

South Wirral High School

Plymyard Avenue, Eastham, Wirral, Merseyside CH62 8EH

Inspection dates

8–9 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not done enough to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress across a wide range of subjects and year groups.
- Disadvantaged pupils have made slower progress than others. Leaders do not carefully monitor and measure the impact of targeted pupil premium funding.
- Leaders have not acted quickly enough to speed up the progress made by pupils in mathematics. This issue is now being tackled, following a period of decline.
- Leaders throughout the school have not focused sharply on the progress being made by different groups of pupils. This is beginning to change and there are clear signs of differences in progress diminishing.
- Leaders' plans to improve literacy and numeracy across the curriculum are in their early stages. Pupils are not supported effectively to improve their writing in a range of subjects.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 10 do not receive thorough careers education to help them consider their plans for the future.
- Pupils' attendance is improving. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities remains low.
- Teaching is not consistently strong because teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in key stage 3, are not high enough and there is insufficient challenge for some pupils.
- Students have not made strong progress in the sixth form in recent years, particularly in academic courses. Not all students have embarked upon courses that are well suited to their interests and aptitudes.
- Students are not systematically supported to cope with the added demands of independent study in the sixth form.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has galvanised the staff.
- Staff morale is high.
- The newly assembled leadership team understands the school's strengths and weaknesses and is driving improvements.
- Leadership of safeguarding is very effective.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and improving. Pupils are happy, tolerant and respectful.
- Pupils have recently made much faster progress than before in English.
- Pupils benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the leadership and management of the school by ensuring that:
 - the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is checked regularly and swift action is taken where necessary to ensure that these pupils attend school regularly
 - actions to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils are regularly analysed so that leaders and governors can carefully measure their impact
 - pupils in Years 7 to 10 receive careers advice and guidance that help them to prepare for their next steps
 - there are clear plans in place to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
 - leaders at all levels focus closely on the rates of progress being made by different groups throughout the school.
- Ensure that teachers have high expectations of what pupils, particularly in key stage 3, can achieve and provide appropriately challenging work.
- Accelerate the progress of students in the sixth form, particularly those on academic courses, by ensuring that:
 - students study courses that are well suited to their abilities, interests and future plans
 - students are closely supported to cope with the demands of studying independently.
- Ensure that recent improvements that have begun in mathematics continue and lead to good progress being made, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that pupils make consistently good progress across a wide range of subjects and year groups. Pupils make overall progress that is broadly average. However, there is too much variation in the rates of progress made by different groups of pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils have recently made slow progress from their starting points compared to other pupils. Leaders do not carefully measure the impact of additional funds to support disadvantaged pupils and those needing to catch up in Year 7. Some of the plans to speed up the progress made by these pupils lack precision and do not sharply focus on removing barriers to achievement. However, information provided by leaders indicates that disadvantaged pupils are now making quicker progress. This is because leaders have emphasised the importance of raising achievement among this group. Teachers and other members of staff therefore know which disadvantaged pupils are at risk of underachievement and are taking positive steps to speed up the progress they make.
- Plans to develop numeracy and literacy across the curriculum are in their early stages and have not yet made a marked contribution to pupils' skills and capabilities. There is not yet an effective strategy in place to develop pupils' writing. Errors in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar remain common and teachers do little to address these mistakes.
- Leaders have not been able to ensure that teaching is consistently good, despite creating a culture in which teachers are keen to improve and develop. Leaders' monitoring of teaching standards has not paid enough attention to detail and this has led to leaders developing an overgenerous view of the quality of teaching. Leaders have made teachers accountable for the progress made by their pupils, although there has not been a consistent focus on the progress made by different groups. Leaders have demonstrated an ability to improve teaching in areas where outcomes have not been good. This has been the case in English, history and resistant materials.
- The new headteacher has been in post since September 2016 and, in this time, he has galvanised staff and set about his duties with determination and tact. Staff morale is high and responses to the staff survey were very positive, with the overwhelming majority of staff indicating that they were proud to work at a school they recognise as improving.
- Pupils also expressed positive views about developments under the new headteacher. Pupils were keen to point out how behaviour was improving. Parents' responses to the online questionnaire revealed more mixed views about aspects of the school, although most responses were positive overall. Many parents felt that teachers were very committed, encouraging and enthusiastic, although some parents raised concerns about the frequency with which supply teachers have been used in the past and the poor state of the pupils' toilets.
- A new and experienced deputy headteacher joined the school in January 2017 with a specific brief to coordinate improvements in the different branches of the school's work. This appointment significantly increases the capacity of the leadership team to

