



Plymouth High School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113532
LEA Plymouth
Inspection number 279191
Inspection dates 10 May 2006 to 11 May 2006
Reporting inspector Barbara Wintersgill HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	St Lawrence Road
School category	Community		Plymouth
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Devon PL4 6HT
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01752 208308
Number on roll	794	Fax number	01752 208309
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr David Walters
Date of previous inspection	24 January 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Sue Martin

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	10 May 2006 - 11 May 2006	279191

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Plymouth High School is a selective school with 800 on roll for girls aged 11 to 18 that was granted Technology College status in 2003. Four out of five pupils are from White British backgrounds and only a very small number speak English as an additional language. The school draws its pupils mainly from the city of Plymouth but about a third come from outlying areas of Devon and Cornwall. Although pupils' attainment on entry is high, the school takes pupils from a wider range of ability than many other grammar schools.

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 outstanding features that has made good improvement since its last inspection. The outstanding features of the school are the care and support it provides to promote the girls' personal development, the girls' willingness to take responsibility in school and the community, the excellent quality of relationships throughout the school, the forging of community and partnership links and the high quality of the sixth form curriculum. There are outstanding links with other agencies which promote pupils' well-being. The school has built on its specialist status to forge links with local universities and businesses and to provide enrichment opportunities for pupils. The quality of teaching across the school ranges from outstanding to satisfactory and is good overall. As a result, although standards are exceptionally high and pupils make good progress, many of them could do better. Senior managers became fully aware of this only after they gained access to contextual value-added data and have been tackling the problem with vigour and commitment. As a result, in 2005, Year 9 pupils achieved much better in national tests than in previous years, but this level of improvement is not yet fully embedded throughout the school. Senior and middle managers have extended a programme of lesson observations and have been trained in the use of data on performance in order to improve further the quality of teaching, learning and achievement. Neither the observation programme nor the use of data is applied consistently by all departments. The school is well led and efficiently managed, and offers good value for money. Although senior management's judgement on the overall effectiveness of the school was too generous, they know the school well. The school is well placed to improve still further. This is demonstrated by its effectiveness in dealing with the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. Senior managers know what has to be done to move the school forward.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school's correct evaluation of the effectiveness of the sixth form as satisfactory was an insightful judgement based on a good understanding of the data. The sixth form overall provides satisfactory value for money, although aspects of provision are outstanding. Students are very positive about 'the family atmosphere' of the sixth form, reflected in the good retention rate and above average standards. However, achievement is satisfactory: a minority of students underachieve, the result of insufficient commitment to their work or underdeveloped independent learning skills. Students greatly value the support they receive and opportunities for extensive involvement in a wide range of school activities. The sixth form leadership has a clear vision of strategies needed to continue the rise in achievement seen during the inspection, although the current monitoring of teaching is insufficiently rigorous. The wideranging sixth form curriculum and the excellent consortium arrangements are a strength of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

• improve achievement in the sixth form by encouraging more independent learning inside and outside the classroom • increase the precision and effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation • focus the priorities of the school on continuing to raise achievement and communicate these priorities more effectively • ensure all staff make more effective use of available data to set challenging targets, monitor pupils' progress and help pupils improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are exceptionally high for pupils by the ages of both 14 and 16 in most subjects, including English, science and mathematics. Test and examination results in 2005 showed an improvement on recent years. Inspection evidence supports the school's judgement that achievement is good, and is improving. However, achievement is significantly stronger in English, which has benefited from strategies such as revised pupil groupings, than in mathematics, which has suffered from major instability in staffing caused by maternity leave. Results in science are improving. A small minority of pupils underachieve significantly, due to substantial absence or negative attitudes, and consequently do not make up sufficient ground by the age of 16. Otherwise, there are no significant differences in achievement between different groups of pupils, including those with disabilities. Although standards in the sixth form are above average, inspection evidence supports the school's judgement that achievement is satisfactory. Whilst achievement is good in some subjects like religious studies, it is variable across the sixth form curriculum, with a minority of students not building on their GCSE successes. The independent learning skills of many students are underdeveloped.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good, with some outstanding features. Relationships are a particular strength. The pupils develop into mature citizens and are keen to make positive contributions both in school and the community. For example, most pupils represent their house in the dance, music and arts festivals and enjoy raising funds for charity. Older pupils and students provide valuable support to younger pupils and members of the student voice work hard to make the school a better place. Initiatives such as The International Club and links with a Ghanaian school have successfully raised the pupils' awareness of other cultures. However, there are missed opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual awareness, for example, in assemblies and tutor time. The pupils are proud of their school and are enthusiastic learners. They particularly enjoy the wide range of clubs and enrichment activities. The pupils are well prepared for their adult life, but they sometimes lack confidence in voicing their opinions and in

