

West Kirby Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105099
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	324157
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Angela Milner HMI

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 students	11–18
Gender of students	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,182
Sixth form	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs T Janikiewicz
Headteacher	Mrs Glenice Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	October 2005
School address	Graham Road West Kirby Wirral CH48 5DP
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

West Kirby Grammar School is a larger than average selective school. The school is a specialist science and mathematics college. Students come from a variety of social backgrounds but few are entitled to free school meals. The students are predominantly girls. There are a small number of boys in the sixth form. The majority of students are of White British heritage. Students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds currently represent around 6% of the school's population. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is lower than average. There are few students with a statement of special educational need and fewer than average students who need help with their learning. The majority of students continue into the sixth form and on to higher education. Awards achieved by the school include: Artsmark Silver, Cultural Diversity Gold, International School, Healthy Schools, Eco School and Fair Trade School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's view that West Kirby Grammar is an outstanding school with an equally outstanding sixth form. It provides very high quality care and education in an inclusive learning environment. Staff work as part of a highly effective team to identify, nurture and develop the potential of each student. Students thrive in this rich and caring environment. The excellent care is reflected in the mutual respect and friendly relationships that exist between teachers, support staff and students. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a particular strength and contributes to the sense of community in the school. Students become mature, self-confident and caring individuals with high aspirations and are extremely well prepared for life beyond school. Students benefit from an impressive culture of very high expectations in relation to personal development and academic achievement. Students are very proud of their school, the support they receive and the opportunities it provides. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire were positive in their views of all aspects of the school and praised its high standards, the friendly, welcoming atmosphere, the accessibility of staff and communications with the school.

Students are selected for entry on ability, so attainment on entry is well above average. Students progress from their initial starting points and achieve extremely well. They reach exceptionally high standards. In the drive to continue to improve standards even further the school sets challenging targets linked to high expectations. Target setting is based on very detailed and accurate analysis and rigorous tracking of students' attainment and progress. As a result, the school has successfully reduced gaps in attainment between different groups of students since the last inspection.

The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. High expectations and challenge ensure that students' test and examination results are impressive and that students make exceptional progress across a range of subjects. Enthusiastic and highly committed teachers inspire students to become confident and independent learners who give of their best. Teachers use assessment information extremely well to plan lessons that build on students' prior understanding and cater for the differing needs of students, including those with gifts and talents. Most teachers mark work regularly and conscientiously but there is some variability in the quality of marking and the use of assessment grades between subjects. The extensive curriculum is very well matched to students' needs and enriched by an impressive range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities.

Specialist science and mathematics college status permeates the life of the school. It has been very effectively managed to move the school forward. Consequently, facilities have improved, community links have been developed and highly productive links have been made with a number of appreciative partners. Specialist status has helped enrich the curriculum, promote motivational approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and enhance provision for the gifted and talented. This has led to improved achievement overall.

Exemplary leadership at all levels continuously moves this high achieving school forwards. The use of rigorous and extremely accurate self-evaluation, wide consultation and effective monitoring ensures that priorities are identified and carefully considered actions lead to further improvements. The headteacher's contribution to the school's success is outstanding. The governing body is extremely effective in holding the school to account for its performance. All of these factors and the improvements made since the last inspection mean that the capacity to improve further is judged to be outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form provision is outstanding. Students receive exemplary support when they enter the sixth form, during their studies and as they prepare for transition to higher education and future careers. Students new to the school, including the small number of male students, receive an excellent induction and quickly settle into sixth form life. Rigorous pastoral and academic tracking systems enable students' progress to be monitored. Students know how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve. The curriculum meets the needs of all, including those who enter the sixth form from other schools. The school offers a very broad range of academic subjects at AS and A2 level. Standards are consistently above the national average and students make excellent progress in their studies. Students are effectively supported to develop skills for learning and future student life, through a series of well planned and attended enrichment activities. Students' progress and retention rates are outstanding because of the high quality induction, very effective teaching, extensive curriculum and enhancement opportunities, the levels of support and academic guidance provided and the high quality of sixth form management. Students' personal development and well-being are also outstanding. Sixth form students make a significant contribution to the life of the school and the wider community through the house system. They act as role models for younger students and are actively involved in giving learning support in lessons. Students enjoy sixth form life and say its strongest feature is the positive relationships between students and teachers. Students feel valued and are an integral part of the whole school community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of marking and use of assessment grades on students' work across subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding and standards are well above the national average. Students enter the school in Year 7 with well above average attainment. Standards are consistently and exceptionally high in both key stages and in the sixth form. All students make outstanding progress from their initial starting points and achieve exceptionally well. This can be attributed to the high quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the extensive and carefully tailored curriculum, the comprehensive use of monitoring and tracking information on students' progress and to the

