

Weatherhead High School Media Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105105
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308769
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Jim Bennetts

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	1575
6th form	354
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Owens
Headteacher	Mr N Dymont
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004
School address	Breck Rd Wallasey Wirral CH44 3HS
Telephone number	0151 631 4400
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five Additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Weatherhead High School is a large community comprehensive school for girls, with some boys in the sixth form. Formerly on three sites, the school has occupied a new building since 2003. With re-location, the school now serves a diverse area. A higher than average number of girls are entitled to free meals. The great majority of students are White British; very few are learning English as an additional language. The number of students is increasing; the sixth form is growing rapidly. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally, though lower numbers were recorded in the past. There are fewer students than usual with statements of special educational needs. Specialist School status was awarded in 2002 for media arts. The school has the Artsmark Gold and several other awards that recognise effectiveness in aspects of its work.

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 many outstanding features. Achievement is good and in some key subjects it is outstanding. Teaching is good, there is a good and improving curriculum, and the care and support provided are excellent. Leadership and management are exceptionally effective and have been the prime levers in instigating the enormous improvement since the last inspection.

Tests at age fourteen show that progress is better than in three quarters of schools; it is outstanding in mathematics. Progress over the five years to GCSE is even better, with particularly strong outcomes in English and mathematics. The proportion of students with five GCSEs at grade C or higher is well above the national figure. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do particularly well. There is good achievement in the sixth form. While many students attain the highest grades at GCSE in some subjects, this is not universal. In the sixth form, some courses are more effective than others.

Personal development and well-being are good, and outstanding in the sixth form. There is especial strength in moral development and in health awareness. Social skills are good and impressive in the sixth form. Students help to maintain a safety conscious school. They make a good contribution to school life. They respect one another and bullying is rare. They enjoy school life; the fun-loving sixth formers work and play hard.

Support for vulnerable students, and those who find it hard to learn, has been reinvigorated over recent years and is a key contributor to their high achievement. Care is outstanding throughout the school and there is excellent tracking of students' progress.

Teaching is good and some lessons are outstanding. The best lessons empower students to work independently and with vigour. Weaker lessons sometimes have pedestrian pace and modest challenge. Marking is often good, but variable. Throughout the school a good curriculum is offered, amplified by excellent additional activities. The school's specialist status for media arts has provided a powerhouse for curriculum development and improvements in this school and its partner schools.

Since his arrival two years ago, and with the staunch support and encouragement of governors at every turn, the headteacher has quietly masterminded major improvement. He is ably supported by the new senior team. A welter of new and wise initiatives has won the enthusiastic support and commitment of all. Meticulously vigilant care systems and consummately efficient management at senior level and in many departments have underpinned impressive improvement. The school gives excellent value for money and has exceptional capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

For those students who left in 2007, standards at A level and in AS examinations were similar to national standards. Achievement is good. Standards and achievement are improving. In 2007 there was an increased proportion of good results in comparison with the previous year. The majority of those now in Year 13 are performing above their targets; in Year 12 there are more above than below targets, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do exceptionally well. However, progress on some of the two dozen courses is better than on others.

The tracking of students' progress and the evaluation of course effectiveness are rigorous and remedial action is implemented swiftly to remedy any slippage from the targets. Weaknesses arising from staffing problems are attended to adroitly. Teaching is good, though occasionally students might be engaged more in expansive discussion and lessons are not always pitched at the best level of challenge for students' capabilities. Students value the knowledgeable teaching and the excellent support and guidance they receive. A wide range of courses is available, with increasing provision for successful learning at a more modest level. Students contribute with gusto to the life of the school, for instance by giving spirited leadership to activities across the school and acting with empathy as mentors to those younger than themselves.