secure sustained improvement following a period when the school was without a permanent deputy headteacher.

- The headteacher has made it an immediate priority to improve the behaviour and attendance of pupils and he has already had a positive impact in these areas. He has overseen the restructuring of pastoral leadership and established effective systems for supporting vulnerable pupils that are coordinated via the newly created 'student services' hub.
- Leadership of the school's provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is strong. There is effective liaison with a range of external agencies, such as educational psychologists and the child and adolescent mental health services, to secure improvements in the support for pupils. Teachers are well trained to support pupils with needs such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Additional funding for special educational needs is used effectively.
- Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. They are guided on to one of three carefully designed key stage 4 pathways that provide the flexibility needed to meet the needs of all pupils. There is less flexibility in key stage 3, however, with all pupils currently following a very similar curriculum. Leaders are currently exploring ways in which the key stage 3 curriculum can be developed to best meet the needs of all pupils.
- A range of extra-curricular clubs and enrichment opportunities supplement the formal curriculum. The performing arts thrive at the school, for example the 'act up' drama club and the 'vision' dance troupe. Pupils can also attend trips and visits, from foreign adventures to local cultural visits.
- Leaders have received little direct support from the local authority in recent years because the local authority has not viewed the school's performance as a concern.
- Leaders have recently begun to further develop the range and scope of work with feeder primary schools. For example, members of staff have recently visited some of the primary schools to look at the level of challenge in the key stage 2 curriculum. This has led to the creation of 'transition passports' that challenge pupils to build upon their achievements in primary school and maintain positive attitudes to learning.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is given a high priority by school leaders. All pupils are challenged to fulfil the 10 'South Wirral pledges' that link to different aspects of enrichment designed to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. Pupils are challenged, for example, to visit a place of worship and pupils spoke enthusiastically about a recent visit to a mosque. Leaders track the fulfilment of these pledges closely and keep the initiative high-profile through regular rewards and celebrations. Pupils have also been actively involved in a campaign to include the Hillsborough tragedy in the national curriculum.

Governance of the school

- Governors have worked closely with leaders to carefully manage the school's finances during a period of acute financial hardship caused by falling pupil numbers in the local area. Governors have used their wider experience effectively to challenge leaders to be resourceful and creative to ensure that the quality of education has not been

compromised by budgetary constraints.

