

Handsworth Wood Girls' Visual and Performing Arts Specialist College and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103505
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	355396
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	735
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brenda Addison
Headteacher	Nicola Walters
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 and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 39 lessons of 38 teachers and met with groups of students, and staff. They spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body and the School Improvement Partner. They observed the school's work, and looked at records of student progress, minutes of governing body meetings, key school policies and analysed 176 parental and carers' questionnaires, 53 staff questionnaires and sampled 100 student questionnaires.

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

- What is the current quality and effectiveness of the sixth form?
- How consistent is teaching and learning across the school, including implementation of whole-school policies on literacy and numeracy?
- What are the reasons behind the improvements in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4?
- How effective is care, guidance and support, and the work done to improve attendance?

Information about the school

Handsworth Wood Girls' is a specialist visual and performing arts college that was designated in 2010. It is about the same size as most secondary schools. It holds Investors in People Award since 1998, Artsmark Gold and, recently, was awarded Customer Service Excellence. Almost all students come from non-White British heritage backgrounds. The majority are from Asian heritage backgrounds, mostly Pakistani. A much higher-than-average proportion of students speak English as an additional language. Many students new to Britain who speak very little English come to the school from a wide range of countries. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, although the proportion of those with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in September 2010.

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

Handsworth Wood Girls' is an effective school that continues to provide good-quality education to all of its students. At the heart of the good progress made by every girl, irrespective of her background, is good-quality teaching and effective learning across all subjects in the main school. This is consistently delivered by every member of staff, backed up by excellent specialist support and intervention for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities who make outstanding progress, and for those at an early stage in learning to speak English. The best teaching includes excellent use of prior-attainment data about each individual learner to plan challenging tasks for students in a creative and enjoyable way. The recently appointed headteacher along with a new deputy headteacher have galvanised the staff and students through clearly setting out expectations for every person in the school. The headteacher consults widely as changes are made, taking brisk and decisive action to resolve a legacy of underperformance in the sixth form so that provision and outcomes in this area are now satisfactory. Attainment overall, particularly in English and mathematics, has risen substantially since the previous inspection. Improved - and now outstanding - care, guidance and support are responsible for the positive learning ethos evident in the attitudes of girls in lessons. School leaders and managers know strengths and weaknesses well, giving the school a securely good capacity for further improvement.

The headteacher's mantra of being 'consistent, insistent and persistent' has percolated through all levels of the school, creating a strong sense of loyalty to her in a very short time. There is a palpable sense of energy and commitment among staff and students, all of whom have been excited as well as challenged by the new leadership team. In class, that energy shows in good planning, interesting lessons and outstanding attitudes to learning by students. Punctuality has improved, attendance is rising, and students know where they stand with regard to school rules. Day-to-day marking usually rewards achievement as well as identifying areas for improvement. Around the school, the delightful exuberance of many of the girls makes for a lively and exciting atmosphere in unstructured times. Occasionally that boils over into boisterous and loud behaviour that causes some anxiety to younger students. There are very few instances of serious misconduct, and the school site is an exceptionally safe and well-managed oasis for all of the girls.

The impact of the school's specialism is most evident in performing arts, where there is a high uptake of courses, good success in those courses, high participation in extra-curricular activities, and developing self-confidence in the students. Visual arts have developed less strongly but a new leadership post in this faculty is intended to address this. Changes to department leadership in mathematics and, more recently, in English have helped drive up standards in these subjects.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build upon the recent improvements to sixth form curriculum provision in order to raise students' achievement to good.
 - Take forward students' sense of self-responsibility in order that their currently good behaviour in unstructured times matches their outstanding attitudes to learning in lessons.
 - Strengthen the good quality of teaching to match the very best of school practice through more creative approaches to teaching and learning, particularly opportunities for independent learning, by sharing the expertise already available through the school's visual and performing arts specialism.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The overall attainment of girls at Key Stage 4 continues to rise since the previous inspection. In 2010, results in most subjects were broadly average and those known to be eligible for free school meals did better than similar students nationally. Given the low attainment of students on entry to the school, this represents good progress for all groups of learners. In mathematics, progress was above the national average. In English, progress was as expected. The current Year 11 already has early entry GCSE results for English and mathematics that are much higher than at the same stage in 2010. Students learn well in most lessons, because tasks are well matched to their prior attainment. They enjoy learning and will pay attention, try hard and ask for help when tasks appear difficult. This intrinsically positive behaviour towards learning helps their good progress even when teaching is, occasionally, more ordinary. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those at an early stage of learning to speak English, make outstanding progress. This is because of exemplary tracking of their progress, clear and widely shared identification of learning needs, good support by teaching assistants and good planning by all teachers to address special learning needs including the development of literacy.

