

# Wirral Grammar School for Boys

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105113
<b>Local Authority</b>	Wirral
<b>Inspection number</b>	324163
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29–30 April 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Vincent Ashworth 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>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1019
Sixth form	278
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr B Edmondson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Hazeldine
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	Cross Lane Bebington Wirral Merseyside CH63 3AQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 6440908
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 6438317

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a selective school that draws students from a range of backgrounds, but very few are entitled to free school meals. It is slightly larger than average in size. Most students are of White British heritage. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds currently represent around 6% of the school's population. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is small. The school has specialist status for business and enterprise. Awards achieved by the school include: Investors in People, International School and Healthy Schools.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Wirral Grammar School for Boys is a forward looking school that provides an outstanding education for its students. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and provided many comments on how well the school has prepared their child to succeed and flourish in adult life. Wirral Grammar is an excellent school', one parent wrote, 'The boys are not only given an excellent academic grounding, but they gain independence and responsibility'. To the school's long tradition of welfare and outstanding personal development, senior managers have added a rigorous and successful focus on raising academic standards and achievement.

Students are happy, reach high standards and make good progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the excellent support they receive. Students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is a substantial strength of the school and contributes strongly to its distinctive ethos.

The focus on more systematic lesson observation, coupled with the encouragement to share good practice across the school, is stimulating better teaching. In the best lessons teachers challenge students well and have the confidence to stand back and let students make learning their own. However, this is not consistently the case across all subjects. The curriculum in the lower school is excellent and reflects the school's specialist status. The extra-curricular activities are the jewel in the school's crown: they contribute enormously to students' personal development and well-being. The curriculum in the sixth form is overly prescriptive and there is too much restriction on the number of subjects sixth formers are allowed to study. The provision for care, guidance and support is outstanding. Boys speak very highly of the relationship they have with teachers. 'They really care about us', one said, 'if you need help, teachers will give up hours of their spare time to help you.'

The business and enterprise specialism flows through all aspects of school life. Management of the specialism is innovative and visionary. A careful balancing of imaginative approaches, thorough monitoring and excellent links into the community has given the specialism a high profile. Work with 30 local schools such as the Healthy Tuckshop initiative has seen students applying their business skills to new situations. Websites have been prepared for local businesses. Enterprise team competitions for over 200 primary school pupils with business mentor support, typify the relevance, imagination and excellent organisation of the initiative.

Leadership and management have improved significantly since the last inspection. A new headteacher has liberated a spirit of innovation within the school. He has created a climate of trust and openness; this has encouraged staff at all levels to think more creatively about their work and find more effective ways of working. The appointment of assistant headteachers has had a transformational impact on the capacity of middle leaders to manage their departments and raise standards. Staff benefit from outstanding opportunities for professional development and good practice is shared systematically between staff. A strong track record in improvement, inspirational leadership and open and consultative management gives the school outstanding capacity to improve.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

Sixth form provision is good and outstanding in some respects. Students are very well motivated, keen to achieve well and take pride in their work. Relationships between staff and students

are very good. The school ensures that students' personal development is outstanding and the quality of pastoral care and support for careers and higher education is excellent. Students enjoy the sixth form and value the opportunities they have to take responsibility; for example, in supporting younger students, organising assemblies and their work leading fundraising and charitable events. The curriculum is good overall because of the significant strengths of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. Nonetheless, there is a lack of flexibility in the provision. Most students are restricted to only three taught subjects at AS level, which they are required to continue with in Year 13. This constrains students who wish to review their subject choice at the end of Year 12 and has a detrimental impact on progression rates and achievement for a minority of students in Year 13. Teaching is characterised by good planning and teachers' excellent subject knowledge. Opportunities are sometimes missed to enable students to take initiative, explore and explain ideas for themselves and to work independently of the teacher. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

