

St Paul's School for Girls

Vernon Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B16 9SL

Inspection dates 9–10 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Standards at GCSE have been well above the national average for a number of years. The proportion of students gaining five GCSE examinations at A* to C including English and mathematics fell to just above average in 2012 but is set to increase again in 2013.
- Students currently in the school are making good progress as a result of good teaching.
- The sixth form is good. Standards improved in 2012 and students' progress in a range of courses was well above national averages.
- Some teaching is outstanding, including in the sixth form.
- Teachers make sure they help students improve their literacy in lots of different subjects.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school. They attend well, are punctual and are very keen to learn and succeed. Relationships between all members of the school are strong and students are supported by a "can do", caring ethos.
- Students feel safe and secure in the school and say there is very little bullying.
- Leaders and governors have a good understanding of how well the school is performing and the areas that need to be improved. They have thought ahead and made good decisions that have led directly to improvements in teaching and student achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some lessons are not planned well enough to provide challenge to students of all abilities.
- Marking does not always tell students how to improve their work or what level or grade they are currently working at.
- When evaluating lessons, leaders and managers do not routinely focus on the impact that teaching is having on learning and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, of which eight were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of shorter visits to lessons to look at specific aspects of students' work.
- Meetings were held with school staff, including middle leaders and senior leaders, four groups of students and representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 151 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) and other communications with parents, such as e-mails and letters, which helped inspectors to focus on particular aspects of the school's work.
- Inspectors considered the responses to 52 staff questionnaires.
- They observed the work of the school, spoke informally with students and looked at a number of documents, including the school's policy on how it manages and improves teaching and decides on pay. Records relating to attendance, behaviour minutes of governors' meetings and documents relating to safeguarding were also examined.

