

South Wirral High School

Plymyard Avenue, Eastham, Wirral, Merseyside, CH62 8EH

Inspection dates 10–11 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher, senior and middle leaders and governors share high expectations and an unswerving commitment to ensure that every student achieves their goals, whatever their circumstances. As a result, the school has made significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Students do well in their GCSE examinations because the school has put in place good systems to check their progress and because high-quality support is given quickly if any student falls behind.
- Teaching is typically good and some of it is outstanding. It has improved since the last inspection because school leaders have taken effective action to eradicate teaching that is less than good.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They are polite and respectful and feel safe in the school. The number of exclusions has fallen significantly since the last inspection.
- Students have a wide range of opportunities to attend clubs and extra classes and develop leadership skills in the wider community. They develop an exceptional understanding of other cultures through international visits and visiting teachers and students from their link school in Ghana.
- The sixth form has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Students make good progress from often low starting points and achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching in the school to ensure that all students who can do so make outstanding progress.
- The progress of some students is hampered because they do not always apply, across all their subjects, the skills they have learned to improve their reading and understanding of texts, when they are working independently.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons, two of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors spoke to students in lessons and around the school and more formally to four groups of students.
- Meetings were held with staff, including middle and senior leaders, three governors and the Chair of the Governing Body. Additionally, the lead inspector spoke by telephone to two representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 33 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), of an independent survey of parental and carers' satisfaction commissioned by the school and of the 83 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised examination results from 2010 to 2012 and assessment information on students currently at the school. They also looked at statistical information about students' attendance and exclusions.
- Inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, safeguarding documents and minutes of governors' meetings, as well as information on how the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, for students known to be eligible for free school meals and for students whose parents serve in the armed forces, is used to improve outcomes for students.
- Information about teachers' professional development and performance management and their impact was also examined.

Inspection team

Susan Wareing, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Addison

Additional Inspector

Pamela Hemphill

Additional Inspector

Judith Straw

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- South Wirral High School is a foundation school which is larger than the average-sized 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school. There are more boys than girls in the school and 150 students in the sixth form.
- The school holds specialist status in visual and performing arts, mathematics and computing.
- Nearly all students are of White British heritage and speak English as their home language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above the national average. The main categories of students' special educational needs are specific learning difficulty and behaviour, emotional and social difficulty.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school makes arrangements for a small number of students in Years 10 and 11 to attend alternative provision once a week at West Cheshire College or Cornerstones Vocational Centre.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that more lessons enthuse and inspire students as effectively as the best.
- Raise achievement further, by extending the range of approaches that students can apply independently, across all their subjects, to improve their reading and understanding of texts.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well. They join the school with attainment that is significantly below national averages. They do well in GCSE examinations, reaching standards that are broadly in line with the national average. This represents good progress from their starting points.
- Results in the key measure of five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics have risen steadily over the last three years. Girls achieve particularly well in mathematics.
- The proportion of students who made and exceeded expected progress in mathematics in 2012 was above the national average but below it in English. The school has taken rapid steps to improve teaching and assessment in English, and information held by the school indicates strong improvement in the 2013 and 2014 examinations. In lessons and students' work seen during the inspection the large majority of students made at least good progress.
- There was some variation in achievement between subjects in 2012, mainly at GCSE grades A* and A. Senior leaders have introduced new courses, discarded unsuccessful ones and made staffing and management changes, so that previously underperforming subjects, for example, geography and French, have improved. Achievement in drama and dance, two of the school's specialist subjects, is consistently good. More students currently in the school are set to achieve the higher GCSE grades in the 2013 and 2014 examinations.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium funding make good progress. Average point scores across a wide range of GCSEs, including English, show that these students do at least as well as similar students nationally and in mathematics significantly better, because of the extra funding for high-quality support that helps these students to achieve well academically and personally. The school has not yet received Year 7 catch-up funding.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Those students who are supported at school action make significantly better progress than similar students nationally. This is because of the exemplary support programmes provided by specialist staff in the school and through the school's many partnerships with external agencies.
- A few students are entered early for GCSE examinations in English, mathematics and science, to give more vulnerable students the best chance of gaining qualifications. Most of these students then choose to improve their grades in the summer examination in Year 11.
- A small number of students are educated away from the school for one day each week. The school carefully checks that they attend regularly, behave well and generally make good progress, so that they are keen to remain in full-time education.
- The sixth form was an area for improvement in the last inspection. Students of all abilities enter the sixth form, sometimes with lower standards than nationally. Students now achieve well and make good progress from their starting points. This is because, as well as traditional AS and A level courses, students can now succeed in a range of individually tailored programmes that help them move on to the next phase of their education or to employment.

The quality of teaching is good

- The school rightly judges that teaching is good in most lessons and some is outstanding. The headteacher has communicated a clear vision for improving teaching and learning which is shared by all teachers and teaching assistants. Leaders and managers challenge teaching that is not of the very best quality and skilled school staff and sometimes external experts work with others to share the good practice that is in the school.
- Where teaching is good or outstanding, for example, in dance, drama and art, teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations of how rapidly and independently students can learn. Teachers' thoughtful planning therefore ensures that students' learning speeds up, through good chances to cooperate together in pairs and small groups and to evaluate their own

and other's work.

