

Hilbre High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105102
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	324159
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Chambers HMI

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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1052
Sixth form	142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janis Casey
Headteacher	Miss Jan Levenson
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2006
School address	Frankby Road West Kirby Wirral Cheshire CH48 6EQ
Telephone number	0151 625 5996
Fax number	0151 625 3697

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Inspection number	324159

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Hilbre is an average-sized secondary school that serves West Kirby and the surrounding districts on the Wirral. Approximately 96% of the pupils are of White British heritage. There is a significant gender imbalance, with more boys on roll than girls. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, but the proportion with a statement of special educational need is well above average. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is above the national average. The school has specialist status in humanities and holds a number of awards, including International School, School Achievement, Artsmark and Sportsmark awards, and has recently been designated an Investors in People Champion.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hilbre is a good school, where pupils progress well and demonstrate excellent personal qualities. Standards are above average overall, which when compared with pupils' attainment on entry represents good achievement. This is the result of consistently good teaching, which helps pupils to develop and maintain a positive approach to learning. In addition, good academic guidance and high expectations are successfully raising pupils' aspirations.

Pupils' outstanding personal development is evident in their willingness to take up the many opportunities that are on offer both inside and outside school. Attendance levels are above average and pupils' behaviour is very good. Pupils say they feel very safe and secure in school and are adamant that whenever even minor bullying occurs, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Additional enrichment activities, such as self-defence classes in Year 9, contribute to pupils' high standards of health and safety awareness. Pupils show good progress overall in key skills; they work very well together and undertake appropriate work-related learning. As a result, they are well prepared for life after school.

Leadership and management, including governance, are good overall. An excellent lead from the headteacher helps managers at all levels to set clear direction for further school improvement. Since the last inspection, pupils' achievement and personal development have improved in many areas, although improvements are less clear in the sixth form, where students' achievement remains satisfactory. Good self-evaluation and improvement planning demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve further.

An outstanding commitment to equality of opportunity is evident in all that the school does. Recent measures to address the underachievement of boys have successfully reduced the gap in attainment between girls and boys. Pupils achieve well across the full ability range, and for each of the last three years, almost all Year 11 pupils have gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to G. The school enjoys a good and improving reputation locally and makes an outstanding contribution to promoting community cohesion. High numbers of pupils take part in events outside school, such as the activities that form part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Junior Sports Leader Award. The recent HMS Birkenhead project successfully enabled pupils from different schools to work together and gain understanding of other ways of life.

Care and support for pupils are outstanding, particularly in the way that support measures from inside and outside school are coordinated. The school has an exceptionally wide range of contacts with external organisations which provide important welfare, health and educational support, as well as activities that successfully boost pupils' self-esteem. In the outstanding curriculum, citizenship features strongly and contributes well to pupils' outstanding personal development. Well planned programmes for personal, social and health education, together with local, national and international visits, greatly enhance pupils' social and cultural understanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards in the sixth form are below average. As students enter the sixth form with attainment that is lower than national averages, this represents satisfactory achievement. In recent years, achievement in individual subjects has varied considerably, except in drama where achievement has been consistently high.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, although some examples of good and outstanding lessons were observed during the inspection. The school has broadened the sixth form curriculum through providing Applied GCE and BTEC National Award courses in addition to a range of AS level and A level subjects. The introduction of an 'Additions' curriculum has provided an alternative pathway for students not yet ready to progress to advanced courses. As a result, these students have good opportunities to improve their qualifications and move on to advanced courses or further education, employment and training. A good range of enrichment activities includes opportunities for physical education, work experience and community work, and a highly successful Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The recently conducted sixth form review, together with recent changes to sixth form leadership, has resulted in the implementation of improved systems to monitor progress and identify underachieving students. These systems have helped to improve attendance but it is too soon for them to have had a full impact on raising standards.

Students enjoy sixth form life and speak highly of the excellent relationships they have with staff. They value the quality of care, guidance and support provided by their teachers and mentors. Their personal development is outstanding and they are articulate and mature young adults. They act as good ambassadors for the younger students and play an active part in supporting them through paired reading and assisting in lessons. They also participate in sports leader activities and curriculum support with partner primary schools. They enjoy working with younger pupils and organising and taking part in the many fundraising projects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils join the school with attainment that is broadly in line with expectation for their age. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are close to the national average, and at the end of Key Stage 4 standards are above average. Unconfirmed results for 2008 in both the Key Stage 3 national tests and at GCSE indicate that standards have generally risen from the 2007 levels, in many cases significantly so. Accurate data provided by the school suggest that these higher standards are being maintained and improved upon by current pupils.

