

Prenton High School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105093
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308765
Inspection dates	2–3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Julie Price Grimshaw

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	635
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Paula Dixon
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
School address	Hesketh Avenue Rock Ferry Birkenhead Merseyside CH42 6RR
Telephone number	0151 6448113
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. The number of students entitled to free school meals is above the national average, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Approximately a third of secondary school age children in the area are selected for grammar school education. The school's population is largely of White British heritage, although the number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is increasing. A small percentage of students have a first language other than English. The school became a specialist college for science and the visual arts in July 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Prenton High School provides an outstanding education for its students. There is a warm and friendly atmosphere, which helps to establish an excellent environment for learning. The vast majority of parents are delighted with the school's work, with many referring to the 'outstanding work ethic'. A typical view expressed is, 'I could not ask for my daughter to go to a better school - staff are very caring and are always there to listen.'

Achievement is outstanding. From starting points that are below average overall, students make good progress in Years 7 to 9. Progress during Years 10 and 11 is very rapid, and students reach average standards. The majority of students meet or exceed the challenging targets set for them. This is due to a combination of high quality teaching and exemplary care, support and guidance. Data on students' performance is used very effectively to set individual targets. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress are rigorous and there is rapid and effective intervention where it is needed to boost performance. First-rate support from a number of skilled staff ensures that each student is constantly encouraged to strive for success. While most teaching is good or better it is not always of this consistent quality. In a small minority of lessons, work is not always closely matched to students' needs and the pace of learning is satisfactory.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The school is an extremely friendly place, where students are actively encouraged to support each other. They respond very enthusiastically and are keen to take on responsibilities, for instance as house captains and school council representatives. Their tremendous enjoyment of school is evident through their commitment to all aspects of school life, and they are clearly proud to attend the school. Students' awareness of issues related to personal safety and healthy lifestyles is impressive. A very efficient team of highly competent staff work well together in providing excellent quality pastoral support for students.

Although the school has held specialist college status for only a short time, there is already evidence of positive impact. This is demonstrated through curriculum developments and improvements in relationships in the community. For example, a regeneration project, with an art focus, involves students and staff working with members of the local community. Planning for future work as a specialist college reflects imagination and creativity.

Leadership and management, at all levels, are outstanding. The headteacher, supported very effectively by other leaders and the school governors, has successfully fostered a very strong team commitment to continuous school improvement. This has led to a range of improvements since the last inspection, and there is outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the good and outstanding practice to improve the quality of teaching, particularly in relation to the pace of learning and to ensure that work is planned to match students' needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students make outstanding progress during their time at the school. Achievement has been consistently very high over recent years, with data indicating improvement over time. Students

enter school with standards that are below the national average. As a result of good teaching and outstanding care and guidance, they progress well between Years 7 and 9. Achievement in mathematics is particularly good, and leads to students attaining average standards by the end of Year 9. Students make excellent progress during Years 10 and 11. They reach standards that are securely in line with the national average. The percentage of students achieving five or more passes at GCSE in 2006 was above the national average. Students perform exceptionally well in some subject areas, for example art, media studies, and design and technology. The achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. This is due to the very high quality tailored support provided to these students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school succeeds in its mission 'to make a difference to the life aspirations and opportunities available to the students we teach'. Students thoroughly enjoy coming to school and their mature and thoughtful behaviour creates a positive climate around the school. They have good regard for the safety and well-being of others. They demonstrate a thorough awareness of healthy lifestyles and are keen to participate in the wide range of sporting activities that the school offers. The school is working hard and successfully to improve attendance.

Students thrive in their positions of responsibility and make their views known through the work of the school council and through local and national youth parliaments. They are confident in managing change in their lives, and a very high proportion of them take up education and training after leaving school.

Essential work skills are developed through group work in lessons, work experience placements and enterprise weeks. Students also enjoy considerable success in national and international competitions, such as those that promote girls' participation in science, maths and technology.

Students are committed to raising money for charities locally, in the UK and abroad. They also enjoy activities aimed at enriching their knowledge and experience of other languages, cultures and art. They have produced some outstanding art work linking their knowledge of science and art, in order to raise awareness of the environment around the school. They respond positively to opportunities to reflect on religious beliefs, racism and cultural identity, such as through their work in personal, social and religious education, and English. As a result their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. A significant proportion of lessons are outstanding. Harmonious relationships between teachers and students are a very strong feature of school life. Teachers boost students' self-confidence and instil the firm belief that they can learn new skills and achieve highly. Students respond very well to the high expectations of teachers, the challenging tasks they are set and the praise and encouragement they receive. Very well targeted and highly effective questioning deepens students' understanding and extends their thinking. As a consequence students thrive and make great strides in their learning. Lessons often move along at a lively pace, but in a small minority of lessons there is too much teacher direction; in such lessons, the pace of learning slows as a result. Most lessons are

planned very well and pitched precisely to cater for the range of ability in the class. In a few lessons, tasks are not well enough matched to meet students' needs.

