



Colchester County High School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115370
LEA ESSEX LEA
Inspection number 279590
Inspection dates 14 March 2006 to 15 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. John Godwood LI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Norman Way
School category	Foundation		CO3 3US
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01206576973
Number on roll	757	Fax number	01206769302
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr.Allan Blundell
Date of previous inspection	9 May 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Elizabeth Ward

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a selective grammar school for girls aged 11 to 18. It is a specialist science college. Girls are selected by an entrance test and their attainment on entry is well above average. The school is highly oversubscribed. It is smaller than average, although the sixth form has grown and is slightly larger than average. Students are drawn from within a 25 mile radius. Very few are eligible for free school meals or have special educational needs. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly average, and is higher than in the catchment population. The number of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school's own view is that it is outstanding, and inspectors agree. It provides students with outstanding opportunities to achieve their full potential in their academic and personal development. Students make outstanding progress and reach exceptionally high standards at all stages. More than nine-tenths of students gain five or more A or A* grades at GCSE. A-level results are consistently in the top 1% of sixth forms nationally. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their behaviour, concern for others and enthusiasm for school are exemplary. They contribute very well to the school and the wider community. The broad curriculum, wide range of additional opportunities and excellent care and guidance make a significant contribution to students' development. Teaching is good. Some lessons are outstanding and provide students with a high level of inspiration and many opportunities to think and work at the highest level. However, not all lessons are so good, and in some the students are too passive and are not fully extended, although they still learn well. Students' outstanding achievement is the result of good teaching combined with their own determination, the school's high expectations and excellent pastoral care. The school's effectiveness is due to outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher and leadership team provide a very clear vision centred on students' well-being and achievements and a strong drive to keep improving. There are clear, effective management procedures, although the process of evaluation and planning is not fully rigorous. Governors provide outstanding support for the school's strategic development and have made a very significant contribution to improving its accommodation. Finances are used very well and the school provides outstanding value for money. Specialist science status has been very well managed and has contributed to improved standards, wider subject choice and improved facilities. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The school was excellent then, but it has continued to raise standards and improve opportunities. It has very good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school that the sixth form is outstanding. Students make outstanding progress and achieve exceptionally high examination results. They have excellent opportunities to develop their leadership skills through their involvement in the main school and the wider community. They mentor younger students and take the lead in many activities. The curriculum meets students' needs very well, providing a broad and rigorous education with extensive enrichment. Teaching is good. The ethos is friendly and supportive. Students receive very good guidance on their progress and future career opportunities. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior staff monitor the provision rigorously and have a clear vision for development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all lessons use teaching methods that engage students actively and challenge them fully.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students' achievement is outstanding. Attainment on entry is very high and, from this starting point, students make outstanding progress and reach exceptionally high standards at all stages. Year 9 national test results are consistently exceptionally high. In 2005, almost all students gained Level 7 in English and mathematics. However, the school views Year 9 tests as no more than a staging post towards GCSE and does not prepare them specifically. As a result, the test results do not accurately reflect the progress students have made. For example, students were not entered for the highest tier in mathematics, and hence none achieved Level 8. GCSE results are exceptionally high and improved significantly in 2005. More than four-fifths of all results are A* or A grades and almost half are A*. Students meet challenging targets and reach very high standards in all subjects. In 2005, they did particularly well in mathematics but slightly less well in art and dance. The school is aware of strengths and weaknesses in subject performance and quick to take effective action. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds do at least as well as other students. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is above average. Students make outstanding progress and achieve A-level results that are consistently in the top 1% of all sixth forms nationally. Students' total points score is exceptionally high because they take more subjects than is usually the case and achieve very high grades in each subject. Attainment is very high in almost all subjects and particularly so in biology and chemistry. This is a result of the school's specialist status and the emphasis put on these aspects of science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students are highly motivated, confident and considerate. They work well together and support each other's learning. Relationships between staff and students are very good, resulting in an excellent ethos in which students can try out new ideas. The girls are confident and express their opinions clearly. Their behaviour and attitudes are exemplary. They say there is very little bullying in the school. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They appreciate the canteen's healthy menu and Years 7 to 11 benefit from good provision for physical education. Sixth formers are leading an initiative on Healthy Schools, and have requested timetabled physical education in addition to the opportunities for sport currently available. Students are given many opportunities to take responsibility and show initiative. The sixth form holds a core position in the school, providing mentors, running clubs such as the Veterinary Society and taking the upper school assembly each week. The highly respected Student Council takes a lead in organising some events. Attendance is above average. Students say they enjoy