The day-to-day attendance of students is broadly average and improving, although for a few an important amount of academic learning is lost through extended family holidays. Most students - and the large majority of their parents and carers - agree that the school keeps them safe. Four out of five students participate in an extra-curricular activities at lunchtime or after school, driven by the high profile of performing arts. Students have a wonderful sense of fun and good humour that is a particularly special feature of the school ethos and helps to keep in perspective the few instances of poor behaviour. The spiritual and cultural development of students is outstanding. The school provides spaces for prayer, with frequent opportunities to reflect upon world events. Students across the full spread of world cultures represented within the school mix freely and collaborate well. However, some students should be more considerate of the feelings of others and staff during unstructured times, such as in the dining room.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
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	3
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?

Teachers are quick to assess students' learning as lessons proceed, and then adjust their planning as necessary. This flexible approach, coupled with good use of information about students including any special learning needs, results in good or better teaching and learning in most lessons. Even where teaching is satisfactory, students try hard and continue to make the expected progress, once they get the chance to begin work. Some assessment practice is outstanding, for example, in science where students review the corrections that their teachers have made to write development targets. Teachers check these to ensure they are achievable and challenging. Students of all ages confirm that teachers acknowledge and praise their work. This careful feedback and encouragement are evidence of the very high quality of guidance provided to students. There are excellent examples of teachers directing questions to students that develop understanding and engage every learner, but also occasions where most students passively observe an exchange involving just one or two of them. There is a common understanding of what constitutes good learning.

The school benefits from good partnerships with other local educational establishments that help in providing a versatile Key Stage 4 curriculum that can meet learners' needs and interests well. Vocational courses are a successful element and contribute well to students' overall attainment. Literacy across the curriculum is well embedded and helps to support

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students with limited English skills. Cross-curricular numeracy and the development of information and communication technology (ICT) through other subjects have not been monitored for impact or consistency, although standards in mathematics are rapidly rising.

There are excellent arrangements to support transition from primary school. There are impressive arrangements to encourage better attendance. Although rare, poor behaviour is dealt with firmly but fairly through a clear, graded series of actions and, ultimately, sanctions. Information about students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language is clear, user-friendly and enables accurate intervention and support by every staff member. Specialist support from outside agencies is effectively deployed so that, overall, these learners make exceptionally good progress in learning, language development and personal maturity.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher's direct, good humoured and no-nonsense manner, coupled with her personable and thoroughly competent leadership have quickly engendered a strong sense of loyalty and commitment by staff and students to her vision. Good foresight by the governing body in 2009 resulted in her early appointment well before the former incumbent retired. That ensured good preparation prior to her formal start in September 2010, which, in turn, led to very swift changes to the timetable for sixth formers, new ICT systems to support teachers in tracking students' progress and providing good information to aid lesson planning, and the concurrent appointment of a new deputy headteacher. The new senior leadership team has inspired staff to improve further their own practice, use ICT to enhance their teaching, and work together to improve its consistency.

All groups of learners achieve well because of very effective personalisation of provision to meet their differing needs, and this results in equally good opportunities for their future success. The ethnic profile of teachers and the governing body closely matches that of the local community, which is a testimony to the school's long-standing successful recruitment strategy. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary, with excellent records and tenacious follow-through of concerns. Leadership is exemplary in coordinating other agencies in support of vulnerable students, very thorough health and safety monitoring and good site security measures. Outcomes for different groups are at least good or better and the school has good links with other schools in very different settings to widen the girls' awareness of their more traditional, predominantly white British culture. The school itself is very inclusive and welcoming to all backgrounds, it knows its local community well and

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serves their demand for an effective all-girls school well. The governing body has not yet formally reviewed and reported upon the good impact of the school's approach to equalities and community cohesion.

