

Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117527
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358152
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	699
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Jones
Headteacher	Theodora Nickson
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 30 teachers in 30 lessons, two form tutorials and a Key Stage 3 assembly. Four of the lesson observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher and three other senior leaders. HMI and the headteacher also made a series of short visits to classrooms and toured the school site. Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, and with the Chair and other members of the governing body. They also met with panels of students from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and the sixth form. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at achievement data, systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and tracking students' progress and participation, and teachers' lesson plans. They also considered records on exclusions, attendance, racist incidents and bullying, as well as policies for promoting, monitoring and evaluating equality of opportunity and community cohesion. In addition to the survey of parents' and carers' views, to which 275 replies were received, a sample of students completed a written questionnaire and a staff survey was also conducted. The headteacher helped to plan aspects of the inspection; HMI also invited the headteacher and an assistant headteacher to observe inspection team meetings, including the final meeting where judgements were discussed and made by inspectors.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How well do students achieve, considering the standards that they reached before they joined the school?
- What are the features of teaching and assessment that help students make progress, and what could help them progress further?
- How effectively do partnerships help the school provide an appropriate curriculum and support for students?
- How well do school leaders plan for, and monitor, the personal and academic progress of students from different ability and ethnic groups?

Information about the school

Bishop's Hatfield is a small secondary school, the only single-sex secondary school in the immediate area. The small sixth form is part of a consortium with other local schools. Bishop's Hatfield has been a specialist humanities college since September 2009 and the school holds the Artsmark Gold award. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals are both below average. However, the proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and/or with English as an additional language have grown recently and both are now above average.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

As it celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School continues to provide a good all-round education. Students are guided well to achieve above-average standards across a good range of subjects. All aspects of their personal development are good, including their behaviour and contribution to the community, and their attendance is above average.

Other good features of the school include:

- a good curriculum including effective partnerships with other local schools and colleges to widen the range of available options, and good provision for literacy and numeracy
- strong teacher subject knowledge, mirrored by good student attitudes to learning which, in turn, lead to good working relationships in the classroom
- thorough knowledge of individual needs and abilities, and some very good support systems for the most vulnerable students
- thorough procedures for ensuring that all adults are checked appropriately
- some innovative approaches to developing students' understanding of different faiths and cultures
- after only one year of operation, the humanities specialism is already having a very positive effect on students' learning and the school's work with community partners.

Relative weaknesses include:

- not all work is marked in sufficient detail to help students understand how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve, and information about students' individual needs is not always used effectively in lesson planning
- strategies for promoting equalities and community cohesion require sharpening in order to realise the school's ambition for all groups of students to make outstanding progress
- some areas of the school site are deteriorating, and are dependant on the constant vigilance of staff and the good behaviour of students in order to maintain satisfactory standards of safety.

The school is led well by the headteacher and her senior team, with good support from the governing body. Overall, students achieve good outcomes in all areas and so value for money is good. The school has consolidated its good performance from the last inspection. It monitors its work regularly and evaluates its strengths and weaknesses accurately, and there is good capacity for further, sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that the quality of marking and other written feedback to students is of consistently high quality
 - using the school's detailed knowledge of individual students' needs to plan more effectively different tasks and activities in all lessons.
- Strengthen the management and effectiveness of the school's equalities and community cohesion strategies, so that students from all groups achieve outstanding results in their examinations and develop outstanding understanding of spiritual, social, moral and cultural issues.
- Rigorously monitor the condition of the school site, particularly walkways and surfaces, and take all necessary and immediate action to ensure that satisfactory standards of safety are maintained.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students join the school in Year 7 having achieved broadly above average standards overall in their primary schools. In the 2010 examinations, nearly three in every four Year 11 students achieved at least five good GCSE passes including English language and mathematics. Significantly, for many this also included good passes in English literature, a modern language, two or three sciences, and history or geography. In 2010, a third of all GCSE passes were at grades A or A*. All this represents a rising trend in attainment and indicates good progress overall. Most importantly, this is supported by students' very positive attitudes to learning in lessons as seen clearly by inspectors during lesson observations. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with extended absences for medical reasons, generally make good progress. Overall, students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language also make good progress. However, the school is aware that within this picture there is some variation, particularly for some students of average ability. This is an important reason why achievement is not yet better than good overall.

Students feel very safe in school, a confidence shared by their parents, and they develop a good understanding of what it means to live a healthy lifestyle. Many students participate in community activities and charity drives, and the school council has an active role in school life. All students are encouraged to participate in additional activities, although the extent to which different groups participate is not monitored and analysed sufficiently. There are some strong aspects to students' understanding of cultural diversity, and they certainly get along well with each other within the school community.

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

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	2
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

The majority of teaching seen by inspectors and judgements made by senior leaders during joint observations confirmed the school's self-evaluation, that teaching is good overall. Teachers' strong subject knowledge, insistence on high standards of attention and behaviour, and good working relationships all underpin students' good progress and their willingness to apply themselves in lessons. In this small school, there is detailed knowledge of students' individual academic and emotional needs, whether they have learning difficulties or are particularly able. There are some excellent care strategies, including the very effective support centre which provides a haven for vulnerable students while at the same time encouraging them to achieve well in their studies. Progress is tracked in great detail. However, less use is made of this information by teachers when planning lessons. Consequently, while all lesson activities are planned in detail and students' individual needs known by all teachers, work is not always adapted to meet these different needs. Neither is the quality of teachers' marking good consistently across the school, and so improving the quality and use of assessment is a key area for further improvement.