The sixth form is popular; it is large, growing rapidly, and has an excellent record for retaining students once they have joined. Leadership and management of the sixth form are vigorous and diligent: there is a relentless determination to strive for the best. Students relish the academic and social opportunities that sixth form life provides.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that achievement is good or better in every sixth form course.
- Ensure that the most able achieve well in all subjects at age 16.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are above average and achievement is good. Pupils join the school at age 11 with standards that are similar to those found nationally. The overall progress they make to age 14 is better than that in three quarters of schools. They are in the top 5% for progress in mathematics. Overall, achievement to age 14 has risen rapidly. The 2007 national assessments in English were a vast improvement on those in 2006.

From their starting points on joining the school, students make good progress to GCSE: in 2007 results showed progress to have been in the top 20% nationally. There has been rapid improvement. Between 2005 and 2007 the proportion of students achieving five GCSEs at grade C or better rose from 58% to 71%. In 2007 nearly 60% achieved this inclusive of English and mathematics – well above the national figure. In both English and mathematics students' progress over the five years to GCSE was outstanding. Students who had very low standards and other potentially vulnerable pupils did exceptionally well. In some, but not all, subjects there was a good proportion of students with A and A* grades. Overall, the 2007 results compared favourably with the school's challenging targets.

Students' work and the progress currently underway in classrooms are consonant with the recent high results. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities thrive strongly. In the sixth form, standards are broadly average and rising; achievement is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are especially

mature in moral development; this is reinforced well in assemblies and reflected in relationships at all levels. Students' commitment to healthy lifestyles is outstanding. There are high standards in physical education, uptake of additional sport is extensive and health awareness is bolstered in several classroom subjects in pursuit of the Healthy Schools Award. Students are attentive to safety; this is embedded in school policies and practice. Bullying is rare. Girls are considerate and respect one another. The vast majority are self-disciplined, and the school's sanctions and rewards are effective and appreciated by the girls. Students enjoy the academic and social life of the school and attitudes are good. Attendance is improving and is now good. Contribution to the community is good; it is exceptional in the sixth form. There are ample opportunities for students to have their say and participate in running the school community. Developments under the auspices of the schools' specialism, such as talent shows and the Mariners' Project, as well as sporting initiatives, are particularly productive. Students make very good headway in developing the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT); social skills are good and sixth formers are accomplished organisers. Students are well braced to face the world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good and some teaching is outstanding, particularly in mathematics. Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers have masterly subject knowledge and high expectations. Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives. There is often a stimulating range of activities and strategies to motivate and extend learning. The school's specialist status has facilitated effective use of media and ICT by many teachers and students. Most lessons have good pace and brisk questioning checks and develops understanding and thinking. Relationships are good; students enjoy lessons and are confident in presenting their work to others.

In many of the best lessons, students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, contribute and share ideas eagerly, and enjoy collaborative effort. They evaluate their own or one another's work incisively through the sharing of assessment information. Students' engagement is palpable and behaviour is very good. Activities provide ambitious challenge for all abilities and there are efficient opportunities to improve work.

Occasionally, lessons are less effective; they are too heavily directed by teachers, limiting opportunities for students' creative engagement. There is insufficient challenge and pace slows. There is also some lack of consistency in marking work, resulting in lack of clarity about what has been achieved and how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum in the main school and sixth form is good. It is continuously reviewed and adapted to meet changing needs. Specialist status has broadened the curriculum, particularly through a variety of media-based courses that are having a positive impact on literacy skills. The range of enrichment opportunities is excellent and the level of involvement is very high.

At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form there is a good balance of academic, applied and vocational courses. An outstanding feature of provision is that it is driven by, and tailored to meet, individual needs. Collaboration with neighbouring institutions and providers is used effectively to provide flexible alternative arrangements, which are also successful in addressing the needs of those who might be at risk of disaffection. Although the curriculum embraces work-related learning and enterprise, the school recognises that this is an area for further development. The well conceived sixth form provision encourages an unusually high transition from Year 11 to Year 12, and attracts students from elsewhere. Retention of students throughout the sixth form and progression to higher education are indicative of successful curricular opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Across the age range, this aspect of the school's work is outstanding: a real strength of the school. Restructuring and reorganisation of care, guidance and support over the last two years reflects astute leadership and vision. The student services team, which works closely and effectively with external agencies and the local authority, is having a strong impact on achievement, especially for the more vulnerable and potentially disaffected students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students appreciate how their individual timetables, Fast Track and alternative curricula provided through the Learning Zone, help them make progress. Some even feel that, were it not for this support, they would struggle to summon the motivation to attend school. The team of support staff - including learning mentors, teaching assistants, attendance officers and the well-being coordinator - all work together to best meet individual students' needs and maximise achievement.

