

Prenton High School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105093
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	367364
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Johan MacKinnon

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	668
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joseph Roper
Headteacher	Paula Dixon
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Teaching and learning were observed in 29 lessons and the same number of teachers was seen. This included joint observations carried out with the headteacher and a deputy headteacher. Inspectors met with staff, groups of students, the school council, members of the governing body and the School Improvement Partner from the local authority. They observed the school's work, and looked at school policies and procedures about safeguarding and the welfare and progress of students as well as documents showing how leaders and managers monitor, evaluate and review the work of the school. Inspectors also considered 107 parental questionnaires, 93 student questionnaires and 56 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether achievement is now securely good and improving for all students.
- How well provision meets the needs of students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement.
- How effectively leaders and managers at all levels use assessment information, data and self-evaluation to drive improvement.
- To what extent the good and outstanding practice and provision seen at the time of the last inspection has been sustained and improved on across the school.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average secondary school, with an increased intake in the last few years following an earlier dip in numbers. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high, although decreasing, and a low proportion of students is from minority-ethnic groups. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average and the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is low. The school has held specialist status in science, mathematics and the visual arts since 2007 and will become an academy in July 2011. The school holds the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Healthy School status and was recognised by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust as one of its most improved schools in 2008 and 2009. It is also recognised by the Mentoring and Befriending Association as an approved provider of peer mentoring.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Prenton High School provides outstanding education and support for the girls in its care. The high aspirations and expectations of the headteacher and her senior leadership team are reflected in the commitment and work of the staff, students and governing body. There is a palpable sense of pride in belonging and students willingly make a significant contribution to the school and wider community. The specialism pervades the school, with high-quality artwork in all areas and creative and scientific projects across the curriculum. The calm and purposeful atmosphere and outstanding behaviour of the students make a significant contribution to the outstanding outcomes. Staff work as part of an effective team to identify, nurture and develop the potential of each student and provide opportunities to broaden their horizons and fire their ambitions. The exceptional support that students provide for each other through the peer-mentoring programme is a striking example of their excellent personal development and is appreciated by students of all ages.

Students of all abilities and backgrounds make good progress in their learning. Examination results in the visual arts are consistently high and they have improved markedly in science. The specialism is flourishing. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress. This is as a result of the particularly high quality of support provided by the intervention and inclusion team. The quality of teaching is good, with a brisk pace of learning and embedded development of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills within other subjects. In the most effective lessons the success criteria are clear and structured, a range of engaging and challenging activities for all students is employed and students know how to take the small steps in learning needed to reach their challenging targets. Where lessons are less successful, teachers do not take sufficient account of assessment information to plan work to meet the needs of all students in the class or ensure that students are clear about the steps in their learning. This slows the rate of progress some students make. Students receive good verbal feedback on their learning but the quality of written feedback and advice is too variable. There is some good practice in evidence which is not built on as much as it might be.

The rich and varied curriculum is highly personalised to effectively meet the needs of a changing population. It provides a range of courses which is well matched to the needs and interest of students, supported by highly effective partnerships. The exceptional quality of care, guidance and support that the school provides, including

outstanding safeguarding, ensures that all students feel very safe and well cared for and every student can succeed. Students have a clear sense of right and wrong and are sensitive to the needs and beliefs of others. The level of attendance has improved and is now high. This reflects both how positively students feel about school and the effective systems in place to promote and reward high attendance and support families.