Inspection team

Simon Blackburn, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Sumeya Bhikhu	Additional Inspector
Lin Bartlett	Additional Inspector
David Hughes	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above the national average and the proportion of students identified as speaking English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well below the national average as is the proportion supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school provides alternative provision in for some of its Year 10 and 11 students through the North West Birmingham Network and the Rite Project.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is all at least good with much that is outstanding by ensuring teachers:
 - always plan activities at the right level to meet the needs of all students
 - take opportunities to develop students' numeracy skills in other subjects
 - consistently give students clear information about the levels that they are working at
 - give students regular feedback on how to improve their work, and regularly check that students act on it.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that all lesson observations focus on the impact that teaching has on learning and progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment is typically well above average by the end of Year 11. After a dip in results in 2012, when standards were above average but lower than in previous years, data for current students shows they are on track to do as well as usual.
- Students' results at GCSE in 2012 dropped as a result of lower results in English and mathematics. The school trialled a new double award qualification in mathematics, which did not give the same success as in previous years.
- In 2011, the progress made by students in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics was well above average. Though progress dropped for students who took exams in 2012, the school's own tracking data shows that students currently studying in Years 10 and 11 are on track to make progress in both English and mathematics that would be well above that seen nationally. This is a direct result of good quality teaching in these subjects. Early entry to GCSE mathematics was used with a very small number of students in 2012 and it did not prevent them from gaining the higher grades. The school no longer uses early entry.
- The progress of students from different groups is good but is not consistent across subjects or year groups. In 2012 the results of students who are eligible for pupil premium funding were over a grade lower than others in the year, in both English and mathematics. Eligible students currently in Year 11 are making rapid progress and the gap in attainment with other students is closing in both English and mathematics as a result. In Year 10, the gap is closing more quickly in English than mathematics. The government funding provided for these students is used effectively across year groups to provide small group teaching in literacy and numeracy, and to employ academic mentors to support eligible students.
- Students supported through the Year 7 catch-up premium funding have made a term's additional progress on average, as a result of one-to-one mentoring in literacy and numeracy.
- Those students who are disabled or who have special educational needs are making good progress overall because of the good teaching they receive and the well planned and targeted support of other adults. There is no difference in the progress of students from different ethnic groups. Those learning English as an additional language make progress in line with other students because their needs are identified quickly and the support offered matches their needs very well.
- Students make good progress in learning basic skills in reading and writing and they are able to communicate their thoughts and ideas to each other very well because they are encouraged to do so in many different lessons across the school.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Students' progress in AS, applied AS and applied A-level subjects is well above the national average and progress in A-level subjects is just above the national average.
- A small number of students attend courses away from the school and these students make good progress in both GCSE and work-related courses. Their progress, behaviour and attendance are checked regularly with visits from senior staff. The number of students who do not go on to training, education or employment at age 16 is extremely low compared to the national average.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching is leading to good overall progress. Outstanding teaching is evident in both key stages and in the sixth form but some inconsistencies remain so a small amount of teaching requires improvement. None of the teaching seen during the inspection was judged to be inadequate.
- There are strong and extremely positive relationships between teachers and students in all lessons. The “can do” attitude that is a fundamental part of the school’s ethos is evident in the high expectations that teachers have of all their students both in terms of behaviour but also in their approach to learning.
- Teachers’ good subject knowledge enables them to use questioning effectively to deepen students’ understanding. In the very best lessons, students are encouraged to lead the learning and the teacher becomes a facilitator. This was seen in an outstanding Year 12 English lesson where the students were challenged to devise appropriate and demanding questions based on their previous learning and their arguments and conversations deepened their understanding of the poetic themes they were studying.
- Sometimes teachers do not use all the information the school provides to plan lessons that challenge students at their different ability levels. A single activity is sometimes used with all students that proves to be too easy for some students and too hard for others, so the pace of learning is slowed for a sizeable proportion of the class.
- Teachers pay good attention to helping students improve their reading, writing and oral communication skills but do not take all the possible opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in different subjects.
- The quality of marking and assessment is not always good enough to make sure that students know what they need to do to improve their work. Marking is done regularly and it comments on the work that has been completed, but it does not consistently give specific guidance about how to make changes that will move it to the next level or grade. The very best marking seen during the inspection gave students a clear idea of the level they are working at and ensured that corrections were completed, but this quality of feedback was not seen consistently across the school.
- In the best lessons, teachers check the progress their students are making regularly and take action to help those who are falling behind. Sixth form students said that this was a particularly strong feature of their lessons and that the help provided is very effective at helping them to see the next steps they need to take.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour around the school and in lessons is impeccable. Students are courteous, polite and friendly to staff, visitors and to one another. Disruption to learning is extremely rare and students’ attitudes to learning are highly positive. They enjoy working together and are keen to succeed in all lessons.
 - Exclusions are extremely rare. The school does everything possible to avoid exclusion and a comprehensive range of strategies are used to support the most vulnerable students with the most complex needs.
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- Attendance has been consistently above average over the last three years and continues to improve. The school monitors the attendance and punctuality of all its students very effectively and inspectors saw no examples of lessons disrupted by late arrivals during the inspection.
- Students feel safe at the school. All the students spoken to during the inspection said they feel safe and always have. Parents and carers were unanimous in their view that students were safe and happy at the school.
- The school makes an outstanding contribution to helping its students stay safe. The curriculum is well planned to ensure that students have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and how to avoid and prevent it. Students say that there are rare cases of bullying but that they feel they can approach staff with any problems, confident that they will be dealt with effectively.
- Consistent with the atmosphere of caring that is seen everywhere in the school, students are “secret saints” to another student who they perform small kindnesses for and look out for without being identified. The more formal “Guardian Angels” in Year 10 provide mentoring for younger students and develop leadership skills through the process.
- The school’s positive, friendly and welcoming atmosphere helps support students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities for prayer and reflection are plentiful and all faiths are respected. Students enjoy a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, from sailing to drama.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership and a clear vision for the school as well as high expectations of all staff and students. She also provides a spiritual lead to the school, one member of staff describing her as ‘the beating heart of the school’ in a staff questionnaire response.
 - Teaching is generally well led and managed. The quality of teaching and learning has become the focus for all staff meetings and subject meetings have become the main forum for sharing what works well in the classroom, with the result that best practice is being shared across the school. Leaders and managers use a wide range of evidence to evaluate teaching and then offer effective support to teachers, focused on specific areas of their work which need to improve.
 - Subject and other middle leaders have residential training to ensure their crucial role in improving teaching is fully developed and their skills of lesson observation and feedback are given particular attention. Teachers are held to account for the progress of their students through the performance management system and advancement on the salary scale is closely related to the effectiveness of teaching. Senior leaders have taken decisive action to improve teaching with the result that the students’ learning experience is constantly improving.
 - Leaders and managers make detailed checks on the quality of teaching that help to inform the school’s training programme for teachers. However, some of the lesson observations focus too closely on the teaching activity and not enough on the effect that the teaching is having on learning and progress, with the result that lessons may be judged to be more successful than they actually are.
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- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Students are prepared extremely well for the extra demands of post-16 courses and as a result progress on AS-level courses is now well above the national average. Every student is mentored by their form tutor and by a dedicated sixth form mentor, ensuring that any underachievement is identified early and that support can be carefully tailored to their needs.
 - The range of subjects on offer in both key stages and in the sixth form is good. There is an element of work-related learning in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form which is sensibly balanced with academic study and is constantly under review so that it meets the needs of changing cohorts. This, combined with a very personalised curriculum for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, ensures that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed. The wide programme of additional cultural and sporting activities is taken up and appreciated by many students. There is use of offsite education for a very small number of students and this is monitored carefully by a member of the senior leadership team to make sure students are fully safeguarded and make good progress.
 - The local authority provides 'light touch' support to this school. It checks the school's performance regularly and provides useful support, training and networking opportunities, particularly to leaders.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a clear understanding of how well the school is doing because they have the skills to interpret and question the data that the school presents. They are aware of how good teaching is in the school and have a clear view of how weaker aspects of teaching are being improved, but are less clear on how performance management is used to improve the quality of teaching. Governors have a strong strategic impact in the school through their involvement in self-evaluation and school improvement planning. They know how the pupil premium funding is being used and the impact it is having on the learning of eligible students because they regularly question senior staff on its effectiveness. Governor training is well managed and the governing body has a good range of skills and experience. Governors share the headteacher's vision for the school and are as committed to its improvement.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	103531
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	412106

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
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	956
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	133
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Browning
Headteacher	Dawn Casserly
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2010
Telephone number	0121 454 0895
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