- Governors have been less effective at holding leaders to account for declining outcomes in different areas of the curriculum. They have not ensured that leaders carefully monitor the impact of pupil premium spending and they have not challenged leaders to take more decisive action to tackle areas of emerging weakness.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The new headteacher has prioritised development in this area and the assistant headteacher now responsible for safeguarding is the driving force behind improvements in behaviour and safeguarding across the school. She leads a team of people who all now have clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the arena of welfare and safeguarding.
- The safeguarding lead is tenacious in her pursuit of pupils' welfare and inspectors were shown case studies that demonstrate determination and resilience when dealing with external agencies.
- All staff are well trained and alert to signs of abuse and neglect. They pass on concerns swiftly, using the appropriate channels, and record-keeping is precise. All staff have received training on the 'Prevent' duty and have knowledge on how to safeguard pupils from the threat of extremism and radicalisation.
- Pupils receive useful information that supports them to make informed decisions about their own safety. They receive particularly useful information and guidance about how to keep themselves safe online and when using social media.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies within departments and across the school. Teaching in key stage 3 is less effective and teaching has not secured consistently positive outcomes for pupils over time. Teaching is therefore not yet consistently good and this prevents pupils from making fast progress throughout the school.
- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low and they do not plan work which is challenging enough. This is particularly the case in key stage 3 and for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are taking action to ensure that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, but these have not yet had sufficient impact.
- Teachers' planning for the most able pupils is inconsistent. Where teachers have high expectations of what the most able can achieve, they plan learning that challenges and stimulates curiosity, such as in chemistry. Where expectations are lower, teachers do not provide the most able with the consistent level of challenge required for them to achieve the higher grades.
- Pupils have limited opportunities to develop their extended writing in different subjects. Teachers do not consistently focus on developing pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar; therefore, it is common to find pupils repeating the same technical mistakes in their writing. Where there is a sustained focus on improving pupils' writing, such as in product design, pupils respond to the challenge and make progress with the quality and fluency of their work. Teachers do far more to develop pupils' speaking skills and

pupils are regularly required to verbalise their ideas and understanding in a range of subjects.

- Teaching in mathematics is improving and leaders are working to ensure greater consistency. Teachers challenge pupils more routinely in key stage 4 and there is a strong focus on preparing pupils for the rigours of the new examinations. In contrast, teachers' expectations in key stage 3 are much lower. In addition, there is an inconsistent focus on developing pupils' mathematical reasoning across the school. Teaching in English is more consistently strong, although leaders recognise that teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' extended writing.
- Teachers use assessment effectively in key stage 4, where there is a strong focus on preparing pupils for external examinations. They use examples of good work to help pupils understand how to improve their work and regular assessment supports pupils to understand their current level of attainment and what they need to do to improve. In contrast, assessment in key stage 3 is less frequent and not as developed. Consequently, pupils demonstrate limited understanding of how much progress they are making and what they need to do in order to improve.
- Teachers show good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic in their interactions with pupils. Little time is wasted in lessons and pupils enjoy very positive relationships with members of staff.
- Leaders have a clear rationale for how they are developing homework throughout the school and they closely monitor pupils' attitudes to home learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Leaders have recently overhauled the school's pastoral systems and this has significantly improved the level of care pupils receive. Staff know pupils well.
- Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare at the school and, when it does occur, it is dealt with fairly and effectively by members of staff. On the rare occasions that pupils use racist or homophobic language, they are challenged appropriately by members of staff and such behaviour is frowned upon by other pupils. Consequently, pupils are overwhelmingly tolerant and respectful of others.
- Leaders are attentive to the emotional well-being of pupils and are currently undertaking some promising work with other local organisations to support girls to maintain their mental health.
- Pupils' personal development is structured around the school's innovative 'pledge' system that encourages pupils to fulfil a number challenges that will support their preparation for life in modern Britain. There is also a strong focus on extra-curricular activities and an emphasis on outdoor learning, with many pupils completing a Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The school also enjoys strong local and international links. Several teachers, for example, have visited a partner school in Ghana as a focal point for teaching pupils what it is like to live in different cultures and communities.
- School assemblies make a strong contribution to maintaining the positive and harmonious school ethos, although form time is not consistently used productively to