Teaching assistants work very closely with teachers. They make a significant contribution to the quality of learning, especially for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Marking is almost always very helpful and clearly pinpoints where improvement is required. In most lessons peer evaluation and self-evaluation is used to very good effect to assess what has been understood. Students enjoy marking their work and that of their classmates, saying that 'it helps us to improve and tells us what to aim for.'

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is regularly reviewed to ensure that it fully meets the needs of individual students. Students in Years 7 to 9 benefit from a broad and balanced range of subjects and activities. The curriculum is organised so that specialist support is provided for low attaining students arriving into Year 7, and this helps them to make rapid progress. There are outstanding opportunities for Year 9 students to follow courses leading to formal accreditation. In Years 10 and 11, students are offered a choice of pathways according to their needs, aspirations and preferences. There is a good range of opportunities for work-based learning. Students speak with enthusiasm about the options available to them, and feel that the curriculum contributes well to developing their independence. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide variety of enrichment activities; students enthusiastically report that there is 'something for everyone to enjoy.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding and contribute very effectively to their enjoyment and well-being. Parents are confident that their children are well cared for; many are particularly pleased with the arrangements for supporting students' transition from primary school. They feel that they are well informed about their daughters' progress.

The school has an excellent network of integrated care to meet the needs of all students. School staff work very well with a range of agencies, and with each other, to provide support for students at risk of underachieving. For example, staff with specialist skills and expertise respond effectively to the specific needs of students in public care, and those for whom English is an additional language.

Students of all backgrounds and abilities know that there is always someone they can talk to if the need arises. For example, students speak very highly of the house learning mentors who provide additional support in order to improve attendance, behaviour, personal relationships and achievement. All procedures for safeguarding students fully meet current requirements.

High quality academic guidance, combined with effective pastoral care, is a major factor in securing students' outstanding achievement. Students have a good understanding of their targets and are motivated to meet or even exceed these. The school provides a comprehensive programme of lessons, special evenings and assemblies, as well as links with colleges and sixth form provision, to help students in making well-informed choices for the future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The outstanding work of the headteacher and the leadership group has enabled the school to build effectively on its past success and improve many aspects of its work. Responsibilities have been thoughtfully delegated, ensuring that best use is made of the expertise of individual staff. There is clear evidence of a common approach to continuous school improvement, with leaders and managers at all levels showing considerable commitment to their work. The school has a very secure understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and senior staff use this information well to set clear direction for the school's development. A rigorous approach to monitoring the quality of provision has resulted in significant improvements to teaching and learning, through tailored training activities and successful coaching programmes for staff. Governance is outstanding. Members of the governing body are fully involved in the day-to-day life of the school, and provide support and challenge to school leaders. Governors have a secure awareness of how data can be used effectively to analyse students' performance, and all leaders use this information very effectively to set ambitious yet realistic targets for students.

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
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 the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Inspection of Prenton High School, Birkenhead, CH42 6RR.

Following our visit to inspect your school, please accept our thanks for making us feel so welcome and for sharing your views with us. On behalf of the other inspectors I would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

Prenton High is an outstanding school. You told us that one of the best things about the school is the friendly atmosphere, and we totally agree with you. We were extremely impressed with your mature and sensible manner, your excellent behaviour around the school, and the way in which you supported each other. You also told us that teachers and other staff are very caring towards you and do everything they can to help you fulfil your potential. Like you, we feel that the quality of care, support and guidance that the school provides is outstanding.

This high quality of support and guidance is one of the main reasons that the students of Prenton High School make outstanding progress. Achievement has been consistently high for several years, and examination results have improved. The staff help to set challenging targets for you, and we know that you are keen to meet your targets; many of you even exceed them! There is a very good range of subjects and courses, so you all have the opportunity to follow a programme of study that suits you.

We agree with your view that most of the teaching in the school is at least good, and this is another reason why achievement is so strong. In a few lessons, however, progress was slower, mainly because the work was sometimes either too easy or too difficult for you. We have recommended that the school should aim to improve teaching and learning further, in particular to make sure that in all lessons the work is set at the right level for you all and you learn at a quick enough pace.

Your headteacher, the other members of the leadership group and the governors have carried out some excellent work leading to improvements in your school. Together with all the teachers and support staff, they are fully committed to making your life at school as enjoyable and successful as possible. You have an important part to play here; attendance figures have improved recently, and you need to make sure that this improvement continues. You should also continue to work hard and focus on meeting - or even exceeding - your targets.

We are delighted that so many of you are proud of your school. We wish you well for the future, and hope that you will work hard to reach even higher standards and achieve your full potential.