outstanding care, guidance and support provided throughout the school. Standards have been high for many years and show a continually improving trend. Consequently, results in national tests taken in English, mathematics and science in Year 9 are very impressive. In 2008 provisional data indicate the proportion of students achieving Level 5, the standard expected for their age, was 100% in English and mathematics and 99% in science. A significant proportion of students gained a Level 7 in English and science and a Level 8 in mathematics. Provisional data indicate the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics in 2008 was 99.5%. Standards in English, drama and theatre studies are a significant strength throughout the school. Results in the school's specialisms have shown an upward trend with increasing numbers of students opting to take higher qualifications in science and mathematics. In the sixth form standards are exceptionally high and are also improving year on year. Approximately 67% of students who take A2 level examinations gain passes at the higher grades of A and B. Students make outstanding progress during their time in the sixth form and the vast majority continue their studies at university. There is no significant variation in standards between different groups of students. Students of different abilities and backgrounds achieve very well and those with gifts and talents are challenged appropriately.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. Students feel proud and privileged to be at West Kirby Grammar School. Students' spiritual, moral and cultural development, fostered through a highly effective assembly programme and religious education, design for living and citizenship lessons is excellent. Students are polite, helpful and courteous to visitors and to each other. They are also very caring of each other. One example of this is the 'jigsaw programme' whereby older students act as mentors to younger ones. Students say they feel very safe in school. They report that bullying is rare and rapidly dealt with. Students have a very good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles as can be seen from their high rates of participation in sporting activities. They are very clear about how to keep themselves and others safe. Students fully appreciate the extensive efforts the school makes on their behalf and are confident that their views are listened to. They have a clear sense of belonging to the school community and willingly make a significant contribution to the wider community. They take full advantage of opportunities to exercise high levels of responsibility in their roles as school councillors, form captains and organisers of house activities, charity appeals and assemblies. Students are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and the world of work. Their financial understanding and team-working skills are particularly well developed. Students develop as mature, confident, articulate, thoughtful and caring individuals partly because, as one student said, they are encouraged to 'grab every opportunity' the school offers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that teaching and learning are outstanding. In nearly all the lessons observed teaching was at least good and in a high proportion it was outstanding. The school is clear about what constitutes effective teaching, learning and assessment. Professional working groups and a comprehensive and well focused professional development programme have greatly enhanced the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. Excellent relationships and mutual respect are a hallmark of most lessons. Consequently, students enjoy their work and are able to make brisk progress, producing work consistent with their high levels of ability. Students enjoy and make the greatest progress in lessons where they are fully involved in a range of challenging and purposeful teaching and learning activities. In the best lessons enthusiastic teachers use their subject expertise and skilful questioning to ensure that students are effectively challenged. This means students make exceptional progress. A small proportion of lessons, of good quality in other respects, lack the demanding high levels of challenge evidenced in outstanding lessons. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection in the use of assessment information to monitor students' progress and plan differentiated learning for the gifted and talented. Students are encouraged to assess their own work and learn how to improve it further. Marking is regularly and conscientiously undertaken by most teachers but there is some variability in the quality of marking and the use of assessment grades between subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum, which caters very well for the needs of all students and meets statutory requirements. It is one of the reasons why students make outstanding progress. The curriculum is extremely flexible and individually tailored to meet students' needs. At Key Stage 3 the recent introduction of personal learning and thinking skills enhances the curriculum by focusing on the skills necessary for creativity and independence. The curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 is impressive. It is kept under constant review to ensure that it meets the full range of aspirations of all students, including the gifted and talented. One example of this is the opportunity for able linguists to study additional languages such as Russian and Latin. Most students stay on into the sixth form where there is an extensive and growing range of academic courses provided at AS and A2 level. The school's specialist status is adding a highly appropriate curriculum focus to the school. A number of innovative developments are impacting on the breadth and quality of the curriculum offered to students and extending the opportunities available for them to play an active part in the already extensive range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. This includes opportunities to engage in research being undertaken in the Canadian Arctic and with the National Space Centre for students who are gifted and talented. High participation rates indicate that these activities make a valuable contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Very effective links with local organisations facilitate work-related learning and