The headteacher has successfully embedded a culture of improvement and staff morale is high. Self-evaluation by senior leaders is rigorous and honest and emerging issues are tackled directly. Middle leaders are increasingly held accountable for standards and improvement in their areas and are supported well through training and mentoring by senior leaders. The governing body is exceptionally highly involved in the daily life of the school and understands clearly its achievements and priorities for improvement. The school has an accurate view of teaching and learning, acknowledging that the use of assessment strategies to secure good and better progress is less well developed than other aspects. The school has acted successfully to address the recent fall in achievement and has sustained and improved the high quality of other outcomes. However, the recent variability in achievement and in the use of assessment information to accelerate progress mean that capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently make effective use of assessment and other information to provide activities which meet the precise learning needs of all students
 - building on the existing examples of good practice to ensure that students receive consistently high-quality written feedback on their learning and so know clearly how to improve
 - making effective use of targets and success criteria in lessons to structure learning and accelerate progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students of all ages enjoy their learning, work hard and participate actively in all aspects of their education. They behave with exceptional consideration of each other and their environment and work cooperatively in lessons. Their personal development is particularly strong and they are very supportive of each other. One example of this is the successful and popular peer-mentoring system, which begins with Year 9 students working with a Year 6 class as they prepare to go to high school and continues throughout the school. Senior students also work effectively as reading buddies with younger learners. The large school council has a strong presence and impact and works confidently with staff and the governing body to improve the school for everyone. New and increasing opportunities to contribute to shaping the curriculum and evaluate provision further engage a wide range of students in school improvement in different ways.

Students arrive at the school with prior attainment which is broadly average. Attainment and progress fell overall in 2010 despite the school's highest-ever proportion of students achieving five or more grades A* to C at GCSE. Lesson observations during the inspection and the school's monitoring data, which include external examination results in English, mathematics and science, indicate that students currently at the school are making good progress and attainment is rising. Concerted action has improved the outcomes for the least able in English and mathematics. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported very well and make progress which is at least as good as that of their peers, as do students known to be entitled to free school meals.

Students enjoy and participate enthusiastically in the creative opportunities provided to participate in fund-raising and raising awareness of issues such as breast cancer and the environment. This is underpinned by a strong moral sense of responsibility and a desire to help others, including girls at a partner school in Sierra Leone as well as the local community. Students feel very safe in school, a view echoed by their parents and carers, and are very confident that school does not tolerate negative behaviour. There is widespread participation in the extensive range of healthy extra-curricular activities available and uptake of the healthy menu of school lunches is unusually high. Students act as 'Active Playground' leaders in local primary schools as part of an increasing range of opportunities to be ambassadors for healthy lifestyles.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The outstanding care, guidance and support underpin the success of the school. Students refer to it as having a 'family atmosphere' where they are known as individuals and have a wide range of staff available to provide help at any time. The house-system structure for pastoral and academic support, with forms from every year group in each house, works effectively. It helps to break down barriers between older and younger students. The heads of houses are central figures for each student and are valued highly by them. Extremely positive relationships between staff and

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

students and the well-focused work of the inclusion and intervention team ensure that all students have the opportunity, skills and ambition to succeed. Effective partnerships with primary schools secure very successful transition into the school. The quality of advice and guidance that students receive as they move through the school and seek to make appropriate choices for their futures is a clear strength and is valued highly by students and their families.

Most of the lessons observed by inspectors were good or better and staff are clearly committed to further improvement. Teachers use their subject expertise, creative activities and skilful questioning to engage and challenge students. The classroom atmosphere is purposeful, with high expectations of the quality of work, and students rise to this challenge. Discussion and paired or group work is used widely to explore ideas and deepen understanding. The quality of planning activities to challenge students of differing abilities is, however, variable. Students know their targets but are not always clear about how to take the next steps in reaching them. Outstanding learning, for example, in the art lessons observed, was typified by excellent use of assessment criteria by students to evaluate their own and others' work and secure detailed understanding of how to improve.

