

# Reading Girls' School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	110096
<b>Local authority</b>	Reading
<b>Inspection number</b>	378053
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 January 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	John Carnaghan

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	698
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	74
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Kayes
<b>Headteacher</b>	Viv Angus
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8–9 October 2008
<b>School address</b>	Northumberland Avenue Reading RG2 7PY
<b>Telephone number</b>	0118 986 1336
<b>Fax number</b>	0118 986 6938
<b>Email address</b>	office@readinggirls.reading.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

Inspection team

John Carnaghan

Additional inspector

Sylvie Trevena

Additional inspector

Olson Davis

Additional inspector

Sandra Teacher

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two day's notice. Inspectors observed 30 lessons taught by 28 teachers and held meetings with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection; they observed the school's work and looked at the school's plans, policies, records, assessments and 38 questionnaires from parents and carers.

## Information about the school

Reading Girls' School is smaller than the average-sized comprehensive school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Almost two thirds of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds; the largest ethnic groups are of White British, Pakistani and African origin. Approximately two thirds of students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average; the largest groups in this category have moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school meets the current floor standards. The school works in partnership with a local girls' grammar school and a nearby university. It has specialist status in business and enterprise.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. Rigorous leadership and management and a shared ambition have ensured significant improvement since the previous inspection.
- Good self-evaluation has improved classroom practice. Students progress well and attainment is rising steadily, although it remains average. Given their starting points, students' achievement is good. Assessment information identifies students in danger of falling behind and subsequent actions ensure all groups, including Pakistani and African students and those who speak English as an additional language, make similar progress.
- Good teaching promotes good learning in most lessons. Students are keen to learn, collaborate effectively and behave with courtesy and maturity. Teachers have high expectations and focus on learning, especially the requirements of national examinations such as GCSE.
- Some inconsistencies in teaching remain. Marking often lacks helpful advice for improvement. The deployment of teaching assistants is not always well targeted so they are unable to use their talents throughout lessons.
- The sixth form is good. The curriculum is tailored to students' needs. It offers vocational courses that integrate well with other local providers and has plans to expand this provision. Retention rates are high; students are well taught and make good progress.
- Leadership and management are shared between a large group of teachers. Well-trained staff support the priorities clearly outlined in the well-focused school development plan. Monitoring by senior leaders and members of the governing body provides an accurate picture of the school.
- The curriculum has developed to meet students' needs and interests, to the benefit of achievement. However, information and communication technology (ICT) is inconsistently used.
- Students enjoy positive experiences in this cohesive community. They respect one another, developing good social skills. They feel safe and arrangements to ensure their security are thorough.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
  - ensuring greater consistency in the feedback given to students on how to improve their learning so that, as well as knowing their target levels, they understand the most important areas that they should concentrate on
  - deploying teaching assistants so that they support learning in every phase of lessons.
- Plan the curriculum so that it offers more opportunities for students to develop their ICT skills.
- Build on the sixth form curriculum to offer a more diverse range of opportunities to meet the needs of all students.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

The school uses assessment well to identify and act on variations in rates of students' progress; this has proved increasingly effective in recent years. It has addressed the achievement of previously underperforming groups. The development of the curriculum has engaged many older students' interest. For example, new BTEC courses have provided students with different opportunities for success and have fully addressed previous concerns about the attainment and progress of White British students. Current attainment is broadly average and has risen sharply; there has been a convincing upward trend over the last three years. Previous gaps in attainment, for example where higher ability mathematics students were not reaching their full potential, have been effectively addressed through better teaching so that there are now no significant variations.

Given students' below average attainment on entry to the school, their achievement is good. Early identification of students who face barriers to learning and effective interventions ensure that groups, such as disabled students and those with special educational needs or those at an early stage of learning English, achieve as well as their peers. Students in the sixth form achieve well, with all but a very few leaving the post-16 centre with qualifications that lead to further education or employment. Almost all of the parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire correctly believe that teaching is good and students make good progress.

Under the influence of teaching that places a much clearer emphasis on learning, students' progress has seen a marked improvement in the last three years and is now good. Students learn well because lessons are well planned and they have very positive attitudes to their studies. For example, an excellent Key Stage 4 history lesson on the development of medicine was enjoyable, incorporated varied quick

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activities and promoted thoughtful discussion of underlying moral issues, promoting good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. The use of a typical GCSE examination answer for students to analyse promoted lively discussion and both consolidated their knowledge and deepened their understanding of examination requirements. Many lessons emphasise reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills and most subjects contribute to students' rising attainment in English and mathematics.

### **Quality of teaching**

Teaching in most lessons, including in the sixth form, is good and there are examples of outstanding practice; this confirms the positive views of parents and carers. Rigorous monitoring has increased the proportion of good and better teaching, although some inconsistencies remain. Typically, lessons are thoroughly planned and pitched in light of teachers' good understanding of students' prior knowledge so that all groups are challenged and supported appropriately. Teachers use assessment data well to set challenging targets for all students. They usually question students well, probing for deeper understanding and drawing out detailed answers. Thought-provoking discussion, shown, for example, as Year 9 geography students studied life in underdeveloped countries, encourages reflection on profound aspects of human experience and develops an understanding of different cultures.