Resources for operating the school are well managed, allowing the new headteacher substantial support to introduce better ICT facilities. The buildings are, however, very tired, with a backlog of refurbishment. A lot of time and energy have to be diverted to ensure the buildings are at least safe, leaving nothing to lift the quality of the decoration, but there are excellent displays, including students' work around the school, that help to disguise some shoddy building fabric.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	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	1
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

Students' academic outcomes in recent years have been inadequate, because of too little teaching time per subject. However, some improvements in applied and vocational subjects occurred in 2010. Students have been most successful within applied and vocational courses. Some students have benefited from a hair and beauty course in partnership with a local college. The curriculum has been drastically reshaped since September 2010, enabling students to have more lesson time in the subjects they are studying. Alongside more frequent tracking of progress, outcomes are improving, with students making at least satisfactory progress in lessons. There are ambitious plans to extend the breadth of choice of courses available from September 2011, including partnerships with other local schools. Care, guidance and support are a key strength, with students known and cared for as individuals. Students value this personal support very highly and feel it is the most important feature that enables them to achieve.

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The new leadership team, underpinned by a local authority review, have astutely identified the factors that have previously limited students' academic outcomes. The head of sixth form is now working in an effective partnership with the deputy headteacher, to build on strengths and embed key improvement strategies. These include staff training in the particular strategies required to develop sixth form students' independent learning skills.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of the higher-than-average proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires are happy with their children's experience, and think that they enjoy school. A small minority do not think the school helped them to support their child's learning. The new school leadership recognises the need to modernise communications with parents and carers and will shortly launch a sophisticated web-based portal that will help with home-school information transfer. The school has also changed the reporting of student progress to give more frequent progress grades to parents and carers. It has consulted widely with Year 11 students and their parents and carers on sixth form developments. Given senior leaders' short time in office, inspectors consider that they are doing as much as possible to improve their communications with parents and carers. Another concern related to 'healthy lifestyles'. This is also being addressed by introducing more compulsory physical education into Key Stage 4 from September. The school provides after-school sporting activities but believes that some parents and carers do not encourage their daughters to participate. The school canteen does prepare healthy food choices, although it is too small to cope with demand, and occasionally leads to noisy queues.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Handsworth Wood Girls' Visual and Performing Arts Specialist College and Sixth Form Centre 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 176 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 735 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	25	113	64	12	7	5	3
The school keeps my child safe	50	28	115	65	8	5	3	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	52	30	101	57	19	11	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	24	113	64	15	9	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	37	21	114	65	17	10	5	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	18	95	54	43	24	5	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	17	94	54	39	22	8	5
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)	48	27	96	55	22	13	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	21	100	57	34	19	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	28	98	56	19	11	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	18	96	55	34	19	6	3
The school is led and managed effectively	39	22	109	62	18	10	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	56	32	102	58	14	8	3	2

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

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

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



28 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Handsworth Wood Girls' Visual and Performing Arts Specialist College and Sixth Form Centre, Birmingham, B20 2HL

Thank you for your delightfully enthusiastic welcome to my team and myself as we inspected your school. We really enjoyed talking with many of you, both in formal meetings and around the school. You are fortunate to be experiencing a securely good education, primarily because your teachers are good at teaching. All the staff are exceptionally good at meeting your various individual needs, including support for those of you new to the English language, and those who need extra help with learning. The new headteacher and her team have swiftly built upon the school's previous success, for example with major and ongoing changes to the sixth form curriculum, which we agree are necessary.

Most lessons are at least good with many that are outstanding. The best lessons are precisely pitched to your talents, and often engage you through drama, or other creative ways that link to the school's specialist status. We suggest the school helps all staff to learn from these examples. In lessons, you concentrate well and try hard, which is helping you all learn well. Most of you enjoy school, with older students telling us that school life is getting even more rewarding as the headteacher's firm but fair approach to improving day-to-day ethos takes effect. Occasionally around the school and particularly at lunchtime, a few of you can get a bit over-exuberant. Some students said this made them feel uncomfortable. So we think some of you should think a little more carefully about the effect your actions have on those around you.

Best wishes for your future success

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright

Her Majesty's Inspector

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