The arrangements for the transition of pupils from primary school are very effective. Students with difficulties in reading, writing and numeracy are identified at the earliest stage and given individual support that helps them improve rapidly. Strategies to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism have also been very effective. The year group leaders' role is developing to include greater emphasis on overseeing, monitoring and supporting students' progress and achievement. A highly effective system for tracking students' progress is informed by very reliable termly assessments. Where students are found to be making less headway than they should, there is speedy intervention to find out why and to improve things. The school meets all requirements for the safeguarding of students and has clear policies and practice in relation to equality and discrimination.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior staff have a clear and compelling vision for improvement in every avenue of the school's work; they are unflinching in their pursuit of excellence. At the time of the last inspection in 2004, the fine new building had recently brought the school together from three sites, and there was work to be done in re-establishing school organisation. The present headteacher joined the school two years ago and the senior team has been restructured. They have galvanised the staff in well focused endeavour for school improvement - senior staff readily acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of the

teaching and support staff with all that has recently been achieved. The school is highly regarded by parents; they have very few concerns.

In the main school, standards have improved with impressive rapidity; in the sixth form there is steady improvement. Targets are challenging: the school aims to be in the top quarter of schools nationally for achievement. These targets are exceeded. The quality of care and support that the school provides is outstanding. Teaching is good. Leadership and management in subject departments are mostly very good, with some departments better than others. A few key posts are currently filled on a temporary basis and there are strategies in place to empower middle leaders further. Self-evaluation is thoughtful and thorough and leads inexorably to action to remedy weaknesses. Staff are generally skilfully deployed. The opportunities that accrue from the school's specialist status have been developed to advantage, with benefits permeating the whole work of the school. There has been immense improvement since the last inspection. There is excellent capacity to take this yet further. The high quality leadership in the school is matched, and held to account, by equally resolute and prudent governance.

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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	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?	2	2
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	2	

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?	2	2
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	2	
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	2	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Weatherhead High School Media Arts College, Wallasey, CH44 3HS

We greatly enjoyed our visit to your school. We were impressed by many of the things we saw. We valued the opportunity to talk with you and see how you are getting on. Weatherhead High School is a good school with many outstanding features.

Standards are improving rapidly in the main school; they are much better than in most schools. They are particularly strong in English and mathematics. Standards in the sixth form are at least as good as on similar courses across the country, and are rising. There is good achievement throughout the school. You enjoy school life, spare no effort, and are well looked after by staff. The range of subjects is good and you engage with enthusiasm and commitment in an excellent range of additional activities. Teaching is good and we saw several outstanding lessons. The recent rapid improvement is largely due to the excellent leadership and management by the headteacher and his senior team. If anything is not quite as good as it should be, the problem is spotted straight away and sorted out. Staff throughout the school, and in all capacities, join with senior colleagues in common commitment to do their best for the school and its students. Governors have left no stone unturned in seeing to it that things are as good as they can be. Meanwhile, leadership has ensured that the school is a happy place to work, learn and enjoy daily life. It is a tight ship and a happy one. With a school that is as good as yours, there is limited scope for further improvement. However, we have asked the school to consider two things:

- ensuring greater effectiveness in a few sixth form courses
- making sure that those who have the potential for top grades at GCSE achieve A or A* in as many subjects as possible.

As students, you have contributed enormously to the improvement in academic standards. You - and particularly those of you in the sixth form - have given of your best in making it a vibrant and happy school. Keep it up.