

The Earls High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103860
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	376980
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew O'Connor
Headteacher	Thomas Johnston
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2008
School address	Furnace Lane Halesowen B63 3SL
Telephone number	01384 816105
Fax number	01384 816 106
Email address	info@earls.dudley.sch.uk

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Forty four lessons or part lessons were observed, taught by 43 different teachers. Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body, staff and the headteacher. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including the school's records of students' attainment and progress, school policies including safeguarding documentation, and the school development plan. In addition, questionnaires from 444 parents and carers, 155 students and 81 teachers were analysed.

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

- How effective are strategies to improve students' attainment and progress, particularly in mathematics?
- How accurate are teachers' assessments and how well is the information used to plan further steps in students' learning?
- How well do school leaders and the governing body check attainment, progress and teaching and contribute to the school's improvement?

Information about the school

This school is larger than most other secondary schools. Most students live locally and the large majority are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is lower than average. The percentage of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational needs, is average. The needs of these students relate mainly to moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average. The school has specialist status in performing arts with an additional specialism as a leading edge school and it has achieved the Healthy Schools status. The school works in partnership with two other secondary schools and hosts a sixth form collegiate with a local sixth form college (inspected separately). The school is a Facilitation School for the National Teaching Schools programme, an Accredited Advanced Consultant School and a National College Leadership Development School.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This outstanding school provides excellent opportunities for students to thrive and develop as mature and well-rounded young people. It shows that young people can achieve exceptionally well, irrespective of circumstance. Students are very well prepared to meet the challenges of the future and they have the skills, aptitudes and ambition to make a very marked contribution to society.

Almost every aspect of the school's work has improved substantially since the previous inspection because of the tireless determination of the headteacher, staff and governors to achieve excellence in all they provide for the students. Attainment is high and standards in many subjects have been significantly above average for a number of years and are continuing to climb. Achievement, including progress, is outstanding through a combination of excellent teaching, a highly motivating curriculum, which meets students' needs well, and a highly caring and supportive pastoral system. The school's outstanding track record of improving performance is grounded in secure, continuous monitoring and evaluation of students' outcomes by managers at all levels.

Excellent leadership from the headteacher has developed outstanding teaching and learning, and created an exuberant learning ethos. Teachers provide a wide range of learning activities which meet the needs and interests of most students very well. Teachers mark work well, providing very good advice on what students should do to improve.

Staff know students very well and offer excellent care. The school identifies a variety of groups whose circumstances make them more vulnerable and ensures they are very well supported, for example those who are young carers. As a result, students enjoy school greatly. Safeguarding procedures in school are of a high standard and consequently nearly all students who answered the questionnaire and all those who met with inspectors said they feel very safe. The school's specialist area of performing arts ensures the school makes an excellent contribution to the local area. Students have an outstanding understanding of the arts and culture and of life in different areas of the world. However, while they learn about different religions and social circumstances, their understanding of life in a modern multicultural United Kingdom is less well developed. Although already outstanding, there is scope to develop the curriculum further so as to boost the school's existing good work on community cohesion and lift further students' outcomes in relation to their social and cultural development.

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The school's specialisms are at the heart of its excellent partnerships. These include strong working ties with local primary schools that ensure good transition to secondary school, with post-sixteen providers that support very high progression rates and strong links to the wider performing arts education community. Its work with teacher training institutions and agencies brings national expertise and advice to enhance teaching. The school has routinely exceeded its statutory and specialist targets.