some areas sixth formers are not given enough opportunities to learn to work independently. Behaviour in and around the school is good overall. A small minority of pupils can be disruptive, especially when teaching is dull or continuity is disrupted. Attendance rates are good and the school quickly follows up any unexplained absences. The pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy taking part in sporting activities but do not always take up the healthy options on offer in the dining hall. They act in a safe and responsible manner both in lessons and when they are not closely supervised during breaks.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching is good. As a result, in most lessons, pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress. There is some outstanding teaching, characterised by challenging objectives and clear guidance for the pupils on how to achieve well, and clear feedback on how well they are doing. In the best lessons, teachers use a range of teaching strategies and encourage independent and collaborative learning. In an art and design lesson, the teacher gave a powerful printing demonstration to illustrate what she required of the pupils. Pupils respond most positively to lessons that involve them in challenging activities. The school makes excellent use of its links with outside agencies and technology partners to bring in outside speakers with special expertise. Teachers' use of ICT has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Pupils with disabilities and those who have organisational or emotional difficulties are given good support. Satisfactory lessons are characterised by weaker planning and organisational skills and a few teachers have weak classroom management skills. The school recognises that the use of assessment to improve learning is inconsistent across subjects. Teaching in the sixth form is also inconsistent but is good overall because it contributes to the improving sixth form progress observed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides a good curriculum. Provision for Years 10 and 11 includes a good range of GCSE subjects, a catering course and work experience. The sixth form curriculum is outstanding. A flourishing consortium offers a wide choice of academic and vocational courses, which are highly valued by students. The school has recognised that not all pupils benefit from taking 10 GCSEs and is providing valuable support to the minority of pupils who have dropped a subject. There is some good provision for gifted pupils through a programme of enrichment activities and the opportunities to take advanced courses in Year 10. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities, including music, sport and visits, successfully enhances and enriches the girls' learning. Technology status has enabled the school to develop excellent links with local

universities, commerce and community. This had led to pupils broadening their knowledge of the range of courses and career pathways.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support arrangements are good. Pupils perceive the school as a very friendly, supportive community and feel safe and secure in the knowledge that there are adults who can help them. Child protection procedures are good and staff are fully trained. There are excellent systems to help girls who are experiencing problems or emotional trauma of any kind. The student support centre is a valued place of refuge and recuperation. There are outstanding links with other agencies which promote pupils' well-being. The physical environment presents challenges and pupils are taught to evaluate risks and behave safely. The school has recently established more challenging targets for pupils and a complementary academic review system to track progress. These systems are still relatively new and are only just starting to have an impact on pupils' achievement. They are insufficiently developed so that roles and responsibilities are unclear and the quality of guidance girls receive on how to improve their work is inconsistent. They receive sound advice on the courses on offer, and the alternatives available when they leave school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good in both the main school and the sixth form. There is a clear drive to promote a friendly, supportive community and more recently, to raise achievement. The school has involved parents, pupils and staff in assessing how well the school does and deciding what needs to be improved. The school is over-generous in assessing two aspects of its performance itself and priorities identified from self-evaluation processes sometimes lack clarity. They are not consistently understood and implemented by all staff. The school has recognised the need to review roles in order to improve the focus on the school's priorities. It rightly plans to monitor more rigorously in order to improve the quality of teaching, learning and achievement. The school has made good progress in improving science and information and communication technology, which were criticised in the last inspection report. It has also developed productive partnerships. It has been slower to identify underachievement and this is only now being addressed with vigour and commitment. Until recently, targets lacked challenge. The school has provided training on using performance data so that staff can make more effective use of available information to help to raise achievement further. This has helped to raise achievement in Key Stage 3 in 2005 from satisfactory to good. However, there are still inconsistencies in the use of data and hence in the progress made by pupils. The governing body takes a very keen interest in the school and has extremely effective systems to discharge its responsibilities. Financial procedures are very secure and the school provides good value for money. The school knows what needs to be done and has a good capacity to improve.

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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	3
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	3	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	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	2
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?	2	2

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	Yes

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

15 May 2006 Dear Students As you know, a team of inspectors recently visited your school and I am writing to let you know what we said in our report. We very much enjoyed being in the school. Thank you very much for making us so welcome and for telling us your views. Your school is a good school with some outstanding features. Your teachers take excellent care of you and work exceptionally well with outside agencies to support you. Most of you told us that you enjoy being at the school, especially liking the many activities on offer. We were particularly impressed by those of you who take responsibility in the school, and by the contribution many of you make to the community, particularly through fund raising and the school links with Ghana. The school provides a good range of subjects, tailored to your needs and abilities. The consortium arrangements provide an outstanding curriculum for the sixth form. The governors, headteacher and senior staff lead and manage the school well and know what must be done to continue to help you make the best possible progress. The school is good overall rather than outstanding because the quality of teaching varies. As a result, many of you could do better and I urge you to develop the skills to work more independently. This applies particularly to the sixth form. A small number of you sometimes misbehave in lessons and this must stop because it is not fair on teachers or other girls who want to learn. I have asked the headteacher to make sure that senior staff and heads of department observe more lessons in order to improve still further the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Yours sincerely Barbara Wintersgill Her Majesty's Inspector Alexandra House 33 Kingsway London WC2B 6SE T 0207 421 6800 F 0207 421 6707 www.ofsted.gov.uk