

Southend High School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	136444
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	385470
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Edward Wheatley

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1045
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	299
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Linda Barnard
Headteacher	Alison Clewlow
Date of previous school inspection	n/a
School address	Southchurch Boulevard Southend-on-Sea SS2 4UZ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors who saw 41 lessons taught by 41 teachers. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body, and students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation about students' progress, and policies, particularly those in respect of safeguarding, school development planning and evidence of self-evaluation. They considered 220 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

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

- How effectively does the school, deal with relative differences in performance between subjects in all key stages, and drive up levels of attainment, especially in mathematics?

Information about the school

Southend High School for Girls is broadly average sized. It is a grammar school and its sixth form takes students from other schools, including some boys. Most students are from a White British heritage, and a broadly average proportion is from minority ethnic backgrounds. No students are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is low and the proportion known to be entitled to free school meals is below average. The school is a specialist languages college. The school has Healthy Schools status, International School award and the Eco-School award.

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

Southend High School for Girls is an outstanding school. All aspects of the school's work are excellent and the great majority of parents, carers and students are extremely pleased with the quality of education and the care, guidance and support it provides. One parent or carer wrote, 'The school has provided my daughter with an excellent education. More than that, it has a warm, friendly and supportive ethos that has allowed her confidence to grow over the years.'

Attainment is high and especially so in English. Students are extremely articulate and write with a high level of maturity and sophistication. While performance in mathematics in recent examinations was high, it was slightly below that of English. The school has dealt with this successfully, as it does with any slight variations between subjects, and attainment in mathematics is now much the same as in English. Levels of attainment are high in sciences and modern foreign languages. In science, recently adopted courses mean that students have studied science to greater depth than previously and have reached higher levels of attainment than in recent years. Students' progress is outstanding and has generally been sustained at this level for some years. Students of all abilities make outstanding progress, and where students do need particular support, it contributes extremely well to their excellent progress.

Teaching is excellent, never less than good and effective in promoting outstanding progress and sustained high levels of attainment. Lessons are interesting; briskly paced, and contain challenging work that is closely matched to what students need for academic success. Teachers' questioning is exceptionally good. They challenge students' perceptions, and expect them to explain and justify their thinking. Assessment of students' progress is particularly good, and used exceptionally well to set on-going and examination targets, the great majority of which are fully understood by students. Teachers' marking is usually excellent giving students outstanding guidance on how to improve their work. However, a small proportion of students commented on this otherwise exceptional situation; occasionally the link, between targets and how marking informs students about their successes, is lost and next steps in learning and how to reach them are not clear. The curriculum is excellent and provides a very wide range of subjects to support students, achievement of academic excellence. It is enriched with a wide range of visits, conferences, special focus days (flexible Fridays) and opportunities for students to choose activities they want to engage in. The range of out of school activities is excellent and extremely well supported by students. The academy has specialist

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language status and promotes languages in other subjects extremely well. It encourages links with other schools and international links exceptionally well, and provides excellent opportunities for students with English as an additional language to study their home language.

Students thoroughly enjoy school. Their behaviour is excellent and attainment levels are very high. Students feel safe at all times, know how to keep themselves safe, and readily tell others about their concerns if they arise. Their contributions to the school and wider community are excellent. Their understanding of the importance of following a healthy lifestyle is outstanding and almost all take part in the extremely wide range of competitive or non-competitive physical activities. Students hold the school in very high regard. One said she found staff inspirational, and another that the school had 'helped her grow into a woman.'

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Parents and carers are well-informed about students' progress and have ready access to staff for further information. One student, reflecting the views of others, said that 'the school has done everything for me and my family.' Students from all backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported exceptionally well. Advice for higher education and careers opportunities is exceptionally good, and valued highly by students.

Leaders and managers have an exceptionally clear view of how effective the school is and what needs to be done to sustain the high levels of provision. They act fast to implement improvements. The work to improve the quality of teaching is excellent and is aided by the very professional approach of all staff in evaluating their own and other's work. Significant improvements have been made in how the school records and uses assessment information to track students' progress and plan work that is always challenging. The governing body is extremely well informed and works closely with senior staff to drive improvement and to maintain outstanding provision. Given the effectiveness with which the school sustains very high standards and improves provision where it can, the capacity to sustain further improvement is excellent.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that marking reflects the best practice in informing students about how well they achieve their targets, what their next steps in learning are, and how to reach them.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Attainment on entry to the school is above average overall, although a large minority of students start with broadly average levels of attainment. By the end of Year 11, attainment is high and almost all students exceed national averages in all subjects. High levels of attainment have been maintained in recent years, and the proportion