The outstanding curriculum is kept under constant review to ensure that it matches the changing needs and aspirations of each cohort of students. Students can embark on qualifications in some subjects, for example, science, at different times depending on aptitude and readiness. The curriculum provides excellent opportunities to promote enjoyment of learning and supports outstanding personal development. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities. High participation rates indicate that these activities are enjoyed and appreciated. Visitors to school and educational trips are used extremely well to support and enrich learning, stimulate curiosity about the wider world and foster ambition.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The ethos, culture and practice instilled and exemplified by the headteacher and her senior leadership team ensure that students and staff are highly ambitious and have the skills and resources required to fulfil those ambitions. Accurate self-evaluation is effectively linked to improvement planning, which has a sharp focus on the key issues for the school. Progress towards improvement targets is reviewed regularly. The models used to set school and student academic targets are reviewed regularly to ensure that they continue to provide sufficient challenge. The governing body is highly effective in holding the school to account and participates actively in evaluation. For example, a number of governors carry out classroom visits to review agreed aspects of teaching and learning. A comprehensive cycle of well-focused monitoring systems is in place to sustain and improve high-quality teaching. This

cycle is closely linked to the training and coaching programme in school and complements an increasingly open culture of sharing good practice. The school is aware of the limitations in the use of assessment information to accelerate learning and has planned appropriate steps to address them. These actions have not yet been put in place.

The school communicates effectively with parents and carers, through regular newsletters as well as, increasingly, electronic media. The views of parents and carers have influenced the structure of parents' evenings. The parents and carers of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have close contact with a range of staff to ensure that they are supported and informed well. Productive partnerships bring many benefits to the school in achievement, personal development and well-being. Partnerships developed through the school's specialism have a particularly strong impact on outcomes and enrichment, and links with a wide range of welfare agencies support highly effective multi-agency working. Outstanding safeguarding ensures that students feel safe and parents and carers are confident that their children are safe in school. Policies and procedures to tackle discrimination are in place and are regularly monitored, but very few incidents occur. Equality of opportunity is integral to the school and ensures that all groups of students have the same chances to succeed. The school works actively to support community cohesion locally but there remains scope for further development at a regional and national level, particularly in students' experience of working with people from other faiths.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

An average proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire and the vast majority of responses were highly positive. All those who responded felt that the school keeps their child safe and that the staff, the quality of teaching, and preparation of students for their future are particularly highly regarded. A few parents and carers expressed reservations about the quality of communication with school but others wrote about their satisfaction with communication and the approachability of the school staff at all levels. Inspectors found the work that the school does to engage and communicate with parents to be excellent and the school continues to seek ways to improve this further.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Prenton High School for Girls to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 107 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 668 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	49	46	55	51	2	2	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	68	64	39	36	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	59	55	47	44	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	47	53	50	3	3	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	52	49	53	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	46	43	52	49	6	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	36	66	62	2	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	40	37	64	60	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	46	54	50	2	2	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	47	50	47	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	45	42	56	52	2	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	60	56	47	44	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	63	59	43	40	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Prenton High School for Girls, Birkenhead, CH42 6RR

Thank you for the way in which you made the inspectors welcome and contributed to the inspection. Your behaviour is excellent and we were impressed by the way that you work and learn together as a friendly and supportive community with a real sense of belonging. Please pass on our thanks to your parents and carers for taking the time to complete our questionnaire as their responses were very helpful.

Prenton High School is an outstanding school. It provides you with a very rich curriculum and supports all students exceptionally well, especially when they may need extra help. This, and the commitment and skill of the staff, makes sure that you learn well and have high expectations and ambitions for your future. I would like to congratulate you on your high levels of attendance and positive attitude to learning. The excellent relationships that exist between students and staff make a strong contribution to your enjoyment of school as well as to your success. You told us that you feel very safe in school and know that the staff care about each of you as individuals and work hard to ensure that no-one gets left behind.

Examination results are rising and teaching is good although the way that some teachers plan, set objectives and mark your work does not always help you to make the most rapid progress possible. We have asked your teachers to raise achievement by:

- making effective use of assessment and other information to provide activities which precisely meet your needs
- improving marking to make sure that you know how you are doing and exactly how to improve
- making better use of targets and success criteria in lessons to accelerate progress.

You can all help to achieve this by continuing to work hard, having high expectations for yourself and by maintaining your high attendance. We thoroughly enjoyed visiting your school and wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Johan MacKinnon
Lead inspector

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