



West Kirby Grammar School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105099
LEA Wirral
Inspection number 277294
Inspection dates 12 October 2005 to 13 October 2005
Reporting inspector Ms Josephine Nowacki HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Graham Road
School category	Community		West Kirby
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Wirral, Merseyside CH48 5DP
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	0151 632 3449
Number on roll	1205	Fax number	0151 632 1224
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs T Janikiewicz
Date of previous inspection	6 December 1999	Headteacher	Mrs Glenice Robinson

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 12 October 2005 - 13 October 2005	Inspection number 277294
------------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an 11 to 18 selective girls' grammar school situated in the small town of West Kirby on the Wirral. The school is much larger than most schools with 1,196 students; 341 are in the sixth form, of whom 16 are boys. The number of students claiming free school meals is below the national average. The number of students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average. There are a very few students who come from minority ethnic groups. The school gained specialist science college status in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. The headteacher, ably supported by her senior managers, sets high expectations for improvement in all areas of the school. They know their school well and have a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. Standards throughout the school are very high. Exam results are good but the overall progress that most students make is satisfactory. Not all students achieve the very highest grades relative to their prior attainment at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Attendance is very high and most students have very positive attitudes to learning. Students feel well cared for and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Students are cheerful, purposeful and keen to learn; they appreciate the high level of support given by their teachers, often outside of formal lesson time. There is much good teaching and some outstanding teaching, but there is also some that is merely satisfactory and a very small amount that is inadequate. The use of data to set targets and monitor students' progress is good in the sixth form but is underdeveloped in the main school. The curriculum is outstanding and offers all students opportunities to succeed. Most students benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and has successfully addressed all weaknesses. The capacity to improve is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is well established and serves an increasing number of students very well. General certificate of education advanced level (GCE A-level) results are very high and a significant number of students achieve high grades. Most students achieve the grades predicted based on their general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results, though there is some underperformance. Teaching is good and helps to develop effective study skills. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Personal development and well-being are a particularly strong feature; the contribution that sixth form students provide to the rest of the school and the wider community is exemplary: organising whole school events, acting as mentors and role models to younger students and raising money for charities.

What the school should do to improve further

The school should:

- Consolidate the improvements made in teaching and learning.
- Use data more rigorously to set targets and monitor students' progress.
- Provide greater challenge for more able learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry to the school is high and attainment in examinations is high. However, results in GCSE examinations in 2004 showed that pupils had made significantly less progress than might have been expected, especially in English and also in mathematics. Senior managers have taken actions to address the decline in performance. The unvalidated results in 2005 show a rising trend in the numbers of students reaching the higher National Curriculum levels in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 9 and percentages of grades A* to C at GCSE are well above the national average. The large proportion of learners who attain at A* and A has shown a further improvement over the past two years. Drama, history and religious education are among the highest performing departments. However, although standards are high throughout the school, there is an inconsistency in the progress made by learners of different abilities and those with higher levels of prior attainment do not achieve as well as they should compared to others of similar ability.

Standards are high in the sixth form and have been so for some considerable time. There are increasing pass rates in the GCE A-level examinations. In the vast majority of subjects, all students attain a pass grade and the numbers reaching A and B grades are consistently well above average. The 2005 results showed a slight fall from those in 2004 and demonstrate some underachievement, again amongst students of higher levels of ability.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students are proud of their school and proud to be members of this community. The vast majority feel safe and secure. They say there is very little bullying and are confident that any instances are dealt with effectively. Students' behaviour is good and they are very keen to succeed. They enjoy their lessons a great deal and are happy at school. Relationships are very good and students value and appreciate their teachers. Attendance is higher than average and there have been no exclusions during the past year. The house system provides outstanding opportunities for personal development by enabling students of all ages to work and play together, to take responsibility for each other and to engage in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. For example, the very successful whole school inter-house music festival was organised and run by sixth form students.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students have very good social skills. The school has extensive cultural links in Europe and beyond, but there are too few practical opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and understanding of multicultural Britain.

The school provides a very welcoming, friendly and caring environment.