The driving force behind the school's success is undoubtedly the gifted and dedicated headteacher. He leads the school with unflinching enthusiasm and determination. However, he does not work in isolation and, as one member of staff explained, 'He encourages everyone in this school to be creative in their own way'. Even though the school already has many outstanding features, there is no trace of complacency and the governing body, school leaders and staff are ambitious for the school to get even better. They know exactly what actions to take next as a result of thorough systems of school self-evaluation. In view of the strong improvements made in the last three years, outstanding leadership and management, the excellent curriculum and exceptionally high levels of care, guidance and support that students receive, the school's capacity to improve further is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the curriculum by increasing the opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience of communities different from their own.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of students

1

Students start at the school with broadly average levels of attainment. The work seen by inspectors confirms that their attainment is high by Year 11, and improving strongly, especially in mathematics. Results show high standards across a variety of GCSE subjects, including English, mathematics, history and religious education. All students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those eligible for free school meals and those with particularly low levels of prior attainment, achieve very well. There is no significant difference in the rates of learning and progress of boys and girls. Key to this success is the introduction of rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the progress of all students towards challenging targets, coupled with consistently good and often inspiring teaching. Consequently, the quality of learning in lessons is excellent. Students are keen to do their best, work purposefully in lessons and greatly enjoy what they are doing.

Progress was often outstanding when teaching activities helped develop students' understanding as well as focusing on subject knowledge. This was seen clearly in an outstanding Year 11 GCSE English lesson when the students made excellent use of their deep knowledge and understanding of the play 'Journey's End' to evaluate each

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other’s assessments of the play’s characters. Learning is also highly effective because staff know their students well so teachers are able to identify individuals who need additional support or extension work. Students’ mathematical skills have improved markedly since the last inspection because of the careful attention given to extending students’ skills in solving written number problems. In a fast-paced Year 11 mathematics lesson, all groups of students made swift progress and really enjoyed working in groups to complete the challenging task of solving equations using the ‘balance’ method.

In all year groups, students profit from the welcoming ambiance of the school. The behaviour of students in lessons and around the school is good and often impeccable, although some can be boisterous at lesson change-overs and at the end of the day. Relationships are very good. Students have excellent social and interpersonal skills. They enjoy a wide variety of opportunities to take part in sports and they also have a very good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. A number commented that they are given advice to reduce their stress levels during examination times. Students have a highly developed understanding of moral issues and they demonstrate a strong spiritual awareness in their consideration of emotions and beliefs, including work within ethics and philosophy. Students make an excellent contribution to the local community and the school and greatly enjoy taking part in a wide variety of cultural activities. However, they have little direct experience of diverse multicultural communities elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Their above average attendance, along with excellent key skills and work-related skills and attitudes, ensures that they are very well prepared for the future. The proportion of students who are not in education, employment or training after they have left school is extremely low and all individuals have high ambitions.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2

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

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The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching, and the engagement of staff with all students and their learning are outstanding. Teaching is lively, tasks and concepts are clearly explained and activities are carefully designed to challenge the students to learn at a swift pace. Students' levels of enjoyment and motivation are high because there is mutual respect between them and their teachers. In subjects such as English and humanities, there is a strong emphasis on developing understanding as well as subject knowledge and ensuring students are supported to extend their learning. High-quality teaching, such as that seen in a Year 8 history lesson, where students were evaluating Elizabeth I’s approach to religious tolerance, captivates and enthuses students and keeps them on their toes with provocative questioning and challenging tasks. Marking is informative and supportive so that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students often respond by correcting the work, or carrying out an additional task but this response is not yet routine for every class.

The outstanding curriculum is underpinned by the school’s specialist status and meets students’ needs, interests and aspirations very well. Enrichment opportunities, including sport, music and drama, have a high take-up. There are excellent arrangements to support literacy across the curriculum, with very strong support for students such as those recently arrived with low levels of English. The value placed on each student, and the attention paid to meeting each one’s individual needs, underpin the school’s success in supporting and developing students’ personal and academic achievements. The school has an extensive and highly effective range of strategies to ensure students are given the best possible care, guidance and support. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, or those at risk of exclusion, are given perceptive, tailored support that has a clearly discernible impact. Systems to promote good attendance are outstanding, with clear and robust procedures to ensure that parents and carers are highly aware of the school’s expectations.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection the headteacher, very well supported by leaders at all

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levels, has brought about significant improvements. The drive and ambition of these outstanding leaders is shared by all staff. Targets are challenging and students respond well. Staff are highly motivated and want to give of their best. All staff who answered the staff questionnaire said they were proud to work at the school, that their contribution was valued and they knew what the school was trying to achieve. These responses are testament to how effective leaders have been in motivating and supporting staff. The school works well with local primary schools and external agencies and it has developed highly effective links with other secondary schools and local further and higher education establishments.