- Teachers create a very positive atmosphere for learning and use a variety of questioning well to encourage students to think more deeply and explain their reasoning. This builds students' confidence to think for themselves, express their own ideas, and take risks with their answers. In the most inspiring lessons, especially in the sixth form, teaching is clearly a partnership in which students and teachers exchange ideas and arguments on a level footing.
- Teachers make very innovative use of new technology to enthuse students and enhance their learning.
- Marking, an area for improvement in the last inspection, has improved and now gives students helpful information on how to improve their work. However, in the small minority of lessons that are not good, teachers do not always check carefully enough that students have acted on their advice.
- The use of information about students' progress, by leaders at all levels and by individual teachers, has sharpened since the last inspection. In most subjects teachers identify underachieving students more confidently and provide support more quickly as a result.
- In the small minority of lessons where teaching requires improvement, teachers' planning does not match work closely enough to the learning needs and interests of groups and individual students. These lessons therefore are not as successful as they might be in motivating and engaging students.
- Sometimes, although the school's extra support for those who struggle with reading is very effective, students do not always apply independently, in all their lessons, the approaches they have learned and this hampers their progress.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good and sometimes outstanding. It has improved since the last inspection because of more frequent assessment of students' work and sharper systems for holding staff to account for students' achievement. As a result, students make increasingly good progress and enjoy their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well both in lessons and around the school. They are polite and welcoming to visitors and respectful of each other and of adults. Behaviour is not yet outstanding because students' positive attitudes to learning do not yet have enough impact on their achievement.
- The school has a very rigorous approach to improving behaviour, founded on the determination of all staff to ensure that all students feel safe and secure in school. Older students say that behaviour has improved during their time in school and this is confirmed by parents, staff and governors.
- The school's behaviour policy is well established throughout the school. This has resulted in a marked reduction in the use of sanctions, such as letters to parents and carers. Permanent exclusions are very rare and the number of fixed term exclusions has reduced significantly.
- Overall attendance is slightly below average and persistent absence is higher than average. Systems for checking attendance are robust and the school does its very best, under the challenging circumstances of some students, to improve their attendance.
- The school is vigilant about bullying of all kinds, including prejudice-based and cyber-bullying. Students have confidence in the school's systems to keep them safe from it. They say that their mixed-age tutor groups help older and younger students to understand, respect and take responsibility for themselves and each other at an early age.
- Assemblies, a very rich variety of out-of-school activities and teaching across the curriculum contribute greatly to the school's provision for students' exemplary spiritual, moral, cultural and social development.
- The 'Pledge' system is nationally recognised as good practice. It is a guarantee to each student of an individual programme of experiences that help to build their self-confidence or make a significant contribution to the school and the wider community during their time in school. Students' progress is recorded, as they take part, for example, in a residential visit, local sports

leadership or a performance to an audience.

- Students develop their understanding of people from other cultures through direct experience, for example, visits by teachers and students from a Ghanaian school. Students meet Holocaust survivors and, through innovative use of technology, deepen their understanding by making their own films about other survivors. All these experiences reflect the strong moral and cultural purpose that underpins everything that the school does.
- The school's collaboration, through regular case conferences, with a wide range of external experts, to plan support for its most vulnerable students, including those who have disabilities or complex special educational needs, is a strength. Creative approaches such as the use of community placements instead of exclusion and high-quality mentoring and counselling help to maintain many of these students in full-time education against the odds.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is highly ambitious for all the students, their families and the wider community. Senior leaders, governors and all staff share her unswerving commitment to supporting and challenging all students to achieve their academic and personal goals, whatever their circumstances. This vision contributes much to the continuing improvement of the school. However, leadership and management are not outstanding because they have not yet secured outstanding teaching and achievement.
- The school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind. Senior leaders, managers and governors work tirelessly to remove any barriers to the success of all students and also of staff.
- All staff and governors contribute to the school's self-evaluation, which is robust, honest and gives the school a very accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. This has helped the school to tackle successfully all the areas of improvement from the last inspection and shows the school's good capacity for further improvement.
- The performance management system is strong. It is firmly linked to salary progression and identifies for reward only those teachers who teach consistently well. High-quality professional development is well tailored to support the improvement of teaching and eradicate any weaknesses. This has increased the proportion of good and outstanding teaching since the last inspection.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. It is broad and balanced at all key stages, including in the sixth form. Senior leaders review the curriculum very regularly to ensure that it continues to meet precisely the needs, interests and aspirations of all students. The needs of a few vulnerable students are well supported by education away from school at West Cheshire College or Cornerstones Vocational Centre. The very extensive range of enrichment activities: sports, music, drama and local and international visits, is very popular with students, including sixth formers.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet all statutory requirements exceptionally well.
- The school derives effective support from the local authority for its external evaluation and, occasionally to support improvement work in subject departments.
- The sixth form is well managed and as a result, outcomes and provision for sixth formers from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities have improved since the last inspection.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because they have not secured enough outstanding teaching to ensure outstanding achievement for students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governance of the school is very strong. The governing body is proud of the school and brings a very wide range of professional expertise to its work and members take a very active role. They visit the school as regularly as they can, including attendance at professional development events alongside the teaching staff. Governors talk knowledgeably about students' achievement and are well able to link this information to the school's robust performance management system. Governors have the expert skills necessary to oversee the school's finances and ensure that all expenditure is focused on the school's priorities for

improvement. They make judicious use of the pupil premium funding, always strictly linked to students' learning and social needs. Governors are well able to discharge their duties as critical friends who are confident to challenge as well as support the school in equal measure.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105107
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	412872

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1046
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	R Barker
Headteacher	C McCormack
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2009
Telephone number	0151 3273213
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