Generally, teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and display confidence that motivates and inspires most students. Teachers manage behaviour with skill and subtlety and relationships with students are warm and constructive. Students enjoy most lessons, appreciating the variety of stimulating topics planned as part of their well-organised curriculum. Classrooms are very harmonious and students get along with one another notably well, working most effectively in pairs and groups and happily applauding the achievements of others. They appreciate and capitalise on the good opportunities they have to work independently.

Teaching assistants are often skilled in working with small groups of students, supporting those who need extra help to overcome barriers to learning. When they are in whole-class sessions, however, the expectations that some teachers have of them are occasionally unclear so they are unsure how best to promote learning. Books usually clearly display a target grade or level for students to aspire to. Regular assessments help them to understand their progress but, while work is regularly marked, there is often too little advice on the small steps students need to take to attain their goals. Sixth form marking is more consistently informative and teachers make good use of technology to support older students' learning.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

This is a well-ordered school. Students are typically considerate and respectful to staff and to one another and most of those spoken to by inspectors reported very little disruption to lessons, allowing them to run smoothly. Students move around the school staircases and corridors in an orderly way. Lesson observations show good

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behaviour in almost all lessons and positive attitudes to learning, although there are very occasional lapses where lessons are less stimulating. Students say they feel safe at school and demonstrate a good understanding of hazards and how to avoid them. Many report they enjoy school; their punctuality is good and attendance has improved in the last two years and is now above average. Sixth form students behave with maturity and good sense, taking full benefit from the greater independence offered to this age range.

Most students say that bullying of any kind is unusual and they are sure that the school deals with such incidents rigorously. Discrimination and racism are virtually unknown. Well-judged support for students who find difficulty in conforming to school expectations ensures that many quickly return to patterns of good behaviour. The fewer than average number of parents and carers who returned inspection questionnaires expressed some concerns about behaviour. However, inspection evidence indicates a largely positive picture with little disruption and good behaviour the norm. Exclusion rates have fallen markedly indicating the impact of improved behaviour management over time.

## **Leadership and management**

The school has a large and effective leadership team whose members share senior leaders' ambitions and high expectations. Considerable training has developed teachers' skills; many staff use self-evaluation to identify and overcome weaknesses. Leaders and managers at all levels are fully involved in monitoring the school's provision, particularly teaching and learning. The new learning and teaching framework sets high expectations for teachers in the way they teach and assess. Although some inconsistencies remain, teaching is improving. Lessons are now more purposeful and learning more focused, leading to higher attainment across the school and more rapid rates of progress. Teaching in the sixth form is robustly monitored and leaders and managers at this age range show a good understanding of students' needs and requirements and plan carefully to meet these.

Issues raised in the previous inspection, including using outcomes of monitoring to drive improvement, have been comprehensively addressed and the school demonstrates a strong capacity for sustained improvement. All staff are fully committed to promoting equality of opportunity and eradicating discrimination. The governing body monitors provision carefully, including through regular discussions with students. Its knowledge of the school and analysis of assessment data enable it to offer appropriate challenge, particularly about achievement. The governing body is involved in developing and monitoring the pertinent and practical school development plan. It helps ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and secure.

The curriculum builds on students' requirements and interests, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs. It has evolved so that there is an appropriate balance of academic and vocational courses in most parts of the school. The sixth form vocational curriculum is, as the school recognises, currently limited in

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scope but there are plans to develop it. Planning ensures the effective promotion of communication skills and mathematics across all subjects, although there is a less systematic approach to the provision of ICT beyond specialist lessons. Students enjoy a wealth of opportunities to participate in enrichment activities and are proud to represent their school in activities such as on enterprise day. The school's specialist status is integrated into many activities and potential students from primary schools enjoy induction activities that have a business focus. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good because the curriculum offers a good range of artistic, cultural and sporting opportunities and fully promotes students' personal growth.



## 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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



20 January 2012

Dear Students

**Inspection of Reading Girls' School, Reading, RG2 7PY**

Many thanks for your helpful participation in the recent inspection of your school. All the inspectors agree that it was a pleasure meeting you and we appreciate the courteous way you expressed your opinions about your education.

This is a good school. The efforts of the headteacher and staff have led to improvements in many aspects. Your attainment is on an upward curve and your achievement has moved from satisfactory at the previous inspection to good. Good teaching and your positive behaviour and attitudes have contributed to this improving picture.

I have asked the school to focus on making these improvements.

- Develop teaching further by ensuring that teaching assistants contribute more fully to lessons and that marking offers you clearer advice on the best way of meeting your academic targets.
- Plan a greater use of ICT across all subjects.
- Build on the work started in developing the sixth form curriculum to offer more vocational courses.

Once again, many thanks for all your assistance. You can help the school continue to improve by maintaining your positive attitudes to education.

Yours sincerely

John Carnaghan  
Lead inspector

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