



# Hitchin Girls' School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 117503  
**LEA** HERTFORDSHIRE LEA  
**Inspection number** 280099  
**Inspection dates** 28 November 2005 to 29 November 2005  
**Reporting inspector** Mrs. Lynne Blakelock LI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Highbury Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		SG4 9RS
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls	<b>Telephone number</b>	01462621300
<b>Number on roll</b>	1037	<b>Fax number</b>	01462621301
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr. Colin Minton
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs. Rhoda Edwards

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 18	<b>Inspection dates</b> 28 November 2005 - 29 November 2005	<b>Inspection number</b> 280099
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Hitchin Girls is a very popular school. It is of average size and part of a post-sixteen consortium and was awarded Science College status in 2004. Pupils come from Hitchin and a few neighbouring villages. Most of them are of White British heritage, but about one fifth are from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This reflects the local community. Few come from homes which experience economic hardship and the number of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and statements of SEN is very low compared with the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

The school is providing consistently good education for all its pupils. This closely matches the school's own evaluation of its performance. The standards and progress of pupils are good. This is because the quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes outstanding, and because staff have high expectations. Lessons are planned well, with many opportunities given to pupils for independent learning. However, work appropriate for all ability levels is not always provided. Since the last inspection, the improved provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has made learning more exciting. Pupils are well cared for and are supported in their learning by detailed tracking and monitoring of their progress. Pupils' personal development is good, with attendance being outstanding. The school has gained the Healthy Schools accreditation and is committed to helping pupils to lead healthy lifestyles. They feel safe and enjoy the many opportunities they are offered to take responsibility and develop as young leaders. However, the attitudes and behaviour of a very small proportion of pupils are having a negative effect on the learning environment in one or two classes and there is no consistent practice in dealing with them effectively. The curriculum is good, with some innovative features, and meets the needs of all learners. However, despite improved provision given to the teaching of religious education (RE) in the sixth form, this needs further extending. The high quality support and guidance provided at the end of Year 11 and Year 13 needs strengthening further for a very small minority of pupils. The school is led and managed well, with the governing body an active partner in helping the school to make further progress. This is being aided by regular and searching self-assessment. The school gives good value for money. It has made good progress since the last inspection. This includes the arrangements for a daily act of worship which are now in the process of being implemented fully. The extra provision in place for sixth form religious education needs further extension. The school has gained Science College status, built up the sixth form consortium and been awarded Sportsmark Gold and Artsmark silver. It has good capacity to improve.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The proportion of students gaining pass grades has been consistently high and above the national average. The school is aware that there is some variation in attainment from year to year and between different subjects and has responded to this with increased monitoring. Overall, students make good progress from high grades at GCSE level, with the majority choosing to go to university. Teaching and learning are good, with a focus on independent and collaborative learning. The consortium with two other local schools has extended the choice of academic and vocational subjects. Preparation for university is very good but support for those choosing other options is more limited. A compulsory AS-level module in critical thinking, introduced in September 2005, has broadened study skills. Although some ethical and religious ideas are discussed in lessons, statutory requirements for RE are not yet fully met because learning is not planned in enough

depth. Students participate well in charity work and contribute effectively to the school's social and academic life. Many take responsibility for mentoring younger students, buddying and running clubs. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form monitors and reviews students' progress and attainment regularly to help raise standards. As part of the consortium, the sixth form has open access. Nearly all students who start their AS courses follow through to full advanced level courses.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure effective and consistent implementation of its behaviour management policies.
- Take steps to ensure that learning activities are matched more closely to pupils' needs and abilities.
- Provide a very high quality of guidance and support to all pupils at transition stages.
- Extend further the provision for 6th form religious education.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

The overall achievement of pupils is good. Pupils enter the school with attainment above the national average, make good progress and reach standards well above the national average by the end of Year 11. The school enables all pupils to be successful. The proportion of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A\*-G has been consistently above the national average. Achievement in the sixth form is good; standards are well above average and students make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. There is some variation in performance across subjects. At the end of year 9 although the proportion of pupils reaching the national standard in English, mathematics and science is high, the proportion obtaining the higher levels is significantly higher in mathematics and lower in science. Achievement in science is lower overall than that in mathematics and English. At GCSE, there is no significant variation in the proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A\*-C. Where there has been underperformance in a subject the school has quickly identified the reasons and rectified the situation for the following year. Overall, pupils' performance at Key Stage 4 has been consistently well above the national average. The school sets itself and pupils challenging targets based on predictions from a range of indicators although it does not always reach these targets. In the sixth form most students achieve or exceed targets.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Personal development is good. Every pupil is valued and respected. Attendance is outstanding. Most pupils conduct themselves well, display positive attitudes and clearly enjoy school. Behaviour around the school is good. A very small proportion, however, display unacceptable behaviour which, on a very few occasions, disrupts the learning of others. There is a small amount of bullying, but pupils feel that it is dealt with fairly and promptly. Parents give good support to their children's learning. Pupils' moral,