being in school. They develop very good skills for their future economic well-being and benefit from work experience that allows them to participate rather than merely observe. Many sixth form students do voluntary work in the community, for example working in a nature reserve or teaching swimming. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. All year groups, including the sixth form, have religious education, and students gain a deep understanding of different beliefs and rituals. Citizenship lessons provide an excellent platform for discussing moral and social issues. Visiting speakers make a significant contribution to the personal, social and health education and citizenship (PSHCE) programme. Students raise substantial sums for charity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's own judgement that teaching is good. During the inspection, most of the lessons seen were good or better and a significant proportion were outstanding. Students' outstanding achievement is a result of good teaching, together with their own determination, high quality pastoral care and the high expectations that are enshrined in the school's ethos. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and give clear explanations. Learning is enhanced by very good relationships and students' very good motivation. In the best lessons, teachers inspire students by their enthusiasm, and make full use of time through skilful use of methods that engage all the students actively. Students' progress is enhanced by high quality feedback and opportunities to assess their own and others' work. In weaker lessons, teachers do not plan enough opportunities for students to work independently or in groups. Some lessons lack excitement and pace. In these lessons, students learn passively and are not fully challenged at their own level. It is a school priority to develop teaching methods that match students' preferred learning styles, although this work is at an early stage. Marking is good. Students' attainment is assessed and monitored well. They are given targets and know how to improve their work. Students are prepared for examinations very effectively. They appreciate the additional help that teachers willingly provide. The coursework done in the sixth form is imaginative and of a very high standard.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and meets students' needs very well. In Years 7 to 11, all students take a broad and balanced range of subjects. They have a wide choice of GCSE courses and most take 10 or 11 subjects. The sixth form offers a good choice of A-level courses. Most students take four courses in Years 12 and 13, as well as general studies. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and improved. Recent new courses include AS engineering and AS-level critical thinking. The use of information and communication technology to support learning has been much improved since the last

inspection, although the school recognises that it could still be used more. PSHCE is good in the main school and the sixth form and includes outstanding careers education. Students' enterprise and work-related skills are developed well. The science specialism has brought new opportunities. Students work with pupils from primary and special schools, for example, and are challenged by national competitions. Students have outstanding opportunities to develop their interests, skills and initiative through extra-curricular activities. There is a very wide range of clubs and participation is high. The school's ethos encourages enterprise and leadership. Students regularly take the initiative to help others and organise their own activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Students feel safe and are confident to turn to any member of staff for advice. The pastoral system is extremely thorough and well developed. It enables issues to be identified rapidly, and provides a very supportive framework for the girls throughout their school careers. Some students volunteer to be trained as active listeners for their peers, and a drop-in service is provided by the student adviser. Form tutors, who stay with their groups from Year 7 to 11, know their students very well. Child protection procedures are good and the school has outstanding links with other agencies. A tracking system monitors the effectiveness of the support provided for vulnerable students. There are good procedures to identify and support students who are in danger of underachieving. A carefully planned transition programme for Year 7 effectively supports new students in settling in. The guidance provided on educational and career opportunities is excellent. Most students choose to stay on into the sixth form. Good induction enables new students in Year 12 to become integrated quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides exceptionally clear direction, high quality strategic thinking and a strong determination to keep the school improving. She is very well supported by the leadership team. Students' well-being and achievements in the widest sense are at the heart of all that the school does. Middle managers are guided by clear expectations for their work. They are well supported by the leadership team and are held to account for the quality of their work. Most staff are very committed to ensuring that students achieve their full potential. School leaders contribute well to the school's capacity to improve to the extremely positive impact of its status as a science college. The school knows itself well and has accurately identified its priorities for development. Staff and governors are involved in determining the development plan. However, the process of self-evaluation and planning is not fully rigorous and, as a result, there is some variation in the quality of departmental planning. Parents are very pleased with the school and many think it is excellent, although a minority feel that their views are not sought regularly enough. Governors provide outstanding support for the school's strategic development, making

maximum use of their extensive expertise and links with the local community. They know the school very well and are both supportive and challenging. Finances are very well managed and the school is very active in raising additional funds to improve its facilities. Value for money is outstanding. The accommodation has been significantly improved in recent years, largely through the school's own efforts, although it is still too limited in physical education and some classes are taught in old temporary classrooms.

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

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	1	

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?	1	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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
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	1	
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

Thank you for your help and friendly welcome when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed our visit. Many of you told us that you enjoy school and we could see that this is the case. You go to an outstanding school that gives you excellent opportunities to achieve your very best, both in examination results and in the many other activities that you take part in. We were impressed by your excellent behaviour and your interest in learning. We were pleased to see your concern for others and the very significant contribution that you make to the school and the wider community, often through your own initiative. Sixth form students in particular provide very good support for younger students, and through this develop their own leadership skills. Most of you make excellent progress and achieve exceptionally high results in GCSE and A-level examinations. This is partly due to good teaching, but you also contribute very well through your own determination to do well, encouraged by the school's high expectations. The teachers provide very good support and care. The quality of teaching is good. There are some outstanding lessons where the work is particularly interesting and you can get really involved and use your initiative to learn new things. Some other lessons are not so good, however, because you have less to do and are not always fully challenged, although you still learn well. We have asked the school to use more teaching methods that involve you more actively. Outside lessons, you have outstanding opportunities to develop your interests and skills. These develop your ability to take initiative and be enterprising and prepare you very well for your future lives. The school has an excellent ethos. Staff and governors work very well together to provide the very best education and to keep improving the school. We are confident that the school will continue to improve and wish you every success in the future.