

# Devonport High School for Girls

## Inspection Report

---

|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 113531          |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Plymouth        |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 325836          |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 15 October 2008 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Anne Looney HMI |

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

---

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Grammar (selective)                            |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Community                                      |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 11–18  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Girls  |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |  |
| School (total)                            | 819  |
| Sixth form                                | 216  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body                             |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | David Startup                                  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Anita Hemsli (Acting headteacher)              |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 15 November 2005                               |
| <b>School address</b>                     | Lyndhurst Road<br>Peverell<br>Plymouth PL2 3DL |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01752 705024                                   |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01752 791873                                   |

---

|                        |                 |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Age group</b>       | 11–18           |
| <b>Inspection date</b> | 15 October 2008 |

**Inspection number** 325836

---

Inspection report Devonport High School for Girls, 15 October 2008

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

---

## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and the impact of leaders and managers in raising achievement. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation (SEF), national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, other documents provided by the school, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff, governors and students, and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## **Description of the school**

Devonport High School for Girls is a grammar school that is a little smaller than average and which has an average sized sixth form. About 120 students are admitted each year following 11+ tests; they come from a very wide area and from three local authorities. Very few come from minority ethnic groups or do not speak English as their first language. The school became a specialist language college in September 2005 and has Beacon and Leading Edge status. The school received the International School Award in

2006 and Healthy Schools Award in 2007. The school is led at the moment by an acting headteacher.

## **Key for inspection grades**

**Grade 1** Outstanding

**Grade 2** Good

**Grade 3** Satisfactory

**Grade 4** Inadequate

---

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

**Grade: 2**

Devonport High School for Girls is a good school. The acting headteacher and her senior leadership team have maintained an impressive level of stability at a time of considerable disruption at management level. The school has continued to focus on the students' well-being but the acting headteacher has also been proactive in the development of a range of strategies to improve achievement for all students. The supportive learning environment of the school is valued highly by the students, who enjoy their learning, and by their parents. One parent wrote, 'We are impressed at the staff's consistent and positive approach to learning which greatly influences our daughter and provides her with focus and motivation.' It is significant that only the simplest of rules are needed in the school because students are in total sympathy with the values of the school and with the direction, the school wants to take.

Staff are justifiably proud of their students, whose personal development is outstanding. Exemplary behaviour and maturity are the hallmark of students of all ages. Attendance levels are very high and there have been no exclusions in recent years. Students say that they feel safe in the school, reassured by the knowledge that they are so well supported. They willingly take on responsibilities in their school and in the wider community. Students have, for example, organised citywide sports events as well as participating in, and helping to run, arts performances open to the public at the city's theatres. Students' cultural development is very strong and has benefited considerably as a result of the school's work in its specialism of languages.

Achievement is good throughout the school. Students enter the school with attainment that is well above average. They make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and standards at the end of Year 9 have been consistently high over several years. Progress at Key Stage

4 is less rapid and in 2007 led to a drop in the number of students attaining five or more A\* to C grades in GCSE examinations, as well as in the percentage of students gaining the highest grades. The school acted promptly by identifying and addressing what they saw as a need for greater challenge. Subsequently, the success rates in the 2008 unvalidated GCSE results were significantly better. Progress for that cohort was good although there was still a small amount of inconsistency across subjects. Senior and middle managers are acutely aware of this inconsistency and they are intervening appropriately. The school's own data for those students in the present Year 11 indicate that the overall improvements of 2008 can be maintained, with students making good progress more consistently across subjects. Students are well on the way to meeting their challenging targets for 2009.

Teaching is good throughout the school. Good relationships ensure a harmonious learning environment. Students respond very well to opportunities to work independently or in groups and say that they would value more of these types of activities. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and they convey their enthusiasm about their subjects clearly to the students; students say that they appreciate the 'energy' of their teachers. This shared love of the subject is particularly pronounced in the sixth form. Teachers' presentation skills are good, as is the pace of the lessons. Occasionally, the desire to move the lesson on can lead to teachers being overly directive and asking too few open-ended questions. An increasing focus on assessment in lessons has led to a growing awareness in the

students of what they need to do to improve. Marking is regular and detailed and students say that they always get feedback on their work. Learning objectives are regularly set in lessons but these are not always framed specifically enough in terms of what students will learn by the end of the session. This makes it difficult to review learning effectively.

The school has taken effective steps since the last inspection to develop and broaden the curriculum. All students now take a half GCSE in information and communication technology and many enter other subjects early. The specialist school status has had a major impact on the breadth of the modern foreign languages curriculum and on the proportion of students studying two modern foreign languages, which is well above the national average. The impact of the specialism can also be seen in a range of cross-curricular projects. The school has initiated a wide-ranging review of the curriculum. Progress on this has been a little slower than planned and some of the benefits of the review, such as the emphasis on skill development, are not yet evident. The curriculum is enhanced very effectively by a very wide range of well-supported extra-curricular activities.

The care, guidance and support the school provides for students are good. Pastoral support and guidance are outstanding and all necessary safeguarding requirements are in place. The school's excellent support systems are complemented well by partnerships

with external agencies. The school has made rapid strides in the effectiveness of its target-setting and in the way it monitors students' progress, although it recognises that this is still an area for development. The vast majority of students are aware of their targets and electronic systems of identifying which students are on track to meet their targets have greatly supported heads of department in gaining an overview of progress in their subjects. These systems are, however, not yet sufficiently fine-tuned to ensure that support for individuals is targeted as well as it might be. Progress reviews, whilst giving parents a good idea of how well their children are doing in absolute terms do not indicate how well students are making progress towards their targets.