The achievement of pupils is good overall. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from the support given and they too achieve well. A good proportion of pupils meet challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. In conversation, pupils come across as very open-minded young people and extremely eager to learn about the world beyond their immediate environment. They work with a genuine enthusiasm in lessons. They display a keen interest in other cultures and have written sensitively when composing poetry about the diverse nature of life in Britain. Their healthy approach to life is apparent in their enthusiastic involvement in physical exercise and their keenness to experience new and challenging activities. These positive attitudes are confirmed by their high levels of participation in a wide range of clubs and visits. Around school, pupils move responsibly and calmly, displaying

a very good awareness of factors affecting each other's safety. Behaviour is very good and exclusion rates exceptionally low. Attendance is above average, reflecting pupils' genuine enjoyment of school life and the school's well planned strategies to boost attendance further. Pupils' involvement in the life of the school and its community is outstanding. They leave school well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment, especially with regard to oral communication skills and the ability to work in a team.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use questioning effectively to assess pupils' progress. Pupils have good relationships with teachers and show very positive attitudes towards their learning. Teachers and classroom assistants give good support to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and as a result these pupils feel involved in lessons and make good gains in their learning.

In the best lessons, teachers have clear lesson objectives which they use to monitor and review the lessons; pupils are clear about what they will be learning and how well they are progressing. In other good lessons, pupils benefit from opportunities to work independently, to clarify their thinking through discussion in pairs and or groups, and to learn from each other. In these lessons, pupils benefit from high levels of challenge and work with enthusiasm; they assess their own work using set criteria and learn how to improve their work further. Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not make it clear enough what they expect pupils to learn, and do not give enough feedback in marking. In some lessons, teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to learn independently.

Effective systems to monitor teaching and learning enable senior leaders to identify good classroom practice. Information gained from this process feeds into a staff development programme, led by teachers from the school's specialist subjects, which is helping to share good practice across departments and to improve teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils gain great benefit from excellent curricular provision. In addition to a wide range of academic subjects, the school offers vocational opportunities to ensure that all pupils have courses to match their interests and aspirations. The school makes special arrangements, including extended work placements, for a small minority of pupils for whom the standard curriculum is not suitable. The school has used its humanities specialism very effectively to strengthen its provision, for example through offering examination courses in citizenship and media studies. A wide range of extra-curricular activities supports pupils' cultural development, including high quality musical and dramatic productions and sports.

Pupils in Years 7 to 9 all study dance and have the opportunity to study one of two languages. The curriculum caters well for the most able pupils through opportunities for early entry to examinations. In addition, pupils in Years 10 and 11 can take separate sciences and can study all three of English literature, English language and media studies. Pupils say that they have a good understanding of possible progression routes into the sixth form and elsewhere, as well as future career options.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

In this highly inclusive school adults work together extremely well to provide a consistently effective programme of care. The arrangements for pupils' transition from primary school are excellent. Focused care and guidance are provided for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities even before they join Year 7. Learning mentors, teaching assistants and teaching staff collaborate closely to ensure that support goes where it is most effective. Rooms and activities are available at busy times as quiet havens for less confident pupils. Requirements to safeguard children's safety are in place. A good, rigorous system for tracking academic progress helps managers to identify those who need extra help to keep up. As a result of this strong monitoring and clear communication, pupils are clear about their targets, their progress and how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed and provides good value for money. Senior leaders have a strong focus on school improvement and have identified appropriate priorities for developing teaching and learning. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a generally accurate view of how it compares with other schools nationally. Middle leaders share in promoting school improvement; as with senior leaders, they identify and meet staff development needs very effectively. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. Along with other senior leaders, they are particularly successful in helping other staff to develop their leadership and management skills.

The school has addressed all the issues identified in the last inspection report. For example, the school has successfully promoted a greater awareness of multicultural issues among pupils and there have been appropriate developments in vocational opportunities in the 14 to 19 curriculum. Weaker performing curriculum areas have been supported effectively and this has contributed to improved standards. Governors provide good levels of support and challenge.

The school's specialist status has helped to drive improvements in standards, led by outstanding examination results in drama, but challenging targets in other specialist subjects have not always been met. In addition, specialist status has had an outstanding impact on pupils' cultural understanding and on strengthening links with other agencies and education providers through, for example, joint drama projects with local primary schools and international links with schools in Cape Town.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	3
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?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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 Hilbre High School, Wirral, CH48 6EQ

You will recall that recently, together with three other colleagues, I inspected your school. We enjoyed seeing your school and talking with those of you that we met. This letter is to tell you about what we found.

Both you and your parents and carers told us about the many strengths of your school. We judged Hilbre to be a good school, where you make good progress in your studies. You achieve well as a result of the consistently good teaching that you receive and effective academic guidance that successfully encourages you to aim high.

You show a very good awareness of keeping safe and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. We were impressed how many of you take part in events outside school, such as drama productions and the activities that form part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Junior Sports Leader Award. You behave very well.

You benefit from an outstanding range of subjects to study. You also benefit from excellent care and support, both from within the school and from the other organisations that link with the school.

The school is well led and managed and, as a result, it has improved in many areas in the years since the last inspection. In order to improve the school further we have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to raise standards and achievement in the sixth form, so that achievement in the sixth form matches that in the main school.

You can play your part in making Hilbre a better school. Keep up the good attendance and excellent behaviour, and make sure that you continue to strive for the highest standards possible.