

Pensby High School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105101
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	324158
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Georgiana Sale

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	830
Sixth form	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Gerrie
Headteacher	Mr S Hyden
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2006
School address	Irby Road Heswall Wirral Merseyside CH61 6XN
Telephone number	0151 6481941
Fax number	0151 6488103

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Pensby High School for Girls is a comprehensive 11–18 school with specialist status for business, science and enterprise. The school is situated in an area where around 40% attend grammar schools. The school is smaller than average. The number of students entitled to free school meals is average and there are few students from minority ethnic groups or with learning disabilities and/or difficulties. The school has a joint sixth form with the adjacent boys' school and is part of the Deeside Consortium providing post-16 provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Pensby High School is an outstanding school. It is an excellent place for students to learn: students say that they feel safe and their individual needs are successfully catered for. Students' personal development is excellent and is one of the strongest features of the school. Students are confident, polite, and courteous; the girls support and encourage each other. Behaviour is excellent in and out of lessons. Students achieve standards which are above national standards and make good progress.

Students enter the school with average levels of attainment. By the time they leave, they have reached standards which are above national averages and the school's monitoring procedures indicate that this trend will continue with the current Year 11 attaining higher standards still. This represents good progress. The school works hard to look for ways to raise standards further. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

The excellent curriculum meets the needs of learners very effectively and is very well supported by the extensive menu of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits. It is regularly reviewed and developed and the increasing breadth ensures the continuing interest and involvement of the students. Partnerships with other agencies, organisations, and schools are very good and increase the choice of courses on offer as well as ensure appropriate and timely support for the well-being of the students.

Teaching and learning are good. A large majority of the lessons are good or better. There are very good relationships between staff and students. Teachers expect students to do their best and to be positive about their learning. They motivate students with their enthusiasm for their subjects and through a variety of interesting activities.

This is a school where every student truly matters and this is shown in the excellent quality of care and support they receive. Students settle in quickly and subsequently progress well. Academic guidance is good. Effective intervention programmes are in place to support students who are either having problems or who are falling behind with their work and this helps them to make good progress. Health and safety are in line with statutory requirements and all staff receive regular training in the procedures for safeguarding students' welfare.

Students' personal development and well-being are excellent. The school works hard to develop the girls' self-esteem and confidence and this has a positive effect on their personal development and encourages them to achieve well. They know what is meant by a healthy lifestyle and most put the lessons learned into practice. Attendance is good and exclusions are rare; students say they enjoy school and feel safe and cared for. Bullying is rare and students say they are confident that incidents are dealt with firmly and quickly. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, producing mature, confident young women who want to make a difference to the world.

The quality of the leadership and management is outstanding. There is a clear vision and direction given by the headteacher and senior team, which has led to sustained improvement in the main school. Leaders clearly understand what needs improving and what needs to be done. Data is used very effectively to set challenging targets at whole school and departmental level. Leaders and managers have been successful in improving attendance, standards of teaching and learning, and examination success. The leaders of the school are well supported by a well-informed governing body. Significant key appointments at middle manager level and good training offered to all staff give the school a good capacity to improve.

The school's specialist status in science has contributed effectively to the raising of standards across the school and the enterprise elements make an excellent contribution both to preparing the girls for their working life and to their personal development and confidence. Good progress has been made in relation to the areas identified for improvement since the last inspection. The school provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good sixth form where students learn in a supportive and friendly environment. They act as good role models for younger students and play a positive role in the school and in the wider community. They have a good understanding of health and lifestyle issues and show enthusiasm for their work and the extra-curricular activities they are offered.

Many of the most able students at GCSE choose to attend a grammar school for their sixth form so not all students come with good GCSE passes. Their attainment on entry is broadly average. The proportion of students that pass their A levels is in line with national averages and the proportion achieving the higher grades is less than average. However, they make good overall progress during their time in the sixth form given their starting points.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Care and support are good; students are now given clear guidance so that they take appropriate courses linked to their capabilities. The sixth form development programme allows the students to become independent, mature and articulate, ready for the next stage of their lives. However, this programme and the curriculum generally are not supporting the students to adapt to the difference in skills and ways of working needed to succeed at A level. The leadership has already identified this as an area for development, although their actions have not yet had enough time to effect achievement.

Students are very positive about the sixth form and the good level of support and guidance they receive both personally and in relation to their work. The school has recognised that some students find the transition to the ways of learning post-16 challenging and are beginning to look for ways to put this right. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, and provide good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Put in place effective provision to assist students with the transition from Year 11 to Year 12 so that they will have better learning skills to succeed at post-16 courses.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Some of the brightest students in the area attend local grammar schools, leaving the vast majority of students entering Pensby School with average standards. However, by the end of Key Stage 3 all standards are above national averages and science is well above average.

Students continue to make good progress and by the time they reach Year 11 standards are 10% above the national average, as shown by the proportion of students gaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE passes has risen steadily over the past three years; all girls left the school with five GCSE passes in 2008 and the number of students who gained good passes in a modern language and science was also above average.

Students did particularly well in geography in 2008; all of them achieved a good grade and half of them achieved the top grades. Students in English, Spanish and science also achieved well above national standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of the students are outstanding and this is reflected by their excellent behaviour, good attendance, good achievement and enthusiastic enjoyment of school life. Staff value the individuality of students and relationships are very strong. Students are exceptionally well nurtured; they thrive academically and personally.