Many opportunities for taking responsibility exist such as raising money for charity and membership of the school council. Older students and sixth form students

contribute to the well-being of younger students through the prefect system and paired reading programme.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There is much good and better teaching, though some is satisfactory and a very small amount is inadequate. The school has focused strongly on improving teaching and learning and managers have a good awareness of where strengths and weaknesses are in subject areas. As a result, students' progress is improving. Where teaching is good or better, teachers have good subject knowledge and this enables students to achieve well. In the best lessons, teachers plan activities that fully engage the wide range of abilities in the class. There are frequent checks on understanding, a high level of expectation and challenge, and very good development of independent learning skills, especially in the sixth form. Where teaching was just satisfactory, the pace was often slow and teachers failed to take account of all levels of ability. In some lessons, teachers talked too much and did not provide sufficient opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Assessment in the sixth form is good: targets are set and progress monitored termly. In the main school, the process of target setting is underdeveloped; data are not used routinely to set individual student targets. Teachers monitor students' progress regularly, but the students are not always clear of the progress they are making and what they need to do to reach their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Curricular provision is outstanding. The taught curriculum meets statutory requirements and students in the main school benefit from a variety of suitable academic options and also from a very effective programme of careers education and work-related learning, including mock interviews with local business people. The curriculum is complemented by the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including subject and sports clubs, trips and exchanges to foreign climes. Numerous drama and music events are highlights of the school year. Gifted and talented students are identified and the school provides workshops, master classes and many other activities to meet their needs and ambitions.

Students in the sixth form are offered a wide choice of academic courses, well matched to their needs, interests and aspirations. Careers advice and support for entry to higher education are comprehensive and students speak highly of this support. The enrichment curriculum is a strong feature and sixth formers play an important role in supervising subject clubs for younger students and in organising house activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's care for its students is outstanding. Health and safety procedures are fully in place and risk assessments are comprehensive. Child protection procedures are well communicated to all staff. The school has an excellent programme for promoting good health and well-being. Support for the small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. In addition, a larger number of students are very well supported and monitored by the learning mentor. Monitoring of personal development and achievement, in its widest sense, is very effective and includes one-to-one interviews for all students, although target setting and tracking academic progress are underdeveloped. The school has excellent procedures to help students with the transition from primary to secondary school. Careers education and guidance are very good with excellent opportunities for work related learning activities. Activities include a 'Wider Horizons' week for all Year 9 students, economic awareness in Years 10 and 11, and work experience in Years 11 and 12.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior management team set clear direction and promote a culture of reflection and continuous improvement. The impact of these improvements has been the raising of achievement and standards overall. Students' achievements are celebrated through vibrant displays around the school.

Performance management is well established, effective in driving up standards and outcomes are effectively linked to target setting and training. Staff are well qualified and most have good levels of professional expertise. Opportunities for continuing professional development are very good. Senior staff play a key role in supporting and training other staff and good practice is widely shared.

The headteacher closely monitors school performance. She encourages staff to be open and honest about where the school has been successful and what it needs to do to secure improvements. Self-evaluation is comprehensive, rigorous and mostly accurate. A range of data is generated but is not effectively analysed to target improvement for underachieving groups. The views of stakeholders are well addressed.

There is a good focus on the promotion of equality of opportunity. No discrimination is evident and students say that incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. The school makes exceptionally good use of resources and provides good value for money. Science college status has had a positive impact on facilities. Refurbished teaching areas and upgraded information communication technology (ICT) equipment, such as interactive whiteboards, are good examples of recent improvements. The school environment is well cared for but the dispersed site is uneven in quality. This problem will soon be resolved with the successful targeted capital bid to refurbish the site.

The skills and attributes of the governing body are complementary to the needs of the school. Governors are effective in carrying out most of their responsibilities and have a good knowledge of the strengths and actions needed to bring about further improvement. The strengths in leadership and management give the school a good potential for further improvement as demonstrated by the significant improvements since the last inspection.

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.

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

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

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	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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?	2	2
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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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	2	
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 group of inspectors visited your school. I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your co-operation and assistance during our visit. We appreciated your comments and opinions. I am writing now to tell you about our findings.

These are the main findings from the inspection.

- West Kirby Grammar is a good school which cares well for you and encourages you to lead healthy lifestyles. The headteacher and staff have been very successful in helping you to improve your exam results and most of you are making reasonable progress. Much of the teaching is good.
- Some of you in the sixth form could achieve higher standards and we would encourage you to think carefully about how you could do this. We think that the teachers should set you clearer targets and that you should be more involved in assessing your own learning.
- Almost all of you are happy to come to school, work hard and take advantage of the wide range of activities and events the school provides for you. Your parents too generally believe that the school is successful. The school provides you with a better range of courses than we usually see.
- The information and advice you are given before you choose your courses are very good. Teachers and other staff in the school know you well and work hard to help you succeed.
- We also believe that you would achieve better if you took more responsibility for your own learning and progress. We want your teachers to set targets for you to work towards.

We have mentioned above a few areas where we think you could help to improve the quality of education at your school for yourself and others. Below are the main points which the staff and governors need to improve.

- Use data more to set targets and monitor students' progress.
- Provide greater challenge for more able learners.
- Further improve teaching and learning.

We are confident that the school can continue to improve. We wish you well in the future.