The effectiveness of the governing body is outstanding. It is very supportive of the school and has well-defined and effective committees. Members of the governing body analyse data to challenge the school and it has been influential in helping senior managers secure highly effective school improvement. It fulfils all legal requirements, and all safeguarding arrangements were found to be very effective at the time of the inspection. Excellent practice in safeguarding and child protection is evident in all areas of the school’s work.

At the time of the inspection, there was no evidence of any discrimination and the school closely analyses all outcomes to ensure equality of opportunity. It identifies any underachievement of individuals or groups so that action can quickly be implemented and ensure that all achieve very well.

In this highly inclusive school, every young person matters and individual needs are considered very specifically. The school works extremely well in partnership with external agencies to secure extra support for those students who need it. Community cohesion is good. The school develops students’ understanding of their religious, ethnic and socio-economic community well, although more so in the local and global context than nationally. Leaders have ensured that students are developing into caring citizens who respect and value the views of others and that a set of common, shared values is embedded in every student.

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	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire was above average and the school clearly enjoys their confidence and support. Most parents and carers who responded to the parental questionnaire are very positive about almost all aspects of the school’s work. They are particularly pleased about their children’s safety and experience as well as the good or better progress they make. Additionally, a number of individual comments praised the extremely high quality care, support and guidance given to students, particularly to those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those new to the school. The very few individual criticisms were followed up anonymously during the visit. The inspection evidence confirmed that the school has developed and implemented plans to deal with each issue raised.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at The Earls High 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 444 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1192 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	195	44	222	50	18	4	5	1
The school keeps my child safe	189	42	241	54	10	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	195	44	205	46	27	6	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	171	38	241	54	13	3	2	0
The teaching is good at this school	165	37	255	57	6	1	2	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	121	27	266	60	29	7	5	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	99	22	290	65	34	8	3	1
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)	148	33	248	56	13	3	2	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	154	35	256	58	15	3	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	162	36	230	52	23	5	8	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	103	23	267	60	20	4	5	1
The school is led and managed effectively	187	42	232	52	9	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	230	52	196	44	6	1	3	1

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 students' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its students well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its students.
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 students. 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Student referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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 student referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a student in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the students' 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 students 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 students. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets students' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which students are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the students' 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.



17 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Earls High School, Halesowen, B63 3SL

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were impressed with your good behaviour and manners and your excellent contribution to the life of the school and the local community. You told us that you really enjoy school and this is one reason why we judge your school to be outstanding. Here are some of the other things that make The Earls High School exceptional.

- You make excellent progress both in lessons and over time. Results in your GCSE examinations are consistently high.
- We saw some very interesting lessons and judged that teaching is outstanding. We were impressed by how many of you knew what you wanted to achieve and your determination to achieve this ambition.
- You have very good relationships with staff and lessons are challenging.
- The excellent curriculum enables all of you to achieve very well and almost all of you said in the questionnaire that the school prepares you fully for the future.
- You make an excellent contribution to the local area through your very strong cultural awareness in the performing arts. However, your understanding of life across the modern multicultural United Kingdom is not as well developed and this is an area we have asked the school to improve.
- Staff support and care for you very well. They help you to settle at the start of Year 7 and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education when you leave.
- You all said you felt very safe and you enjoyed the many opportunities the school provides.

Your very effective headteacher, members of the governing body and staff have made a very concerted effort to ensure all of you get the best possible education. We wish you well at this outstanding school of which you are justifiably proud.

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant
Lead inspector

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