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

- Review the curriculum in the sixth form to ensure that it is more closely suited to the needs and aspirations of all students.
- Increase opportunities in lessons for students to show initiative and take greater charge of their own learning.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Attainment on entry is well above average: around half the students in each year group are in the highest ability range. Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 are exceptionally and consistently high and achievement is excellent. By the end of Key Stage 4 students achieve well and reach exceptionally high standards. Almost all students attain five good GCSE passes, including mathematics and English. The proportion of students attaining A\* or A grades in the GCSE examinations has risen steadily and was at an all time high of 50% in 2008. The very good provision in modern foreign languages ensures that a significantly higher proportion of students attain a good grade in at least one modern foreign language than do so nationally. Students make excellent progress in biology, information and communication technology (ICT), mathematics, business and English literature. Their weaker progress in a small minority of subjects is being tackled effectively by heads of department. The school recognises that students' progress slows off slightly during Key Stage 4. Action taken by the school has started to make a difference. Inspectors saw students currently in Year 11 making good use of their 'Challenge Targets' to accelerate their progress.

There is a broader range of ability in the sixth form because a small proportion of boys join Year 12 from other schools. Standards are above average in the sixth form and students' overall progress is good. Students do particularly well in their AS level examinations while their performance is slightly more variable in A level examinations. Of particular note is the consistently strong progress made by students in business studies.

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

### **Grade: 1**

Students' personal development is outstanding. Students have a passion for learning; their behaviour is exemplary and their attendance, already well above national averages, continues to rise. Students feel safe, secure and valued. Consequently, they develop in confidence, maturity

and self-esteem. They are well integrated with consultative processes that evaluate provision and contribute to the school's decision making. Students themselves have taken on the responsibility of stamping out bullying and intimidating behaviour. For this they have reaped rich rewards: the school climate is one of harmony and fellowship. Relationships and attitudes are characterised by mutual respect and sensitivity. Sixth form students' outstanding contribution to peer support has been recognised by the 'Princess Diana Award'. The significant sums of money students raise for charitable causes is testimony to their acute awareness of moral and social issues, as well as their empathy for people living in less fortunate circumstances than themselves. Sports and cultural activities are central to school life and take-up is high. As a result, students grow as healthy and well rounded individuals. Their entrepreneurial flair, demonstrable leadership qualities and team working skills bode well for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school has a highly accurate picture of the quality of lessons because of a regular and detailed monitoring system. Inspectors agree that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Classroom relationships are excellent because teachers have high expectations of what students can do and students respect teachers' expert subject knowledge. However, teachers tend to lead the thinking that goes on in lessons too much. As a result, students do not get enough chance to explore alternative ideas and interpretations. Some potentially good lessons are let down by teachers being vague about the focus or time limit of a task so that learning slows in pace or becomes casual. Lessons are well planned to match national curriculum and GCSE criteria, but the quality of planning for how activities will challenge students of differing abilities is more variable. Inspectors observed a number of outstanding lessons. Here active and competitive approaches, such as games and challenges were often accompanied by a stress on students using precise technical vocabulary. Brisk and probing question and answer sessions led towards sharply focused written work. Teachers' enthusiasm and students' eagerness were very apparent. Students know how well they are doing because teachers mark formal pieces of work thoroughly. However, day to day marking is inconsistent, too often being little more than cursory ticks or checks that work has been completed.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is outstanding because managers keep it under regular review, respond to students' comments, and have worked hard to integrate and extend the business and enterprise specialism. Students in Year 8 study the three sciences separately. The introduction of a second foreign language, an accredited citizenship course and 'fast track' mathematics and modern language GCSE courses further strengthen what is on offer at Key Stage 3. Carefully balanced options and a wide range of extension courses give students in Years 10 and 11 excellent scope to prepare for GCSE. Physical education and vocational ICT examination courses have been welcomed by students. Opportunities to study astronomy, language and business, and critical thinking further widen the offer. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) course has been amended to enable students to sample a range of activities: from archery to cookery; from rock climbing to street-dance. This complements the school's desire to extend and balance students' academic achievement and personal development. All Year 9 students experience an

