



# Birkdale High School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 104954  
**Local Authority** Sefton  
**Inspection number** 287079  
**Inspection date** 31 January 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Julie Price Grimshaw 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>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Windy Harbour Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Southport
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Merseyside PR8 3DT
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys	<b>Telephone number</b>	01704 577253
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	909	<b>Fax number</b>	01704 570451
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Jones
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr M Barker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 March 2001		

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Birkdale High School is a slightly smaller than average comprehensive. It is situated in an affluent part of Southport, but serves students from a relatively wide area and from mixed social and economic backgrounds. The school's population is largely White British, with very few students from minority ethnic groups. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average, as is the proportion of students entitled to free school meals. The school was awarded joint specialist status for mathematics and computing and humanities in September 2004 and is also a Department for Education and Skills designated Training School.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Birkdale High is a good school with several outstanding features. Students make good progress during their time at the school and standards attained at the end of Key Stage 4 are above the national average. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good and this is reflected in the outstanding achievement of these boys. Students respond very well to the school's high expectations of behaviour and the conduct of the vast majority is exemplary. Attendance figures are high and many parents say how keen their sons are to come to school. Care, guidance and support are excellent and levels of parental satisfaction are high, with many commenting favourably on the 'strong discipline and pastoral care'.

The overall quality of teaching and learning across the school is good and a number of teachers are outstanding practitioners. In most lessons students are keen to engage actively with the wide variety of activities and clearly enjoy their learning. Although there is no unsatisfactory teaching, a minority of lessons include less variety and learners are too passive. Assessment systems are well-established, with most teachers providing good quality oral and written feedback to students. The curriculum meets the needs of all students and there is a good variety of well attended extra-curricular activities. The school is placing increasing emphasis on the use of data to track accurately students' progress. Recent enhancements of such systems are beginning to have a positive impact on students' understanding of their individual targets.

The overall quality of leadership and management is excellent. The senior leadership team has recently been restructured and school managers have responded efficiently to the challenge of improving achievement further by identifying a number of suitable strategies, including a greater focus on personalised learning. There are well-established systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, with much of this work being carried out by middle managers. Although senior managers maintain an overview of the process, there is scope for refining their evaluation of the specific impact of recent initiatives.

There is good use of resources, particularly information and communication technology (ICT), to support teaching and learning. Overall, the school provides good value for money.

Specialist status has had a positive impact on the quality of provision; for example, funding has been used to reorganise the humanities area, enabling departments to work together more productively and an additional examination course - classical civilisation - has been introduced. In mathematics, resources for ICT have increased and additional support has been used effectively to increase the number of students gaining the highest grades at GCSE. Since gaining specialist status in 2004 standards across the school have shown an upward trend.

Involvement with the Training Schools initiative has had a positive impact on the work of the school. Very effective partnerships have been established with a number of initial teacher training providers. Trainee teachers benefit from their experience at

Birkdale and school staff who work as mentors successfully develop their own teaching skills as a result of this work.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection and demonstrates excellent capacity to improve further.

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

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning so that it is at least good across all subject areas.
- Ensure that new initiatives are monitored and evaluated so that effective practice becomes consistent throughout the whole school.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Overall, the progress made by students across the school is good. Most students enter the school in Year 7 having achieved standards that are above average. In 2005, students in Year 9 obtained results in English, mathematics and science tests that, overall, were well above the national averages. When compared to similar students in other schools, progress is good, especially in English. The results obtained by students in 2006 are similar. In Key Stage 3 standards have risen faster than the national trend in the last five years. In Key Stage 4 the rate of progress slows a little. Nonetheless, standards reached by the end of Year 11 are now above average, and in some subjects well above average. Students of all levels of attainment make broadly similar progress. However, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported very well and this enables them to make exceptional progress.

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

### **Grade: 1**

The excellent behaviour of students, both in lessons and around the school, is a significant strength. Boys are typically polite, well-mannered and mature: they show respect for each other and also for their teachers. The majority are proud to be part of the school and comment positively on the 'firm but fair' attitudes of most staff. Spiritual and cultural development is good: moral and social development is outstanding. In lessons, particularly those in which boys are encouraged to be active learners, their enjoyment is obvious. Most of the boys are keen to come to school and attendance figures are very high. Almost all show high levels of awareness of healthy living issues.

