide range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities that the school provides through its specialist status. Highly developed partnerships across the community are a strength of the school.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels in the main school and sixth form, contributing to rising standards and achievement. The headteacher shows exceptionally good leadership in setting the direction for the school's improvement. The extensive system of monitoring performance has made a major contribution to the improvement seen in all aspects of the school's work.

Exemplary leadership has driven up standards and achievement since the last inspection. Governors provide very effective support for the school's work and it has a very good capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. Increasing numbers of students opt to join the sixth form and nearly all complete their course. Numbers applying to go on to higher education are increasing significantly. The maturity of sixth formers reflects very well on the school's contribution to their personal development during their years in the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the opportunities for work-related learning in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding throughout the school, including the sixth form where the school modestly judges it as good. Students enter the school with below average standards. By the end of Year 9, standards in national tests are broadly average and improving; in English they are well above average. GCSE results have been improving rapidly for a number of years and in 2005 were above the national average. The school's challenging targets are regularly exceeded.

In response to the school's culture of hard work and teachers' consistently high expectations and challenge, students make excellent progress. Outstanding achievement is underpinned by the very high levels of literacy and numeracy, which the school promotes very effectively. The school's specialist status has had a tremendous effect in enriching learning and promoting students' self confidence and maturity. It is no coincidence that standards have risen significantly since the school gained specialist status.

Students of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and minority groups, make equally outstanding progress.

The school provides sixth form courses for a substantial number of students, who would not otherwise continue their education, roughly 10% of whom have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Standards attained in the sixth form are broadly average and represent outstanding achievement in relation to students' standards when they begin their courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation of students' personal development, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, as outstanding. Students have a strong sense of belonging and fully appreciate the support they receive. They rightly take pride in their school. This is reflected in good rates of attendance and the degree to which students enjoy and show interest in their work. Relationships and attitudes are very positive and there is wonderful mutual respect between students and teachers. Behaviour is exemplary. Students have a clear sense of right and wrong and develop an awareness of other cultures through events such as the highly successful Multicultural Community Arts Festival. Sixth form students say how much they value this event. During their time in the school, students develop confidence, maturity and self-esteem.

Students feel safe, secure and valued. They are part of the consultative process in evaluating provision and contribute to decision making. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and most are actively involved in a broad range of sports and other activities. The interaction between the school and its community is mutually beneficial and significantly enhances students' personal development. The school ensures that students are well prepared for the world of work and their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. A Year 10 student said 'The best thing about this school is the lessons'. Teachers have very high expectations and very effectively challenge students to think for themselves. Students routinely explore

ideas for themselves and tell others what they have learned. As a result, students are independent and confident learners. They are frequently challenged to identify, predict and apply patterns and to explain clearly and accurately how they have arrived at their conclusions. This is very successful in developing their communication skills. Lessons are very well planned with frequent opportunities for students to review and consolidate what they have learned. Teachers monitor progress closely and give help where necessary to ensure all students can succeed. Students who find learning difficult are given particularly good support; gifted and talented students are provided well with additional challenges. Teachers use questioning to very good effect to challenge and support students' understanding. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, for example, students made excellent progress in their understanding of how to multiply decimal numbers. Students were required to explain how they might do this and then to decide the more effective of two methods. Where students made errors in calculations, very skilful questioning enabled them to understand how to put them right. High levels of concentration, a purposeful learning atmosphere and clear enjoyment are characteristics of the majority of lessons.

Teachers use assessment very efficiently to plan for the progress of students in lessons. They routinely involve students in evaluating their own progress and identifying ways they can improve. Regular review and consolidation of learning ensure that students build very effectively on what has gone on before and are given the support they need to do very well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that its curriculum is outstanding. An annual review ensures that what is taught meets the needs of all students. Their views are sought and listened to. As befits a Visual and Performing Arts College, dance is provided for all students in Years 7 to 11 and is one of many factors in developing students' confidence. The school's extensive community links successfully enhance the curriculum. The range of options provided for older students meets their needs and aspirations well. A very good alternative programme is provided for students for whom an academic curriculum is not appropriate; work-related learning is an effective feature of this provision. A very good personal, social and health education course, including careers, is taught by specialist teachers. The curriculum is further extended through such initiatives as Democracy Day and International Day.

The school is rightly proud of its extra-curricular programme. Students appreciate the range and diversity of additional opportunities available to them.

Inspectors agree with the school that the sixth form curriculum is good. It provides an appropriate range of GCE courses and some vocational opportunities, although the school recognises that this is an area for further development. An extensive general studies programme enriches learning in Year 12.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, support and guidance for students of all ages. Procedures to ensure health and safety work well. Arrangements to support vulnerable students and promote child protection are excellent. The sensitive and well coordinated support and guidance offered by the school are very effective in promoting students' well-being. Students and parents greatly appreciate teachers' willingness to give up their time to support students and to provide extra activities. Parents are very well informed about their children's progress.

The very rigorous systems for monitoring progress and setting targets ensure students achieve their full potential and are very successful in developing their confidence and self-esteem. Students are routinely involved in evaluating their own progress. They know how well they are doing and how to improve.

Students have the opportunity to discuss their option and career choices with teachers and careers advisors at key stages during their time at school. As a result, they are able to make well informed decisions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management, both of the main school and the sixth form, are outstanding. The headteacher's great skill is in being able to focus on individual needs without losing sight of the big picture. Her vision for the school's development is communicated clearly and evidently shared by all staff. In addition, she is prepared to give people responsibility, point them in the right direction and then let them get on with the job. This approach has had a considerable positive impact on the professional development of staff. The result is a unity of purpose aimed at developing students' self-confidence and enabling them to achieve as well as they can. A key feature of the school is the way in which all staff accept that they have a role to play in management and are accountable for their own and their students' performance. The very well organised cycle of rigorous evaluation and development planning enables teachers to share good practice within and between departments. Everyone in the school has a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what needs to be done to secure improvement. This extends to students and the effectiveness of target setting and review can be seen in outstanding achievement throughout the school. The school discharges its wider responsibilities as a specialist school exceptionally well; links with other institutions and the community are extremely well developed. The school has successfully involved parents in the partnership of their children's education. Governors are knowledgeable about the school's work and provide exceptional support. A good example is their successful management of the school's bid for specialist status while overseeing rising standards and achievement during a period of extensive rebuilding and staff changes.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, a team of inspectors visited your school to find out if the school is giving you the education you should receive.

Thank you very much for the way in which you welcomed us to your school and thanks to all of you who spoke to us about your life in the school. My special thanks go to the guitar and drum group who entertained me with their own composition at lunchtime.

I am delighted to say the school is outstanding. The particularly good things about the school are:

- the school is outstandingly well run and has a really good atmosphere
- you are happy in the school and rightly proud of it
- teaching is excellent so that you enjoy learning and are helped to do your best
- most of you behave exceptionally well and get on with one another
- the school provides high quality care for you all
- the subjects and the great variety of activities you are offered provide very well for your interests and help you learn.

The only thing that we have asked Mrs McCormack and others who are in charge of the school to improve is to provide more work-related courses in the sixth form.

We hope that you will continue to take pride in your school, work hard and help to maintain its outstanding quality.