



Devonport High School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113531
LEA Plymouth
Inspection number 279190
Inspection dates 15 November 2005 to 16 November 2005
Reporting inspector Ian Stuart RISP

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

Type of school	Other secondary	School address	Lyndhurst Road
School category	Community		Peverell
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Plymouth, Devon PL2 3DL
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01752 705024
Number on roll	822	Fax number	01752 791873
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Prof Phil Dyke
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Maureen Smith

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 15 November 2005 - 16 November 2005	Inspection number 279190
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Devonport High School for Girls is a grammar school which is a little smaller than average and which has an average-sized sixth form of about 220 students. About 120 girls are admitted each year following tests administered by the City of Plymouth Lifelong Learning Department. However, the girls come from a very wide area, including about half of them from Devon and Cornwall. Because the girls are selected on the basis of their ability, attainment on entry is well above average. Very few come from minority ethnic groups or do not speak English as their first language. The school became a specialist Language College in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features. The girls make good progress from the high standards they have on entry, and, by the end of Year 11, standards are very high. Their achievement is good. A challenge for the school is to raise achievement still further, particularly by bringing all subjects up to that of the best.

One of the great strengths of the school is the value it places on the whole development of the girls as people. The school is far more than an examinations 'hothouse' for very able girls. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding. They develop as confident, mature young people who enjoy excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers. The school is a very happy place, with very high quality care and support.

Overall, teaching is good, enabling the girls to learn very well. However, there is much excellent teaching in the school. As a result, in many lessons, the girls' intellectual development is very strong and they are encouraged to think creatively and independently. They grow to love the subjects as their teachers' enthusiasm rubs off on them.

The headteacher, senior managers and governors have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, with good plans for improvement. Prior to the inspection, they judged the school's effectiveness to be outstanding overall. However, they recognise that achievement is not as strong in some areas as it could be, and that the present curriculum is narrower than would be desirable. Accommodation problems and the limited flexibility of the timetable are constraints on the present curriculum. Nonetheless, the school is well placed to improve further.

The school enjoys the full support of the vast majority of parents and girls. It has successfully tackled the issues from the previous inspection. It gives good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. It is excellently led and provides outstanding opportunities for the students to build on their earlier successes, mature further into delightful young people, and contribute to the school community as a whole. Standards are very high, and there are only small variations in the performance between subjects. Students and teachers worked extremely well together. They share their interests and enthusiasm for their subjects, collaborating successfully so that students achieve very well. Much of the teaching is outstanding, and most students successfully complete their courses. They are supported by excellent advice and guidance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in all subjects to that of the best pupils through better quality evaluation and use of performance information, particularly by subject leaders.
- Take

all possible steps to remove the constraints on the curriculum caused by accommodation problems and the present inflexibility of the timetable.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Nationally, very able girls progress very well in their secondary schools, as they did in their primary schools. They continue to make more progress than other groups of pupils. Girls at this school are no different. By the end of Year 11, standards are very high compared with national standards. This is because the girls make good progress, compared with pupils nationally, from their already high starting points. As this good progress is in line with that which would be expected, it represents good achievement in relation to the girls' capabilities. However, there are marked variations in the proportions achieving the very top grades in different subjects in recent years. The proportions in French have been particularly high.

The school is aware of inconsistencies in its performance and there are encouraging signs that the action that is being taken to raise levels of achievement further is paying dividends. However, the use of performance information as a powerful tool to raise achievement, by pinpointing what needs to be done, is not yet consistent across all subjects in the school. The few girls with specific learning difficulties make the same rate of progress as other pupils. Targets for pupils in Years 9 and 11 are sufficiently challenging and were met in 2005.

The standards of students entering the sixth form are very high because most of them do very well in Year 11. These very high standards are maintained, and a notable feature of the results at the end of Year 13 is the consistency of performance between subjects. As a result, students achieve very well and, in many cases, outstandingly well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The girls' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The school provides an environment in which the girls mature into articulate, thoughtful young women. Their behaviour is excellent, and their attitudes to work are extremely positive. They show considerable respect for one another and for their teachers. They are very courteous. Their attendance and punctuality are excellent. The girls enjoy coming to school, which they rightly view as a safe, caring and happy community. They are justifiably proud of their school.

In the school council, girls discuss issues that directly concern them and, in doing so, they contribute very well to the school community. They benefit very considerably from the frequent visits of outside speakers. This helps the girls to very successfully develop their own views on national and international issues. In addition, they develop adequately their work-related skills.

The girls respond very positively to the school's active promotion of safe and healthy lifestyles, and they benefit from the appropriate work in form tutor time on issues such as sex education, drugs and alcohol abuse. The girls participate in large numbers in the excellent sporting activities that are available. The lunch menus feature a good range of healthy choices which are popular with the girls. The free availability of drinking water at all times is another example of the school's commitment to the girls' well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the sixth form, the quality of both is outstanding. Teachers use very effectively the girls' desire to do well. Teachers plan varied work that successfully ensures that good, and often very good, learning takes place. The best lessons are delivered at a fast pace and are exciting in the ways they stimulate the girls' intellectual curiosity and creativity. For example, in an outstanding English lesson in Year 10, stunning teaching enabled the girls to make excellent progress in their technical language and in the structure of their writing, but also to express their feelings and their love of the poetry. This was teaching at its very best, with the girls' enjoying and understanding a very difficult poem.