Since the last inspection, the school has done well to improve the curriculum to match students' needs. Provision in English and mathematics is good, as it is in the specialist humanities subjects. The new combined humanities course in Year 7 is enjoyed by students and complements the already strong transition programme when they move from

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their primary schools. Separate science options and a number of vocational courses have been introduced in Key Stage 4, including in information and communication technology (ICT), and these are augmented with additional courses offered in partnership with other local providers. There is good provision for religious studies and particularly for citizenship education, as reported by the HMI visit in January 2010. Although a full range of additional GCSE subjects is offered, the small size of each year group sometimes means that it is uneconomical to run courses such as dance and music during the normal school day. However, students are offered alternative after-school courses through the consortium. There is a reasonable number of extra-curricular activities that are much enjoyed by students although, again, the small size of the school limits the range offered. A small number of parents expressed concerns about limitations in additional arts opportunities and inspectors agree that more could be done to develop and promote these, including in partnership with other providers.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a principled vision and ambition for the school and, with her very capable senior team, leads the school well. Improvements for future development are identified accurately and articulated clearly. The school has effective policies for promoting equal opportunities, although more could be done strategically to monitor, analyse and promote the participation of all groups of students in all aspects of school life so that all participate equally and make the outstanding progress to which the school aspires. Similarly, while there are some particularly innovative aspects of the schools' work to promote community cohesion with different faiths and cultures, less emphasis is given to other areas such as the social and economic contexts in which the school works.

Governors are very knowledgeable and manage the school effectively. Arrangements for carrying out appropriate checks on staff and visitors are extremely thorough; classrooms and corridors are well-maintained and well cared for. However, staff and governors have an ongoing, increasing battle with the school site - for example, with uneven walkways and surfaces - to ensure that all students are able to work and play in a safe environment. Students' positive behaviour and good vigilance of staff help to maintain a satisfactory standard of safety, but this is not enough to assure good or better standards of safety overall.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Given their starting points, students achieve good outcomes in the sixth form. Overall pass rates are above average, and good proportions of students complete their courses. These help students of all abilities leaving the sixth form to progress to higher education or employment. Acquisition of basic skills is good. Though outcomes are good overall, the proportion of the highest grades achieved at A-level is relatively low; in both 2009 and 2010, this was just above average, but not significantly so. Students' attendance is good. Sixth form students play an extremely important and highly visible part in school life, many acting as mentors or as student leaders for subject areas.

Teachers' good subject knowledge is an important factor in enabling students to acquire the knowledge that they need to succeed in their examinations. However, in a few lessons there are not enough opportunities for students to develop their understanding and thinking skills through discussions independently of their teacher. Students particularly praise the individual care and support offered by their tutors. The curriculum is good, largely because of the consortium arrangements which offer a far wider range of options than the school could alone provide. Inspectors agree with the school that the sixth form is well led. Key to this good leadership is liaison with other consortium partners to assure students' personal well-being, together with the fortnightly checks and discussions that check whether students are on track with their work and meeting their personal targets.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Overall, partnerships with parents and carers are positive and effective, as seen in the higher than average rate of returns made to the inspection questionnaire and the high level of satisfaction expressed about the school's provision. Overall, inspectors judge partnership with parents and carers to be good, as shown particularly in the way that the most vulnerable students are helped to achieve. Nonetheless, inspectors also note the views expressed by a small minority of parents and carers about the way that the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns. While the school website is informative and the school makes good use of other technologies such as text messaging to communicate with the home, inspectors agree that it would be helpful for the school to explore further how to improve systems for taking account of the views of all parents and carers, particularly when they have concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School 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 275 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 699 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	115	42	151	55	6	2	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	116	42	151	55	4	1	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	99	36	141	51	13	5	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	105	38	136	49	13	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	90	33	154	56	16	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	74	27	153	56	26	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	54	20	169	62	39	14	5	2
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)	86	31	151	55	9	3	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	79	29	161	59	18	7	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	73	27	161	59	15	5	10	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	53	19	155	56	26	9	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	109	40	144	52	13	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	125	45	135	49	7	3	1	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



8 October 2010

Dear Students,

Inspection of Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School, Hatfield, AL10 8NL

I am writing to let you know that, following our recent inspection visit, we have judged that 'Bishop's' remains a good school. Your good behaviour and positive approaches to learning play a very important part in achieving this outcome, and for these I offer you many thanks and congratulations. Because of your helpful attitudes to school life, your teachers are able to put their subject knowledge to good use and help you to achieve good results in your examinations. You have a varied curriculum, and it is very pleasing to note that so many of you achieve good GCSEs in English, maths, science, and a modern language. You told us you are well cared for and that the school has a thorough knowledge of your different needs and abilities. However, we noted that this is not always put to the best use by your teachers when they are planning your lessons. We have asked your teachers to consider ways in which work in lessons can be tailored more to your individual needs, to help you achieve even better. We have also asked them to make sure you get clear feedback about your written work. In turn, you can help by asking teachers if you are not sure what to do.

Your school is led well. Ms Nickson and her team are ambitious for you, and try hard to make sure that everyone can enjoy success. Even so, there are one or two areas where the school's planning and evaluation of its work could be stronger. This includes looking particularly at the way it ensures that everyone takes part in opportunities. It is very encouraging that your senior leaders already have good ideas about how they can make further improvements. Your staff and governors work hard to keep you safe, including through their management of the school site which, in some places, is increasingly difficult to maintain. I have asked that they keep an especially close watch on the site to make sure that it is kept safe for you.

You are being given a good start in life, and prepared well for further education and the world of work. I know that you are extremely proud of your school and that you enjoy being part of the 'Bishop's' community. Thank you once again for your help with our inspection and for the part that you play in your school's success - and I wish you well with your future studies.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

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