

# South Wirral High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105107
<b>Local Authority</b>	Wirral
<b>Inspection number</b>	324161
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Chambers HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1135
Sixth form	134
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr R Barker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs C McCormack
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 February 2006
<b>School address</b>	Plymyard Avenue Eastham Wirral Merseyside CH62 8EH
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 3273213
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 3277798

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

South Wirral High School is a larger than average secondary school that serves the towns of Eastham and Bromborough and the surrounding districts on the Wirral. An overwhelming majority of the students are of White British heritage. There are more boys on roll than girls, although this is not consistently the case in every year group. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average and the proportion with a statement of special educational need is above average. This is a non-selective school in a selective area. The proportion of students who are entitled to a free school meal is above the national average. The school has specialist status in visual and performing arts, and has recently been designated a High Performing Specialist School and awarded a second specialism in mathematics and computing. The school gained recognition as a National Support School in September 2008, and holds a number of awards, including Investors in People, Artsmark Gold and International School.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

South Wirral is a good school, where students achieve well. Staff offer outstanding care and support which help the students to develop high levels of personal skills. Evidence from the inspection questionnaires confirms that the school enjoys a good reputation locally.

Students join the school with below average attainment. They make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 so that standards are broadly average at the end of Key Stage 4. In 2007 and 2008, GCSE results consolidated the steady and sustained improvements in results up to 2006; school data suggest that the 2009 results will show clear improvement on 2008. In the sixth form, students' achievement is satisfactory, although standards are below average overall.

Students' personal development, including their behaviour, is outstanding. Students feel safe and secure in school; they are confident that any reported incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Their excellent understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles is reflected in high levels of participation in sports clubs. They are proud of their school and show high levels of enjoyment in all that the school provides. They particularly enjoy the wealth of extra-curricular activities, especially in performing arts, and benefit from the many trips and visits arranged for them. Levels of participation in these activities are carefully monitored and are very high.

The quality of teaching and learning is good, and together with good academic guidance, promotes students' thinking skills and a good pace of learning. Teachers are willing to try different ideas and a culture of mutual support helps them to develop further their professional skills. Formal and informal assessments help students to understand their strengths and weaknesses. However, the standard of marking of day-to-day work varies, so that some students do not get regular reinforcement to the message of how to improve. The outstanding curriculum is very effectively enriched by a range of events, many linked to the school's specialist status, including visits to local museums and churches, trips abroad, and visits from artists. The many community activities promote community cohesion very effectively.

The school is well led and managed. The school's specialist status makes a strong contribution to its success and the impact can be seen in several areas. The curriculum on offer has been broadened to include, for example, all Key Stage 3 students studying dance, and sixth form students having the opportunity to study

A level digital photography. Students achieve well in the specialist subjects and the school meets its targets in these areas. Specialist status has also had a positive impact on the personal development of the students: for example, the large numbers who have participated in dance, drama, music and mathematics events have gained in confidence and the ability to relate to others. The many improvements since the last inspection, together with the school's record of innovation and support to other schools, demonstrate good capacity to improve.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

Achievement in the sixth form is judged in relation to other sixth forms and does not take account of the good progress which students have made up to the age of 16.

Students enter the sixth form with attainment that is slightly below average for AS and A2 level and broadly average for applied courses. Standards are below average overall but broadly

in line with national averages in applied courses, representing satisfactory achievement. Recent results show considerable variation between standards and achievement in different subjects.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They have positive attitudes and demonstrate high levels of confidence and maturity. They enjoy school and contribute well to helping younger students. The school's specialist status also provides opportunities for them to work in partner schools in addition to their work as sports leaders.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In general, students are not as actively engaged in their learning as they are in the main school, though they value the increased opportunities for independent learning provided in some subjects. The good curriculum offers a suitable choice of subjects at AS and A2 and vocational provision has been extended since the last inspection to include Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) sport. Students appreciate the wide range of enrichment activities, many related to the school's specialism, which contribute greatly to their personal development. Students speak highly of the care, guidance and support they receive from their teachers and support staff. Testament to this is the success of students who struggled to achieve earlier in their school career. Few students leave the sixth form during their courses and an increasing number progress to higher education as well as into employment and training. Leadership and management are satisfactory: standards have risen overall in the last three years, but students do not achieve as well as in the main school.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards and achievement in the sixth form.
- Improve the standard of marking so that it contributes more to students' understanding of how to improve.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Students join the school with attainment that is generally below average. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are average: for example, in 2008, the proportion of students with five or more good passes at GCSE was 56%, compared with the national average of 64%. Evidence presented by the school suggests that in 2009, GCSE results will show improvement on the 2008 figures.

Inspection evidence confirms that current students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress. Students achieve well; data for the last three years confirm that students make generally greater gains in their learning than similar students in other schools. Students generally meet the demanding targets set for them, including in the school's specialist subjects.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent overall. Students demonstrate a high degree of confidence and politeness when talking to adults and to each other. Their good understanding of different cultures is promoted effectively through the school's comprehensive personal, social and health education programme. Their attendance is good.