Whilst there is much very good and excellent teaching, some is less challenging and less imaginative. Effective learning still takes place because the girls are keen to do well and appreciate the expertise of their teachers. However, such lessons only rarely lead to the outstanding learning that occurs in the best lessons when the girls are stretched by the teaching and have fun as they learn.

Teaching and learning are of a more consistently high quality in the sixth form. Teachers are highly qualified for the advanced work they are teaching and students are particularly keen to learn. The partnership between teachers and students is excellent, leading to learning of a high order. Where students take their own learning forward, encouraged by creative lessons, they achieve very high standards indeed.

Assessment is good and outstanding in the sixth form. Generally books are carefully marked, although individual targets for improving work are not always clearly communicated to the girls.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is good, meeting the needs of the girls. Their opportunities are considerably enhanced by the very broad range of extra-curricular activities. Participation in these by the girls is extensive. Very large numbers, for example, are

involved with dance groups, some taken by sixth formers. The range of subjects taught in Years 7 to 9 is good but, in Years 10 and 11, there are constraints on the curriculum caused by accommodation problems and by the limited flexibility in the timetable that only has four lessons each day. Although this is compensated to some extent by extra-curricular activities, choice at GCSE is limited, particularly in the arts. The limited flexibility of the timetable also means that lessons for some classes in several subjects in Year 7 are split between two or more teachers. This adversely affects continuity of learning and is a concern of some girls.

The range of advanced level courses in the sixth form is good. In addition, the Link Partnership with some other sixth forms in the city gives a broader range of opportunities than can be provided in the school, though, as yet, there has been very little demand for the more vocational opportunities that are available.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is adequately used across subjects, though there is difficulty with access to the Internet from mobile classrooms as they are not yet linked to the main network. Similarly, accommodation problems for physical education mean that lessons are not always held in suitable locations. The school's desire to develop its curriculum through its new specialist status is already positive with, for example, a European languages day taking place across the school

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is justifiably proud of the outstanding personal support and guidance that the girls receive. Both the girls and their parents value very highly the caring ethos that the school embodies.

The form tutors, the heads of the Key Stages 3 and 4 and the head of the sixth form make a major contribution to the girls' personal guidance. They monitor their pupils' progress carefully, identifying problems rapidly. As a result, vulnerable girls receive strong and effective support. The school uses external agencies very well. They provide highly valued support both to individuals and to the school as a whole. Girls with specific learning difficulties receive excellent well-targeted support. The required procedures for health and safety and for child protection are fully in place.

The girls' academic achievement is monitored rigorously and effectively by their form tutors. The girls are kept well informed about their progress and achievement. The provision for careers guidance is good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's committed leadership provides a very clear steer to the school. The school's values are widely shared and there is a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further

development. The headteacher is very well supported by her deputies and the senior team.

The recent acquisition of specialist language college status has provided a strong impetus for developing the curriculum, particularly with regard to global citizenship. The school's quest for International School status and its links with schools in China are good examples of the way the school hopes to develop. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. There is rigorous monitoring of the performance of subjects and progress of individual students, and intervention where necessary is prompt. Individual needs are given high priority.

Management systems for checking progress are thorough and the annual departmental review offers heads of department good opportunities to be self-critical and to set the agenda for further development. The school also consults parents and the girls, analysing questionnaires and surveys it has conducted with them. The school improvement plan is a detailed document which provides a good basis for further improvement and it has taken into account views expressed by many interested groups, including parents and the girls. However, the quality of subject leadership is not consistently high, as demonstrated in the patchy quality of subject improvement plans and use of performance information. Developing a more consistently good approach to monitoring and evaluation at subject level rightly remains a priority.

Effective procedures for checking on the quality of teaching and learning are in place. The introduction of a programme whereby teachers observe each other in lessons is making a real contribution to improving the quality of teaching through sharing good practice.

Governors are fully involved and play an active part in planning and monitoring. As a result of the school's culture of support and challenge, the school is well poised to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

The Students Devonport High School for Girls Plymouth PL2 3DL

17 November 2005 Dear Students,

Thank you for all your help when we inspected your school. Your views are very important, and it was a pleasure to meet you and to talk to you.

Your school is a good one with many outstanding features. The sixth form is a particularly outstanding part of the school. You make good progress and obtain very high examination results. The main reasons for this are the good teaching you receive from very dedicated teachers, your own excellent attitudes to your work and your excellent behaviour. Some of the teaching in the school is outstanding and you achieve very highly when inspired to excellence. But we do think you could achieve even better in some lessons and subjects if you were challenged a bit more.

One of the great strengths of the school is the way it helps you to develop as fine, confident and mature young people. The relationships you have with each other and with your teachers are excellent. The school is a very happy place with high quality care and support. You have very good opportunities to take part in extra activities and we are very pleased that so many of you do so. Indeed, many of you, especially sixth formers, often take a lead in organising them.

The school is very well led by your headteacher and other senior staff. They know what still needs doing to make the school even better, and we agree with them. We are suggesting two areas in particular for improvements to be made:

The school could make better use of information about how different subjects are doing to help you to achieve even more successfully

Some improvements could be made to the school's curriculum to make it more suited to everyone's needs.

You are rightly proud of your school, and I hope you will play your part, through discussions in the School Council and elsewhere, to make it even better. I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely, Ian Stuart - Lead Inspector