Many students make effective and positive contributions to their own community and to local communities through their charity work. They contribute to a good school council, and there are 'buddy' systems and school prefects to help run some of the day-to-day aspects of the school. These responsibilities and the systematic building up of students' personal skills build up their self-confidence as they move through the school. This, together with carefully organised work-placements, good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and enterprise days ensures they develop good work-based skills and as a result they are successfully prepared for their working lives.

Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, supported by an excellent personal development programme and many opportunities to experience and take part in cultural and sporting events.

Students are very aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and the vast majority of them take an enthusiastic part in extra-curricular activities. In all their activities in and around school, the students pay attention to acting safely and they look after each other well. Students say that there are always adults to help and that problems get sorted out quickly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are clearly focused on the impact of teaching so that good learning takes place in most lessons. Careful checking of lessons, sharing of good practice and effective staff development have resulted in most lessons now being good or better.

Lessons are effectively planned because the teachers know their students and their starting points thoroughly. The work matches the range of the students' abilities and there is a variety of imaginative activities which match the different learning styles of students. Students find most lessons fun and the girls take part in activities enthusiastically. Teachers keep an eye on progress in lessons by good questioning and good assessment of students' work.

Students are encouraged to talk through complex ideas and answers, helping them to both deepen their understanding and develop communication skills. Students listen carefully and behave in a mature way with teachers who give clear guidance to the girls on how to improve their work. There is some lack of consistency both in how targets are given to the students and the way that feedback is given, which is being tackled in the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Overall the curriculum meets the needs of all students very well, offering them a challenging and relevant range of courses. Through the variety of courses and the excellent pastoral and citizenship courses, it enables self-esteem and self-confidence to grow. It also promotes the personal development of the girls exceptionally well.

Literacy and numeracy skills are effectively developed. ICT skills are also successfully developed in mainstream lessons and in a specialised course taken by all students up to Year 11. There is a wide and appropriate range of Key Stage 4 courses on offer including vocational GCSEs and Diploma courses, and there are clear progression routes to sixth form study. There are opportunities for the more able to take two foreign languages and three separate science subjects at GCSE.

The curriculum is enhanced successfully by themed days. In Key Stage 3 these are developed around a skills-based framework and also in response to students' feedback. For example, a recent day was organised in response to the students asking for more advice and information about dealing with relationships and sexual health. In Key Stages 3 and 4 there are enterprise days, arts weeks and other themed activity days. These enrich and enliven the curriculum and give the students a chance to concentrate on subjects in greater depth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care and support in the school are outstanding and academic guidance is good. The staff know their students' needs and personalities so that they can provide accurately diagnosed and effective support to nip any potential problems in the bud. Special provision within the school, for example the behavioural unit, and good working relationships with outside partners make sure that individualised packages of support can be given to the students. Care and support is very strong for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other vulnerable students, enabling them to make good progress.

The school makes very good use of data that it collects and uses it to check the progress of groups and individual students and there are good systems in place to help any girl whose achievement shows signs of slipping. The guidance given to ensure examination success is excellent. Students are very appreciative of the work done to support and guide them and they speak highly of the arrangements made to make sure they settle in quickly to the school and progress well during their time at Pensby.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and feel the school is very effectively led and managed. The headteacher has shown strong leadership in putting into practice a vision which has brought about a consistent rise in standards. He is supported by a strong senior team with complementary skills and interests who work very effectively as a team.

All teaching staff are involved in self-evaluation and understand that they are accountable for raising standards. Self-evaluation is accurate, showing an understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop. Lesson observations provide an accurate picture of the areas to be developed in teaching and learning. These together with a regular curriculum review inform the staff training plans to make sure that the quality and breadth of learning increases. The leadership team make a good selection of the issues to give priority to and plan effectively both at whole school and departmental level to ensure the school moves forward. Staff performance management, subject development plans and the school improvement plan all link successfully together and further ensure that training is focused and directly benefits the students' learning.

Students feel cared for and safe in school because community cohesion is actively and effectively promoted both in school and in the wider community. Students have opportunities to increase their understanding and knowledge of global problems. Governors are knowledgeable about the school and supportive. They manage financial resources very effectively, and have recently overseen the completion of a new teaching block. They recognise that they need to take a more active role in the self-evaluation and planning aspects of the school so that they can take a greater role in acting as a critical friend to the school and check the work of the school more closely.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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 learners' needs?	2	2
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	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Pensby High School for Girls, Wirral, CH61 6XN

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and the other inspectors when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers and visiting some of your lessons.

We have judged Pensby to be an outstanding school. It is a very special place because of the exceptional care and support that it provides. As well as helping you to achieve good results in examinations and make good progress, the school helps you to become responsible, caring young people.

We were very impressed with your behaviour and the respect that you show each other. You told us how much you enjoy your lessons and how friendly and supportive the teachers are. We were pleased to see your enthusiastic participation in all aspects of school life and can see why you enjoy the many after-school clubs and other activities that the school offers you. The sixth form students set an excellent example for younger ones. You all work hard in lessons and it is also good to see that you involve yourselves in a wide range of activities that help the school and the community.

You have an excellent headteacher, Mr Hyden, and excellent teachers who lead the school well. Your parents really care about your education and are represented by a good governing body that support Mr Hyden in making sure you get the very best.

Although there are so many excellent things about your school there is always room for some improvement. We have asked the school to look for ways to help sixth formers make the transition from Year 11 to Year 12 so that they will have better learning skills to succeed at post-16 courses. I know the sixth formers and the staff will have lots of ideas about how to do this.