enhance pupils' personal development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The new headteacher has prioritised developments in this area and it is evident that members of staff have high expectations of behaviour. Both staff and pupils say that behaviour is improving markedly across the school. Pupils also say that they feel safe.
- Leaders deal with the rare incidents of poor behaviour effectively. The school's response to negative behaviour is proportionate. Rates of fixed-term exclusions are below the national average and the school's 'isolation unit' is used sparingly and to good effect. Leaders are keen to support the local community and will reprimand pupils for occasional poor behaviour outside of school.
- Leaders have had a positive impact on improving the conduct of pupils who have misbehaved in the past. A great deal of time is invested in the school's multi-agency approach to support pupils with a range of diverse needs. Consequently, the school has a strong record of transforming the attitudes to learning of a great number of vulnerable pupils who have been at risk of disaffection.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons and very little learning time is wasted because of low-level disruption. It is extremely rare for pupils to be removed from lessons owing to continued poor behaviour.
- Pupils move around the school site in a calm and orderly manner. They behave sensibly and maturely outside of lessons, even when they are away from direct adult supervision. Pupils are considerate of each other and the school environment, particularly in areas that are cramped, such as the school canteen.
- The attendance of pupils who attend alternative provision is good and there are clear lines of communication between the school and the providers.
- Attendance at the school is improving quickly because of well-focused initiatives that have raised the importance of attendance. Despite this, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not improving in line with other pupils at the school. The attendance of these pupils remains stubbornly low.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The school's most recent examination results for Year 11 continued a pattern of variability in different subjects since the previous inspection. Pupils did not make enough progress from their various starting points in mathematics, history, French and resistant materials. Pupils made stronger progress in English literature, business studies, drama, information and communication technology and science.
- There was also variation in the amount of progress made by different groups. Disadvantaged pupils made slow progress from their starting points. This exacerbated a recent trend of disadvantaged pupils making slower progress than other pupils, particularly in subjects where overall progress was slow, such as mathematics and history. Leaders' previously unwise spending of the pupil premium has contributed to

weak outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to other pupils. This is because these pupils receive well-structured support that is coordinated effectively.
- The most able pupils make progress akin to other pupils nationally with similar starting points. They achieve particularly well in English. This is because teachers have high expectations of what the most able can achieve.
- After a period of decline, pupils have made significantly faster progress in English in recent years because of careful planning by school leaders. In the same period, however, pupils have made slower progress in mathematics. Girls, disadvantaged pupils and low-ability pupils have made particularly slow progress in mathematics. Staff absence exacerbated the decline in mathematics but these issues have been resolved.
- Information provided by leaders indicates that pupils currently in Year 11 are making faster progress across the curriculum than their counterparts last year. Leaders have introduced new assessment systems in key stage 3 and so were unable to compare the progress currently being made in key stage 3 to previous cohorts. Inspection evidence, however, indicates that there is variability in the rates of progress for pupils in different subjects across all year groups.
- Pupils make faster progress in subjects where senior and middle leaders work in partnership to drive improvements. This can clearly be seen in areas such as English, science, art and drama. Information provided by leaders also indicates that progress is quickening in some subjects in which there were poor outcomes last year. This is particularly the case in history and product design, where there have been significant improvements to teaching brought about by the implementation of focused plans.
- Pupils start the school with attainment that is below average. Leaders have identified that a large proportion of pupils have low reading ages. Leaders now work closely with feeder primary schools to identify common gaps in pupils' understanding, particularly in mathematics. This is helping leaders to improve the academic transition between primary and secondary school.
- Pupils receive broad and objective careers education in Year 11 that equips them with the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions about their next steps. Consequently, the proportion of pupils progressing to educational establishments, apprenticeships, employment or training is above the national average. The proportion progressing to a higher level of study is particularly high, partly because of the inclusive entry policy of the school's sixth form. Careers education below Year 11 is much less developed and does little to raise pupils' awareness of their options when they leave school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Provision in the sixth form requires improvement because students' performance on academic courses has declined in recent years and is now well below national averages. Students' progress has been particularly slow in the most popular courses such as history, psychology and general studies.
- Students' progress on vocational courses is broadly average but with significant

variation between different courses. Students have made faster progress in courses such as business studies and health studies but slower progress in courses such as applied science and finance.