The school is well led and managed by the acting headteacher. She, in turn, is ably supported by her small leadership team and a well-informed governing body. The overwhelming majority of parents who contacted the inspection team support the school. A small minority express concern at the recent disruption at senior management level. Of those, however, a very large majority still feel that their children are making good progress and enjoy school.

There is a strong commitment to the school's specialism. The impact of language initiatives is evaluated well, both in terms of how it strengthens provision and on outcomes for the students. The school has used its specialist status and its Leading Edge status well to forge links with other providers and institutions locally, nationally and internationally. This partnership working is a strength of the school and is a strong contributory factor to its outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Since the last inspection, the role of middle leaders has been enhanced. The acting headteacher is holding them more to account for the achievement in their subjects and they are rising to the challenge. Senior and middle leaders have a good understanding of strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning and have identified the monitoring and development of teaching and learning as a priority. The senior leadership team is currently consulting the staff on a new observation form, which makes more explicit what good practice looks like. The self-evaluation process now fully embraces the middle leaders. The most recent version of the departmental self-evaluation form for subject leaders and pastoral heads is a very effective vehicle by which middle leaders can review progress in their subjects and set appropriately challenging targets for improvement. These departmental plans then inform the school evaluation and improvement planning process in which the governing body is involved. Leaders at all levels are becoming adept at ensuring that judgements are securely based on evidence. This process provides the school with good capacity to improve. The school provides good value for money.

**Effectiveness of the sixth form**

**Grade: 2**

The sixth form is good. It is well led and managed and the curriculum choice has been extended by working in partnership with a consortium of other local schools. Care and guidance for sixth form students are good as they are in the main school. There is a high level of support for students as they make the sometimes difficult transition into Year 12. The guidance given to students as they prepare to leave school is equally strong and students feel well supported in their applications for university.

Achievement in the sixth form is good. Standards at A-level are well above average and have been improving over the last three years. Standards in some subjects, however, are noticeably higher than in others. As with the main school, the results in 2008 saw a big improvement on those in 2007, particularly in the percentage of students attaining the highest grades. Progress is good, although, as with standards, there are variations between subjects. Heads of department have reacted well to the slower progress made by some students in 2007 and, in French in particular, students who completed A-level in 2008 made good progress.

Students' contribution to community cohesion is commendable. They act as mentors and mediators with younger students, deliver subject booster classes and volunteer in the library. Students have twice received awards for service to the community.

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

- Improve the rate of progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form in all subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - o Providing more opportunities for students to develop as independent learners
  - o Being very specific about the knowledge, skills and understanding students should develop by the end of lessons
- Refine the systems for monitoring progress so that intervention can be more effectively targeted and there is clarity of progress when reporting to parents

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

**Annex A**

## **Inspection judgements**

|   |                       |              |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| <b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.</b> | <b>School Overall</b> | <b>16-19</b> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|

## Overall effectiveness

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective,efficient and inclusive is the provision of education,integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 2   | 2   |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 1   | 1   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | 2   | 2   |

## Achievement and standards

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

## 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 1 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 1 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education  | 1 | 1 |
| The attendance of learners  | 1 | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 1 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 1 | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 | 1 |

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 2   | 2   |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2   | 2   |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards  | 2   | 2   |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 2   | 2   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated   | 2   | 2   |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?   | 1   | 1   |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money  | 2   | 2   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 2   | 2   |
| 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  |     |

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Annex B

### Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 October 2008



Dear Students

Inspection of Devonport High School for Girls, Plymouth, PL2 3DL

As you know, two inspectors recently visited your school and I am writing to tell you what we found. Thank you very much for talking to us and for making us feel so welcome.

We believe that yours is a good school. We were particularly impressed with your attitudes and maturity. You told us that you really valued the support the school gave you and that you enjoyed your education. We thought that you played a key role in the way the school contributed to the local, national and international communities and that the fact that your school was a specialist language college supported you well in that.

You do well in examinations. We felt, however, that whilst your progress is good overall you make better progress in Years 7 to 9 than in the rest of the school. You are also more successful in some subjects than in others. Teaching is good and you told us that you really appreciated your teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects. You also told us that you would like more opportunities to work independently and in groups. Your curriculum offers you what you need and it has really benefited from the school being a language college.

The school has been working hard recently to improve the way it monitors your progress. Although the data that is collected enable teachers to see how well you are doing, the process needs to be directed more carefully to identifying those of you who need the most help. We felt that your acting headteacher has done well during a difficult time, concentrating on making sure you did not suffer. She has also made sure that managers and governors are now more involved in planning for improvement. We have asked the school to improve progress in Years 10 to 13 and to support that by monitoring your progress more carefully and prioritising those who need most help. We have also asked the school to report your progress more clearly to your parents. Finally, we have asked the teachers to be very clear about what they want you to learn in lessons and to give you more chances to work independently. You can help by continuing to work as hard as you do now.

Yours sincerely

Anne Looney Her Majesty's Inspector