Students feel safe in school. They show an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle through taking regular exercise and eating healthily. Relationships with teachers and other school staff are very strong, and these contribute to students' excellent behaviour, both in lessons and around the school. Students contribute very well to the broader life of the school, for example through taking part in assemblies or school events. The school council is well established and students' views contribute to many decisions about provision in the school; as a result, students feel that they are listened to. Students show interest in the wider community through collections for a variety of charities, and the link with a school in Ghana enhances their understanding of global issues. Business enterprise days and involvement with the Connexions service help to prepare students well for the future world of work.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good. A positive shared approach to classroom initiatives has enabled teachers to develop teaching strategies designed to bring about improvements. Members of the school's teaching and learning group, amongst others, have helped the way that teachers share and share good practice.

Good teaching promotes excellent classroom relationships, which contribute to students' excellent attitudes to learning. Teachers are making increasingly effective use of the school's Virtual Learning Environment to enable students to be more active and engaged learners. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to students' learning and ensure that those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress at the same rate as others in the class. In the best lessons, a strong sense of pace and purpose maintains students' interest; students are active participants, reflecting on their own and others' learning. In less successful lessons, students are given fewer opportunities to take an active role in their learning, so that their engagement with tasks and the pace of learning are uneven.

Marking, including the use of written feedback, is satisfactory overall. However, the quality and detail of regular marking is inconsistent so that students do not always know how well they have done and what to do to improve their work.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The outstanding curriculum meets the needs of students very well. At Key Stage 3, all students study dance as a separate subject, and one group of students is entered for GCSE expressive arts at the end of Year 9. The school reviews its provision regularly, and has adapted the courses in Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of those looking for more vocational options. More able students have opportunities to study three sciences and increasing numbers are taking up modern language options. Some have the opportunity to take GCSE examinations in Year 10 and extend their learning with AS level options in Year 11. In addition, the school has been innovative in offering an alternative curriculum for a small group of students at risk of underachieving. Students speak positively about the options available to them and particularly of the guidance they receive for progression into Key Stage 4. The many opportunities for involvement in sport and performances contribute much to students' personal development.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. Child protection and safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements. Students say that they feel well cared for and are confident that any problems are resolved quickly and effectively. The school has effective systems to support students' personal development reflecting the high degree of care and dedication of the staff. Excellent links with the local primary schools, the local authority and other external agencies concerned with promoting students' welfare ensure that all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well supported with appropriate and timely intervention strategies. In addition, staff within the school provide excellent support and care for vulnerable students that match their needs extremely well. The high quality of care and support helps to maintain students' excellent behaviour and good attendance and contributes strongly to students' social and moral development. The school analyses its support structures and can demonstrate positive impact, for example, in the reduction in behaviour referrals and exclusions. Academic guidance is good overall. Formal and informal assessments help students to know how well they are doing. Students generally know the National Curriculum level they are working at and their target grades or levels.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed by a team of highly committed leaders, who direct improvement with a common sense of purpose. Teachers are highly supportive of each other and eagerly take up opportunities for professional development. Processes for evaluation and improvement planning are well established and well understood by managers at all levels. Managers generally know the school well, and identify appropriate areas for improvement, but recent evaluations have overstated how well students achieve, both in the main school and the sixth form. The quality of improvement planning is good overall, but is uneven at department level. Links with other providers are strong and are developing, both in the sixth form and particularly with local primary schools. Resources are well managed and the school provides good value for money. Governors provide a good level of support and challenge.

The school demonstrates an outstanding commitment to equality of opportunity. Up to Year 11, students of all abilities achieve well: for each of the last three years, almost all have gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to G, and differences in achievement for different groups of students are very small. In addition, processes for monitoring students' personal development, including their involvement in cultural events, are helping to ensure that extra-curricular opportunities are accessed by all.

The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Managers have assessed need and enable students to gain widespread understanding of other cultures and different living conditions through a range of activities. For example, a very successful link with a school in Ghana, supported by school events, helps students to understand the needs of students who live in very different economic circumstances from their own.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

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

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	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	

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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**

Thank you for all your help and courtesy when my colleagues and I inspected your school recently. We judged that South Wirral is a good school, where you achieve well. School staff offer you outstanding care and support which help you to develop high levels of personal skills. We judged the sixth form to be satisfactory.

We were very impressed with your attitudes and behaviour, which we graded as outstanding. You are proud of the school and you make the most of all that the school provides, especially the wealth of extra-curricular activities. We liked the fact that so many of you take part.

You benefit from good teaching that helps with your thinking skills as well as examination results. You told us that you feel the use of Moodle is helping you with your learning as well as keeping you in touch with what is going on in the school. The school offers you an outstanding range of subjects to study and you told us how much you enjoy the additional activities such as visits and trips. Your school's specialist status makes a strong contribution to its success.

The school is well led and managed. To improve the school further, we have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to:

- raise standards and achievement in the sixth form
- ensure that when teachers mark your work, it contributes more to your understanding of how to improve.

You can play your part in making South Wirral a better school. Continue to attend regularly, work hard and make the most of all the opportunities that the school offers.