- Information provided by school leaders indicates that overall progress is likely to remain low on A-level courses in 2017. However, leaders' projections indicate that students are likely to make improved progress on AS-level courses. Students' progress on vocational courses is also projected to improve, with less variation between subjects.
- Leaders have adopted a flexible approach to the design of the curriculum. Students can pursue an academic pathway, a vocational pathway or a pathway that combines academic and vocational elements. Leaders have recently introduced a 'bridge to apprenticeship' route with the aim of having a pathway for every pupil in Year 11.
- Leaders have not always ensured that prospective students receive information and guidance that have helped them to make informed decisions about their choice of courses. Consequently, too many students have not enrolled on courses that are well suited to their aptitudes, interests and future career plans. This has led to too many students dropping or changing courses.
- Many students who enter the sixth form without a grade C in GCSE English and/or mathematics make good progress in their resit classes and improve their grade. This is due to effective teaching and rigorous assessment.
- Students' attendance has improved and is now good. Students receive useful information on a range of topics that help them to make informed decisions about their own safety. Students told an inspector that they found the annual 'health fair' to be particularly helpful in equipping them with a clear understanding of how to manage different aspects of their health and well-being.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is variable. Teaching on vocational courses is more effective than that on academic courses. Teachers support students on vocational courses to work independently. Teachers ensure that assessment is thorough and regular and students are provided with developed personalised feedback in line with the school policy that enables them to improve their work.
- Teaching on academic courses is inconsistent and less effective. Teachers do not consistently plan to meet the needs of students with different starting points. The quality of assessment also varies between different academic courses. Pupils are not supported effectively to develop the independent study skills necessary to be successful on academic courses. Too many students demonstrate weak organisational skills.
- Leaders carefully track and monitor students' participation in activities to enrich the curriculum. They have extended the 'pledge' system from the main school to ensure that students access a range of additional learning opportunities that help prepare them for life in the fullest sense after sixth form. All students participate in work experience while in the sixth form. Some students gain valuable experience with companies such as those specialising in engineering. Too many, however, gain work experience within departments in the main school and this represents a missed opportunity to take a broader look at the world of work.
- Students in the sixth form receive effective information, advice and guidance about

their next steps. This is reflected in positive destination data that indicates the overwhelming majority of students leave the sixth form for appropriate destinations. Most students enter higher education or advance to higher-level apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	105107
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	10024214

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	881
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Barker
Headteacher	Simon Goodwin
Telephone number	0151 327 3213
Website	www.southwirral.wirral.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@southwirral.wirral.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 April 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is an average-sized secondary school and has more boys than girls.
- The school is a non-selective school within a selective local authority. Pupils enter the school with attainment that is well below national averages.
- Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their home language.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average and the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is below average.
- A small number of pupils are educated through off-site provision at the Vocational College, the Wirral Respite Alternative Provision, the Cornerstone Vocational Project and the Utopia Project.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the governing body. Inspectors also made telephone calls to the local authority and the school improvement partner.
- Meetings were held with teachers, including teachers who are newly qualified.
- Inspectors formally interviewed a wide number of pupils and spoke to a range of pupils informally at break and lunchtime. Inspectors also observed pupils' conduct and behaviour throughout the school day.
- Inspectors viewed registration periods and an assembly.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school across a range of subjects and year groups. Some observations were undertaken jointly with senior and middle leaders. Inspectors also undertook shorter visits to lessons to gauge the climate for learning and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors looked closely at samples of pupils' written work across a range of subjects and year groups.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including the school's policies, records relating to behaviour and attendance, safeguarding records and performance information. Development planning, self-evaluation documents, minutes of meetings and records relating to teaching and learning were also considered. During the inspection, detailed consideration was given to policies and practices relating to safeguarding and how the school prepares its pupils for life in modern Britain.
- Inspectors considered 69 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 48 responses from parents on Ofsted's free text service. They considered the responses to the staff and pupil online questionnaires provided by Ofsted to the school.

Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Deborah Bailey	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Holland	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Ruddy	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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