outdoor pursuits residential. An outstanding range of activities, trips and visitors has a significant impact. A typical student comment was, 'If there's enough interest, teachers will always try to put something on to meet it.' The high level of participation is a testimony to the commitment of teachers and students alike. Over a third of students play a musical instrument and an unusually high proportion represent the school at sport. The regularity and extent of Saturday sporting fixtures is a strong feature.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Excellent care, guidance and support ensure that students achieve well. All necessary procedures for child protection and health and safety are firmly in place. A strong pastoral system effectively tracks students' personal development and academic progress. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now of a very high order. Links with parents and outside agencies are very good; very few parents have reservations about the work of the school. Academic guidance in the lower school has improved by leaps and bounds because teachers now have very helpful and accurate information that tells them how well students are progressing. As a result, underachievement is quickly identified and appropriate action taken to address it. Sixth form students know their targets and what they have to do to improve. However, the monitoring and evaluation of individual students' progress is not sufficiently incisive.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The process of self-evaluation is thorough and accurate and means the school accurately identifies where improvements need to be made. School targets are challenging yet realistic. There has been a strong emphasis on developing the role of middle managers who have taken on increased levels of accountability. Departmental plans are much improved and focus clearly on actions for improvement. Almost all departments operate effectively and arrangements are in place to support the very few that need to improve. The most impressive development since the last inspection is the improvement made in how data are used to monitor students' performance. This means that managers and staff are more proactive in identifying and tackling underachievement. As a consequence, the proportion of students attaining the very highest grades has increased by 15 percentage points since the last inspection.

The school's work in business and enterprise is at the cutting edge and has raised the profile of the school both regionally and nationally. It has had a particularly beneficial effect in helping students to develop as budding entrepreneurs. Governors are regularly involved in school life which helps them speak authoritatively when holding senior managers to account. The governing body has been vigorous in supporting initiatives to raise additional funding for the outstanding new learning and social facilities. This has had a major impact on the quality of students' experience at the school. The school has established plans to promote community cohesion and is increasingly looking at ways for students to learn with and work alongside young people from different backgrounds. Particularly good partnerships have been built with local primary schools. Finances are managed astutely; ICT and technology resources have improved in recent years. Equality of opportunity has a high priority and everything is done to ensure that all students are able to get the most of the outstanding educational, cultural and sporting opportunities provided to them.





## 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	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	2

## Achievement and standards

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

<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	
The extent to which 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

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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 Wirral Grammar School for Boys, Wirral, CH63 3AQ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. You helped me to understand how your school works and what makes it so special. I was also pleased that so many of your parents took the time to complete the questionnaire I sent. The vast majority of parents are highly supportive of your school because they feel you enjoy school, you are safe there and that Mr Hazeldine is an excellent headteacher. The inspection team agreed with these views and judged your school to be outstanding.

You achieve high standards in your work and make good progress. As you grow up, you become confident, capable and mature young people. Staff work hard to ensure that you develop the social and other skills that you will require to succeed in adult life. You were very appreciative of the large number of sporting and cultural activities that allow you to develop as well-rounded individuals. I would like to commend you for the excellent work that you've done to stamp out bullying; this makes your school a warm and friendly place to be. Inspectors saw how well you were embracing the school's specialist status in business and enterprise. You use your budding entrepreneurial skills with flair and compassion to raise funds for many charitable causes. Inspectors found that the teaching you receive is good and sometimes outstanding. You told inspectors that you particularly enjoy lessons where you are challenged and given lots of opportunities to get involved in different activities. We noticed that you made excellent progress in lessons where these were key ingredients. You are given excellent support and guidance to help you stay on track with your 'Challenge Targets'. To help the school improve still further and in particular to help you all make even better progress, I have asked the school to do two things.

- Your sixth form provides you with a good education and outstanding opportunities for personal development. However, some of you might achieve more if you were given more of a say in which subjects you are allowed to study.
- Ensure that even more of your lessons provide you with opportunities to show initiative and explore your own ideas and work independently of your teacher.