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of students not reaching the highest levels possible has reduced steadily. Attainment in mathematics has risen. For example, in a class of broadly average students, the great majority were successfully working at high GCSE grade levels in their work. They understood and explained the shape and positions of graphs of parabolas on axes in considerable detail, worked out the values of different points on the graph and challenged each other, and the teacher over the meaning of the work. Their calculation skills were accurate, and their rough calculation work was neat and well presented, making it clearly understood. Students’ progress is at least good, and usually outstanding. They frequently display high order thinking skills which help them make outstanding progress in reaching high levels of attainment. For example, in an English lesson, students were developing an understanding of the context and time of a novel, and the high quality of research using the internet and resources on the socio-economic history of racism, led to excellent progress.

Students’ enjoyment of school and learning is excellent. The great majority of students are proud to be at the school. They take on responsibilities within the school, in working in primary schools, a local special school and other secondary schools. They raise money for charities, support disadvantaged children, are involved in international links the school has and work on a wide range of ecological issues to do with energy efficiency and recycling different materials. The school is working towards the silver Eco-School award. Older students are prefects, and student views are taken into account through, for example, the school council question time. Students’ understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet and why exercise is important are excellent, and the school has the Healthy School award. Students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding; they have an excellent grasp and respect for the traditions and values of other cultures. This is reflected in the excellent relationships among students, in lessons and around the school.

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	1
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	1

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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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Learning is of a consistent high quality because teaching is challenging, and lessons are taught by enthusiastic staff. Teachers expect students to take an active role in their own learning, and frequently they discuss their understanding with each other and become confident in accurately expressing what they know, and in seeking further information. In an excellent history lesson, for example, the teacher encouraged students to discuss what constituted a good answer to an examination question about the transformation of British Society over the period of the Second World War. They did this extremely well, answering many of the questions themselves, and deciding on the significant facts they would need to include in the answer. Students appreciate the high quality marking they experience most of the time and the level of target setting that guides them in learning. Occasionally, teachers' marking does not relate closely to targets, so students are not completely sure what they need to do to move on. Nevertheless, verbal guidance is exceptionally detailed in supporting students in learning. Staff back up students' learning effectively by recording lessons so that students can access them on the internet, and by providing an email service for students to contact them if they need help.

The curriculum is innovative in providing an outstanding range of opportunities to ensure students study the subjects they want, and have enrichment activities that widen their experiences. Students report that some of the experiences are memorable. For example, a classics day inspired students to want to study the subject further. Students visit universities, art galleries, museums, attend local and national conferences and participate in overseas educational and sports trips to Brussels, Namibia, Berlin, Nice and Belfast. The range of subjects available is well matched to their interests and academic abilities and aspirations. For example, several GCSE courses start in Year 9, enabling students to take a wide range of subjects. There is a wide variety of popular out-of-school activities, including archery, dance, choir, jazz, politics, ancient history, fitness, yoga, and zumba, which are well supported. The school is particularly successful in the wide range of competitive sports it provides.

Although there are few students and families whose challenging circumstances may make them vulnerable, the school has excellent arrangements to support them based on very close links with external services. Pastoral arrangements are outstanding and class tutors have exceptionally good relationships with their students. Transfer arrangements are extremely good and the school has extensive links with primary schools, other sixth form providers, employers, colleges and universities. Strategies to promote high levels of attendance are extremely good, and the low level of

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persistent absence is steadily reducing.

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?

The headteacher's determination and drive for the school to provide all of the opportunities students need to be successful is reflected in the work of all staff. The school has a culture of ambition and high aspirations that spreads to almost all students. The strategies to monitor and evaluate provision are outstanding, and permeate all levels of the school's work. Effective action is taken rapidly to deal with perceived weaknesses. Parents, carers and students are consulted to ensure the school has the widest possible range of opinions to refer to when planning improvements. The governing body consults widely, and critically reviews its own working practices to ensure they meet the needs of the school. It meets all of its statutory obligations. The school's links with parents and carers are outstanding. The great majority of parents and carers, including those that are traditionally hard to reach, attend consultations. Attendance at other activities, for example, about planned trips, or aspects of learning are high, and the school has established an effective on-line reporting link that enables parents and carers to find out how well their children are doing. Partnerships to promote learning and well-being are excellent. Staff attend a very wide range of training activities and conferences, and contribute exceptionally well to developments in other primary, special and secondary schools. Extensive links with businesses promotes enterprise activities among students extremely well.