social and cultural development is good, with some outstanding aspects. The Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education programme makes a significant contribution to this. In a Year 7 citizenship lesson, pupils discussed in a mature way the rules and responsibilities of living in a community. Emily's garden is a memorial to a former pupil and gives pupils the opportunity to reflect on Emily's life and put their feelings into action by tending and developing the beautiful garden. From when they first arrive at the school, pupils assume responsibilities very well and develop very good skills in working with others. The school council is very effective; pupils feel their opinions are acted upon, as exemplified by the improvements in the cafeteria. Many pupils gain confidence and new skills through involvement in the many extra-curricular activities offered. The development of healthy lifestyles and personal safety is good. Pupils and students feel the school is a safe place in which they can always find someone to support them. Community links are good and the school prepares pupils well with the skills needed in life after school.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning are good. During the inspection the majority of lessons observed were good, with very few being unsatisfactory. In nearly all lessons, teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge. They plan lessons thoroughly and a number include many challenging and varied activities. Very good relationships are evident in most lessons. Many pupils enjoy learning and take pride in their work, presenting it carefully. Pupils like opportunities to work in groups, as in a Year 7 drama lesson on improvisation. Teachers encourage independence and self-assessment and generally manage behaviour well. However, they occasionally do not deal effectively with low levels of disruption caused by a small group of pupils, which causes disruption to the learning of others. The weaker lessons lack pace and are not always adapted sufficiently to the range of pupils' needs and their attention wanders as a result. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported whilst the varied and innovative provision for gifted and talented pupils is being implemented and extended. Assessment is good and is thoroughly monitored. Most teachers set clear and challenging targets which pupils know and understand. The quality of the marking of pupils' work is helpful, so that pupils understand what they need to do to improve.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced in all years although the provision for 6th form religious education needs extending further. It offers pupils a good range of subjects complemented by well organised personal, social and health education, including a work experience placement in Year 11. Pupils say that since achieving Science College status, lessons in science are more interesting. Relevant and some exciting innovations, such as master classes for accelerated learning in mathematics,

science, art and classics are now being taught. A good feature of careers guidance is that all Year 9 pupils have spent time in Stevenage finding out from employers about jobs in science. The development of vocational subjects through a college link has broadened pupils' options. All Year 10 and 11 pupils practise enterprise skills during a team building day, and a BTEC business course has been successfully introduced. Provision of ICT has improved since the last inspection; pupils use it competently and increasingly in subjects to explore ideas and present work. Pupils have many opportunities in sport, music, drama and other after-school clubs. Links with local organisations are strong and enhance the curriculum.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and friendly. New pupils are supported through 'buddying', and sixth form mentors help younger pupils. Pupils speak warmly about the school. Most make good progress, and this includes the small number with special educational needs who are well supported and helped by support staff who use innovative teaching strategies. The school ensures a safe environment by using identity cards and monitoring access by closed circuit television. Audits ensure the site and equipment are safe. Robust child protection procedures are in place. Diagnostic testing helps pupils make good progress, but the quality of feedback is variable. Pupils' progress is monitored well, and demanding but achievable targets are set. Parents have a positive view of the school overall and the school is aware of any concerns they have and is trying to act on them. The school has effective links with further education and post-16 providers. Pupils receive careers advice but the guidance for transition to GCSE and post-16 courses is an area where pupils feel they need more support.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher communicates a clear vision for the school's development. She and senior staff are focused on raising standards. The school's regular process of review, precise planning for development, and self-assessment are instrumental in the good achievement of pupils. The school is also committed to, and offers, a learning environment which provides effectively for all pupils to develop skills and qualities that will prepare them for their future lives. Well established procedures are in place to monitor the school's performance and that of individual subjects, with middle managers playing an important role. Systems for observing and monitoring teaching are rigorous and help to raise teaching standards. However, there needs to be more rigour in the monitoring and evaluation of policies. The school has an accurate understanding of its performance and has identified the areas requiring development. Its strategies to enable parents to secure more involvement in pupils' progress are being appreciated, with parents being generally very supportive of the school. The appointment of a 14-19 coordinator is evidence of the commitment of the management team to offer a varied and relevant curriculum

for the twenty-first century. Both the award of Science College status and the sixth form consortium have resulted in improved provision and a greater variety of opportunities. Resources are managed well and value for money is good. However, there is insufficient accommodation in physical education (PE) to enable the department to extend the curriculum further and the school is aware it needs to improve wheelchair access. Governance of the school is good. Governors have a clear focus on the main priorities and bring experience and skills which provide challenge for further improvement. However, there is no daily act of collective worship and statutory requirements are therefore still not met. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the standards achieved, and there is good capacity for further improvement.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
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

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

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
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	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	insufficient evidence

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
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**

I am writing to tell you about the results of your inspection. First, however, I want to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your helpfulness and politeness to us during our visit. The inspection team found that your school is a good school. You make good progress and achieve high standards. This is because your teachers plan and prepare lessons which usually challenge you so that you have to work hard. Results of tests in Year 9 and exams in Year 11 and the sixth form are considerably above the national average. Most of you behave well in lessons and around the school. Teachers review your progress carefully, and marking tells you how to improve your work. Your school is providing you with a varied and increasing number of courses which give you choices to suit your interests. We were pleased to see that you have more opportunities to use ICT in lessons and that you appreciate the cyber cafe. We were impressed with the work of the school council and the positive changes you have been able to make, such as the wide range of healthy food now available in the cafeteria. There are some aspects, however, that need to improve. A very small proportion of you behave unacceptably in lessons and do not show respect to your teachers. This stops a few of you making as much progress as you can. We think your school needs to make sure that there is a common school approach to this problem. We also think that the school needs to make sure that in every lesson the work you are given to do is at the correct level for you all to make as much progress as you can. Although your careers advice is good, your school now needs to provide a very high quality of guidance and support to all pupils at the end of Year 11 and Year 13. We are confident that your school can continue to improve. We wish you well in the future.