

Inspection of a good school: Plymouth High School for Girls

St Lawrence Road, Plymouth, Devon PL4 6HT

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 April 2024

Outcome

Plymouth High School for Girls continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Mr Simon Underdown. This school is part of Thinking Schools Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Mr Stuart Gardner, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mr Gerard Newman.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has high expectations for pupils' academic success. Pupils rise to this challenge. They are keen to learn. Pupils behave consistently well in lessons and around the school site. The school's motto of 'for life not school we learn' also reflects the school's desire for pupils to leave as happy, well-rounded individuals. Pupils are proud to attend the school. They say it is a welcoming community. Students that join in the sixth form quickly become part of the Plymouth High family. Many parents say their child is thriving at the school.

Pupils learn the attributes of being a successful leader through the many different roles offered. For example, pupils become part of the head student team, or train to become anti-bullying ambassadors, digital leaders, or pupil librarians. Students in the sixth form run a diversity group and take on leading roles in the school's curriculum enrichment week.

Pupils look forward to the regular festivals in music, dance and drama which they lead and perform in. Many pupils are passionate about protecting the environment. The school's 'Earth Alliance' now leads change across other schools in the trust. They campaigned for more sustainable paper sources and have organised a 'big energy switch off', for example.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils achieve well. They have the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful as they move into further education or employment. Many pupils go on to university, but a significant number follow other pursuits, such as apprenticeships. The strong support and

careers guidance they receive enables pupils, and students in the sixth form, to make well-informed choices about their next steps. Many pupils then return to the school as successful adults to deliver talks. They share their experiences to inspire younger pupils.

Pupils follow a broad range of subjects. The school reviews its sixth-form course offer to ensure it meets the needs and interests of students. For example, it has introduced media studies and economics. The school supports disadvantaged pupils well. Staff have a secure understanding of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They work with individual pupils and their families to make reasonable adjustments as required.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. The curriculum they deliver is ambitious and well planned. Subject leaders have carefully sequenced the order of units, so pupils build their knowledge successfully over time. Teachers use planned assessments to gauge pupils' level of understanding. They use this information to re-visit the parts of the curriculum that pupils have not remembered. However, in between these assessments, sometimes teaching does not identify precisely what pupils know and remember, so that any misconceptions are remedied in a timely way.

The school understands the importance of reading. Pupils benefit from dedicated time to read for pleasure in school. They read an increasingly diverse range of texts from the school library. Some older pupils act as reading ambassadors to pupils in Year 7. This support is in its early stages. The opportunities for pupils to read academic texts to support their work across the curriculum is more limited.

Pupils at the school are mature and articulate. They behave respectfully towards each other. Sixth-form students are viewed as role models by younger pupils. Poor behaviour is uncommon. If any incidents do occur, they are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. The use of derogatory language between pupils is extremely rare.

Pupils follow an effective personal development curriculum. They learn about important issues, such as how to form healthy relationships, online safety and the risks associated with drugs. The content and delivery are age appropriate and relevant. Pupils appreciate this information. The school considers carefully what content is most important for pupils to learn. For example, pupils learn about water safety due to the location of the school.

Most staff enjoy working at the school. Many have done so for a considerable number of years. There are a small minority of staff who say leaders could give further consideration to how to reduce their workload. Staff, with the support of the trust, receive an appropriate range of professional development opportunities. For example, leaders communicate regularly with their subject counterparts in other trust schools to share best practice.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers' checks on how well pupils have understood the curriculum are sometimes not precise enough. As a result, some pupils develop misconceptions or have gaps in their knowledge. The school should ensure that teachers effectively check what pupils know and remember and use this to plan what comes next in the learning cycle.
- Although many pupils are keen readers, they do not always read a range of academic texts to support their learning of the curriculum. Therefore, they are not able to demonstrate a depth and breadth of understanding in different subjects. The trust and school should support pupils to read widely and critically across all subjects.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Plymouth High School for Girls, to be good in September 2011.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148369
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10322329
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	816
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	246
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mr Gerard Newman
CEO	Mr Stuart Gardner
Headteacher	Mr Simon Underdown
Website	www.phsg.org/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Plymouth High School for Girls converted to become an academy in February 2021. When its predecessor school, Plymouth High School for Girls, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- Since the previous inspection of the predecessor school, a new headteacher has been appointed.
- The school is part of Thinking Schools Academy Trust.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator (SENDCo), subject leaders, members of the academy advisory board, the trust regional director for the southwest, the chief executive officer of the trust and a trustee.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey for parents and carers, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to the staff survey and responses to the survey for pupils.

Inspection team

Kelly Olive, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Richard Barnes

Ofsted Inspector

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