Safeguarding procedures are excellent and are supported by students, parents and carers, staff and governors in contributing to the safety and security of students using the school. The school promotes equal opportunities exceptionally well, acting fast to make sure that any individual student or group of students is not disadvantaged in their learning in any way. Procedures to eliminate all forms of discrimination are outstanding, and are underpinned by students' excellent attitudes to each other. Community cohesion is extremely effectively promoted, and national and international links are exceedingly good with students visiting different cultures in Britain and overseas. The school has earned the International Schools award for this work.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Sixth form

Students make excellent progress, from their starting points, and achieve high levels of examination success, with the great majority of them going on to universities including some to Oxford and Cambridge. In recent years all students have gone on to higher education or employment. Past relative underperformance in some subjects has been dealt with extremely well, and sharply focused guidance to students on what is expected of them in the sixth form has led to improving attainment, especially in Year 12. Students’ personal development is exceptional. They become mature young men and women who are eager to take on responsibility and to contribute to the community in which they live and study, as well as making themselves highly employable. They confirm that the outstanding opportunities made available to them help to create an environment in which they can flourish. It is a measure of their commitment that they founded a debating society, and within a short space of time entered themselves for a major national competition. Many take on responsibilities in school, some support younger students, others organise trips for their year group. The quality of teaching is excellent, and students are expected to become independent, confident learners. Teachers’ high level questioning and expectations ensure this happens. The wide range of subject choices available meets students’ needs and prepares them extremely well for future studies. Teachers monitor students’ progress extremely closely and use the information they collect exceptionally effectively to plan learning to make sure students’ knowledge and understanding are secure. Students’ attitudes to work are exemplary. They work hard and take pride in what they achieve. In lessons they concentrate well, work maturely together, challenging each other and testing out their own ideas. The quality of support and advice is excellent, and students say that they rely on and appreciate the support they receive from staff. Leaders have an excellent grasp of how performance should improve and respond swiftly and effectively to less than

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expected progress from students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

About one quarter of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Overall, their comments were very positive and the great majority are pleased with their children’s experience at the school. A very small proportion of parents and carers feel that there are too many supply teachers, and that this affects students’ progress. Inspectors saw some supply staff and in all instances work planned for classes was challenging and suited to students’ learning needs. Students confirmed this. Another very small proportion of parents and carers feel that their children are deterred from physical activities because the school focuses on excellence in competitive sports. Inspectors spoke to a few students who had the same view, but the greater majority said that they had no hesitation in joining in sports activities, even if they knew they would not be in competitive teams.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Southend High School for Girls 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 220 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,045 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	121	55	90	41	5	2	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	142	65	76	35	0	0	1	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	114	52	96	44	5	2	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	121	55	85	39	9	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	113	51	97	44	4	2	3	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	98	45	99	45	16	7	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	79	36	121	55	13	6	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)	111	50	81	37	3	1	3	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	112	51	98	45	5	2	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	94	43	98	45	10	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	62	28	115	52	14	6	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	115	52	93	42	7	3	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	137	62	75	34	3	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 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	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
Pupil 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 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.



12 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Southend High School for Girls, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 4UZ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. You told us a lot about the school which contributed to our judgement that it is an excellent school.

The following things are particular strengths of the school.

- You make outstanding progress.
- Teaching is exceptionally good. Work is always challenging and the range of subjects and activities that are available to you is excellent. Many of you find these inspiring, and you are exceptionally well prepared for the future.
- The headteacher, staff and governors work extremely well together to make sure that the school remains as good as it is, and continues to improve.
- The school takes excellent care of you, and you know how to stay safe. It works exceptionally well with your families to involve them in understanding and helping you to learn. There is always someone to help you if you need it.
- Your behaviour is outstanding, you enjoy learning and your attendance levels are extremely high. You show considerable respect and thoughtfulness towards each other.
- Many of you have responsibilities in school, the local community and further afield. You carry these out extremely well.
- Your knowledge and understanding about how to stay healthy are excellent, and the great majority of you eat sensibly and take part in physical activities.

In order for the school to be even better, we have asked your teachers to do the following.

- Make sure that when your work is marked, you are always informed about how well you achieve your targets, your next steps in learning and how to reach them.

You can help by asking teachers whether you are meeting your targets if you are unsure.

Yours sincerely

Ted Wheatley
Lead inspector

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