vocational opportunities that prepare students extremely well for the challenges of life beyond school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. This is reflected in the positive relationships that exist between staff and students and the very strong sense of community in the school. There are very high expectations of behaviour and of attitudes to work. Students are encouraged to 'be polite, be prepared, be positive'. Safeguarding, child protection, health and safety, and risk assessment systems meet requirements and are well managed. Effective liaison with external agencies ensures that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Highly effective transition arrangements enable new students to settle quickly into school. The house system plays a key role in this, enabling new arrivals to get to know students in different year groups. Teachers, leaders and learning mentors carefully monitor and deal with any concerns students may have. The long established support systems for students' welfare have been enhanced since the last inspection to provide a greater focus on the provision of effective academic guidance. The progress of all students is carefully and regularly monitored. Any underachievement is swiftly identified and tackled. Students meet regularly with staff to review their progress. Consequently, students know the levels they are working at, what their targets are and generally what they must do to improve. Guidance on future work and study options is exemplary. For example, local engineers, scientists and female role models from business and higher education visit the school regularly to discuss career options and specific preparatory work is undertaken with students applying for places at Oxbridge.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

A key factor in the success of the school is its outstanding leadership and management. The school is very well led and managed by an inspirational headteacher and leadership team who provide a very clear vision for the development and improvement of the school and work effectively together in translating this vision into reality. School improvement planning is excellent because it draws on rigorous self-evaluation, the monitoring of teaching and learning, the detailed analysis of data and the views of staff, students, parents, governors and partners. The headteacher listens carefully to the views of others, ensures that everyone is valued and creates an atmosphere where all feel able to contribute to the growing success of the school. As a result, the school knows what has been achieved and what can be done to improve further. Strong and confident middle leaders share this vision. The staff work extremely hard and are committed to providing the best possible opportunities for students. Performance management procedures and the continuing professional development of staff have a high priority and staff welcome the range of opportunities provided to develop their skills and share good practice. The science and mathematics specialism is very well led and managed to the school's advantage. This initiative is strengthening the school's reputation both within and beyond the local community. Outstanding partnerships with a range of external agencies are used to make the school distinctive and have an extremely positive impact on students' personal development and well-being.

Arrangements to promote community cohesion at school, local, national and global levels are outstanding. Governors provide high quality support and challenge and hold the school to account effectively, while recognising that the day-to-day running of the school is the responsibility of the headteacher and senior leadership team. Statutory requirements are fully met and the school demonstrates a strong commitment to equality and inclusion. The school provides outstanding value for money.

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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?	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/or disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	

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.

The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Annex A**The quality of provision**

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	



16 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of West Kirby Grammar School, Wirral, CH48 5DP

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. You made the inspection team feel so welcome and we enjoyed visiting you in lessons and talking with many of you and your teachers. We were impressed by your hard work, the high standards you attain, your sense of responsibility and how proud you are to be part of your school community. Many of your parents completed questionnaires. This meant we were able to consider their views during the inspection.

Your school is providing you with a very high quality of education and care. The school has an impressive culture of very high expectations in relation to your personal development and academic achievement. The school's specialist status as a science and mathematics college has an extremely positive impact on the life of the school. The school offers you excellent opportunities to gain the skills and qualifications that will help you to succeed in life. You have excellent relationships with your teachers and with each other. We know you appreciate the opportunities the school provides and the support and advice you receive from the staff. We think that most of the teaching in your school is excellent. The school and sixth form are very well led and managed and your headteacher, governors and teachers have worked very hard to improve the school since the last inspection. They continue to look at ways in which they can make the school even better. While we have judged your school to be outstanding, there is one area that we have asked the school to improve further. We would like the school to improve the consistency of marking and use of assessment grades across different subjects.

You can all, of course, help to improve your school further by continuing to work as hard as you can to achieve your best in tests and examinations, support each other and share your views about the school and sixth form with staff.

Thank you again for your help in this inspection and we would like to wish you all the very best in your studies and every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Angela Milner
Her Majesty's Inspector