

Wirral Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105098
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308768
Inspection date	9 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Tolley

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	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1048
6th form	285
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	
Headteacher	Mrs Elaine Cogan
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 1998
School address	Heath Road Bebington Wirral Merseyside CH63 3AF
Telephone number	0151 6448282
Fax number	0151 6431332

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wirral Grammar School for Girls is a larger than average selective school with a sixth form. Students come to the school from around 40 primary schools in the area. Students are predominantly of White British heritage and there are very few for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also low. The school is a specialist college for languages and for humanities. It has the Healthy Schools and Inclusion awards, the International Schools Award and Sport England Schools Award.

Inspectors investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; personal development and well-being; academic guidance and support; and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies, minutes of meetings, observation of the school at work, interviews with senior members of staff and students, and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which provides a very high quality of care and education for its students. Parents and students widely support this view. The school's view of itself is accurate, identifying clearly its strengths but also honestly appraising and addressing its less successful areas. The school has excellent relationships with other institutions and the business community through its specialist college status in languages and humanities, which has contributed significantly to the developments in curriculum and learning across the school.

Students' personal development is outstanding. During their time at the school, girls develop into confident, caring and responsible young adults who are very well prepared for the next stage in education and the world of work. This is due to the very high quality of care, guidance and support they are given. The school complies with the requirements for safeguarding its students. The personal, social and health education and citizenship programmes make a valuable contribution to students' personal development and their awareness of their place in society. Students are keen to participate in activities in the wider community and are avid fund-raisers. They play an important role in decision making and school improvement and take this responsibility seriously. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because of the frequent opportunities they are given for reflection and expression.

Students join the school with above average levels of attainment. Standards are very high and students make excellent progress from their starting points. In GCSE examinations a high proportion of students gain the highest grades across all subjects. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same excellent progress as their peers. The inspection focused on progress in mathematics, English and science and found that the actions taken by the school are leading to a notable improvement in students' progress in these subjects.

Students' achievement is excellent as a result of outstanding teaching. Students say that lessons are interesting and exciting. Students thoroughly enjoy being at school and some say that they miss it during the holidays. Behaviour is exemplary and attitudes towards learning are excellent. Because of the challenging yet very supportive atmosphere in lessons and the excellent relationships between teachers and students, students participate enthusiastically in class discussion, are more than willing to share their ideas in class and are not afraid of making mistakes. Rates of attendance are high. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and their planning is thorough and very well matched to individual needs. They provide activities which encourage students to think for themselves, explain their ideas to others and develop independence in their learning. Teachers use the resources available to them very effectively to present material clearly so that students rapidly understand new ideas. They use questioning very effectively to both support and challenge, and students respond with enthusiasm. Teachers know the students in their care very well indeed and students respond very positively to the high expectations their teachers have of them. Students say that they greatly appreciate the time and support that teachers give them over and above the timetabled lessons. Relationships throughout the school are outstanding and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect where achievements, both academic and personal, are celebrated.

Students' progress is tracked rigorously. Challenging targets are set for each student and regularly reviewed. Students are increasingly involved in tracking and planning their own progress. This process is very effectively supported through the mentoring systems led by both students and teachers. Careers advice and guidance is very effectively matched to individual

needs and aspirations. As a result students are able to make well informed decisions about their future.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The charismatic leadership and very clear direction of the headteacher has contributed significantly to the outstanding improvement since the last inspection. She is very strongly supported by the senior leadership team, middle leaders, all staff and governors. She has been very successful in creating a very effective team which involves both staff and students alike. All take great pride in the school and share a determination to strive for excellence. The school has used its specialist status in languages and humanities very effectively to bring about improvement. Within the school the very effective collaboration between subject areas to share ideas and spread good practice has led to significant improvements in the quality of leadership and management at all levels and in the quality of teaching. Work outside the school has also considerably strengthened links with partner institutions and primary schools. The actions taken to develop the effective use of assessment across the school has also had a significant impact upon standards and achievement. Both staff and students are fully involved in the rigorous processes of self-evaluation and planning for school improvement. The school has an accurate view of the strengths of the school and of what can be improved. There is now a tangible shared sense of purpose and both staff and students work very effectively as a team. The school provides excellent value for money and has an excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form. Standards are high and achievement is excellent. Students become mature, reflective young adults. They blossom in the high level of care, guidance and nurture they receive. They become more confident and aware because of the attention paid to their personal development. Attendance has improved dramatically because of inspirational leadership and management, linked to clear systems to drive up standards. Students greatly enjoy being in the sixth form and also play a full and enthusiastic part in both the wider school community and beyond. For instance, they help younger students through peer mentoring and take a full role in teaching primary school children in the Reading Recovery Programme. Retention rates are high and the vast majority of students go on to continue their studies at university.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Students think for themselves, question and present their ideas to others clearly and confidently. They relish the opportunity to take the initiative and do this, not only in lessons, but also within the school and the wider community. They are excellent ambassadors for their school.

Students are very well prepared for the rigours of the next stage in their learning and the wider world because of the wide range of opportunities provided in the sixth form and the excellent guidance they receive. The school takes every opportunity to broaden the experience of its students through collaboration with partner institutions, including universities and the business community.

Leadership and management are outstanding. There is a very clear vision for the future and a clear focus on nurturing the well-being, both academic and personal, of all students. There are rigorous systems of monitoring students' progress which ensure they reach very challenging targets.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no significant areas for improvement. The school is fully aware of what needs to be done to improve further and plans to do this are already in place.

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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	School Overall	16-19
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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	1
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	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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	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	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
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?	1	1
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 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	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	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 Wirral Grammar School for Girls, Wirral, CH63 3AF

On behalf of the inspectors I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views. We were particularly impressed by the way you work together as a team with your teachers to make the school as good as it is.

I am sure you will be delighted, but not surprised, to hear that your school is an outstanding one. You all work very hard, attain very high standards and make excellent progress. This is because teaching is excellent, you have excellent relationships with your teachers and because you are enthusiastic about your learning. You told us how much you appreciated the support you are given by teachers to help you when you have difficulties. We agree that you are looked after very well indeed.

The school makes the most of its specialist status as a languages and humanities college to give you a very wide range of opportunities to enrich your experience both at school and outside of it. Its collaboration with other schools, businesses and universities also ensure you are able to pursue your interests and reach your goals, particularly in the sixth form. You told us how much you appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for you. You play a very important role in helping the school to make decisions and to improve. It is understandable that you are very proud of your school and of your achievements.

The leadership and management are outstanding. The school has a very clear idea of what it needs to do to improve further and has plans in place to do this, so we have not identified any improvements that it needs to make in the report. The teachers have been working together to share their ideas and to develop effective systems to monitor your progress and set targets. This has proved to be very successful and has raised standards significantly.

We wish you every success in the future and hope that you continue to enjoy your learning.