Although bullying is not commonplace, there are secure procedures for dealing with such incidents. A peer mentor scheme operates, which involves carefully selected students from all years being trained in mentoring skills. However, a minority of boys were unsure about the systems for enlisting the support of a mentor.

The school places much emphasis on the development of skills and knowledge contributing towards social and economic well-being: almost all students who leave at the end of Year 11 go into further education or employment.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school, with some examples of excellent practice. Students are keen to do their best and they enjoy their lessons. The high degree of mutual respect between teachers and students results in lessons being conducted in a harmonious atmosphere and teachers provide generous individual support. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and plan lessons carefully to reinforce and extend students' learning. In the best lessons teachers have infectious enthusiasm and set a high level of challenge and pace and this is reflected in students' sustained concentration and very good progress. Skilful questioning and the continuous assessment of learning ensure students have a thorough understanding of the work and draw them actively into exploring ideas. Students are given good opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. In a minority of lessons, which are merely satisfactory, students are not so actively involved in their learning and there is less variety to maintain interest. Teaching assistants and other staff are deployed very well to support students in their learning. Targets are known by students and marking usually gives them a good idea of what they need to do to improve.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements and is constantly being reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of all students. School managers are keen to keep abreast of current developments, including increasing emphasis on work-related learning and vocational education. The school has made some modifications to the curriculum in order to tailor programmes of study for boys across the full ability range; for example, it is possible for the most able Key Stage 4 students to take GCSE examinations in separate science subjects if they wish. The school works effectively in collaboration with a local school to ensure that students have the opportunity to follow the GCSE courses of their choice.

A variety of educational trips enrich students' experience and there is a wide range of well attended extra-curricular activities, with sports being particularly popular.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

Staff at Birkdale show high levels of commitment to providing good quality care for the students. Arrangements for safeguarding students are robust and meet current government requirements. A well-established pastoral system ensures that care and

support are easily available. The quality of guidance offered to all students is outstanding: boys are fully aware of the options available to them on leaving school and excellent careers guidance supports them in making suitable choices. Academic guidance is good and improving: systems for tracking students' progress are undergoing further enhancement and development.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The senior leadership team has recently been restructured and its members have quickly established a strong corporate vision for the future of the school with the intent of further raising standards and achievement for all. Under the exemplary leadership of the headteacher the team is beginning to successfully implement a range of suitable strategies relating to all areas of the school's work. The overall quality of the school's self-evaluation is very good and evidence shows that this aspect is improving as managers work to develop a deeper understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Middle managers are empowered to take on much responsibility for assuring the quality of work within subject areas and the great majority respond very positively to this challenge. However, the close monitoring of initiatives such as involving students more closely in assessment, and work on preferred learning styles is at a relatively early stage and there is scope for the development of middle and senior managers' roles in this process to ensure a consistent whole-school approach.

The quality of improvement planning is outstanding: documents show well-thought out focus areas coupled with clear success criteria. The commitment and dedication of managers at all levels is a major strength.

School governors carry out all statutory responsibilities and assist managers by exploring and discussing issues in much detail.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

<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.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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, 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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for sharing your views with us. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

We think that Birkdale High is a good school with some outstanding features. One of the things that impressed us the most was your excellent behaviour, both in the classroom and around the school. It really was a pleasure to talk to such polite, well-mannered and mature boys. We were delighted to see that the vast majority of you showed respect to each other and also to the school staff. So many of you enjoy coming to school and the attendance figures are very high.

Examination results at Birkdale have improved over the last few years and are now very good: we are pleased that you all make at least good progress during your time at the school. Most of the teaching is at least good and we think that some is first-rate. You told us that the lessons you regard as the best are those that include a variety of activities and get you actively involved and we agree with you. None of the teaching at your school is unsatisfactory, but we have asked the staff to think about how they can make further improvements so that all lessons are at least good.

You told us that you receive good quality guidance on options and careers and we agree that this is a strength of the school. Most of you are aware of your targets and what you need to do to improve your work. We know that the school is keen to make further improvements to the systems for tracking your progress in all subjects and this should help you to develop an even better understanding of your own personal priorities for development. We hope that this will result in you making even better progress.

Mr Barker and all the staff are very committed to ensuring that you get the most from your time at Birkdale and achieve your full potential. We are very pleased that so many of you are proud to be part of your school and we wish you well for the future.