



Didcot Girls' School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123260
LEA Oxfordshire LEA
Inspection number 281444
Inspection dates 7 March 2006 to 8 March 2006
Reporting inspector Janet Mercer

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Sherwood Road
School category	Community		Didcot
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		OX11 0DA
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01235 812092
Number on roll	1406	Fax number	01235 511245
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Robert Fitchett
Date of previous inspection	30 October 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Paula Taylor-Moore

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 7 March 2006 - 8 March 2006	Inspection number 281444
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Didcot Girls' school is a larger than average comprehensive school for girls aged 11-18 with language college status. The total number of girls is at present 1406. The school operates a mixed sixth form of 450 students in co-operation with St. Birinus Boys' School. All ranges of ability are catered for and pupils are attracted from a wide catchment area involving 41 primary schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils from minority ethnic groups, pupils with special educational needs and those with statements of special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language are all lower than the national average. Attendance rates are higher than average and unauthorised absence is very low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Didcot Girls' School provides a good standard of education and excellent care. Pupils make good progress and examination results are above average at all stages in the school. Teaching is good and most pupils enjoy their learning.

The curriculum provides a good range of options for pupils, including the innovative, alternative curriculum for disaffected pupils at risk of dropping out of school. The personal development curriculum is outstanding. The school's status as a specialist language college has generated a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop international links. Work with an extensive range of external partners ensures pupils' well-being and productive links with primary schools help pupils to settle in to school quickly.

The school demonstrates a clear commitment to social and educational inclusion in all its activities. Leadership and management are good across the school and the senior leadership team set a very clear direction for future developments. Effective action has been taken to make improvements since the last inspection. The school's self evaluation is honest and accurate and the capacity to improve further is good. Senior managers are committed to implementing quality improvement systems in all areas of the school to raise standards further. They have a clear understanding of the need to raise the expectations and achievement of pupils with lower prior attainment. Governors carry out their responsibilities and are supportive of the school. Finances are well managed and the school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form staff have worked very hard on collaboration with the local boys' school so that a broad and increasing range of courses are available to sixth form students. The sixth form is well organised and led. Pass rates are above average. Students make good progress and this is closely monitored throughout their courses. Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding practice. The school has a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development. An action plan to improve effectiveness has been drawn up and this is regularly reviewed. Students are positive, mature and confident they receive good support and guidance and feel well supported in all areas of school life.

What the school should do to improve further

* continue to implement the school's quality improvement systems to raise standards in all areas* raise teacher expectations and achievement of pupils with lower prior attainment.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good at all stages in the school. Pupils start school with average prior attainment and achieve above average results in national tests at the end of Year 9. A high proportion of pupils achieve the higher levels in core subjects. The proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE has been consistently above average for the past 5 years. Pupils' average point scores have also risen steadily and are above average, especially in English. Pupils make good progress throughout their time in the school and most meet the demanding targets set. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported and most make good progress. The school has identified a small number of pupils with emotional or behavioural difficulties whose progress was a little less than expected. Such pupils are well supported through the Route 66 pupil support centre. Pupils develop good literacy and communication skills and are able to participate well in class discussions. They take care in the presentation of their work and most enjoy their learning. Achievements in the sixth form are good and above average. A-level pass rates have improved over the last 3 years and students make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The majority of pupils are happy to come to school where they feel safe and well cared for. The school's new behaviour strategy, 'Our Values', developed in consultation with pupils, is displayed in all school areas. It is well understood by both pupils and staff and is supported by a structured system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils report that since its introduction there has been an improvement in behaviour. Inspectors observed good behaviour in classes and around the school. Attendance is above average, and the school, has introduced effective strategies to deal with those pupils who are consistently absent, including an effective attendance worker. Bullying is rare, and pupils appreciate the peer mentoring system, which provides them with senior pupils with whom they feel comfortable to report incidents. The school seeks the views of its pupils through the effective school council. There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop spiritual, cultural and moral awareness and their social skills. Many take part in extra-curricular clubs, and accept responsibilities as peer mentors and lead members of the school 'drop in' buddy club. Pupils make many positive contributions to the wider community, for example through their involvement in supporting primary schools as part of their fund raising activities. An outstanding personal development curriculum equips pupils with the skills to take responsibility for their own decisions. The school is improving provision to encourage a healthier lifestyle for all pupils. Pupils themselves feel that there is more they can do towards adopting a healthy lifestyle.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall with much that is very good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge which is used well to support learning. Good relationships exist between the staff and pupils. Lessons are well planned, often carefully structured and teachers set clear learning objectives. This makes a strong contribution to pupils' enjoyment of lessons. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning and has a comprehensive programme of staff development in place. Colleagues work alongside one another to develop individual strengths and to increase subject knowledge. Initiatives to improve teaching and learning have been introduced which have made learning productive and contributed to improvements. Opportunities for independent work are improving and the needs of different groups are generally well catered for. While marking in some subjects provides very helpful feedback to pupils on how to improve, this is not consistent across the school. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form understand this more clearly than those in Years 7, 8 and 9. Behaviour management strategies have been adopted to ensure pupils work hard and with determination. Pupils' work is valued and there are high quality displays around the school of what they have achieved both in and outside the school day. There is an awareness in the sixth form of how to meet challenging targets and very positive relationships exist. Teachers make it very clear what students have to do to reach course requirements. The school is regularly reviewing the curriculum to ensure all pupils can purposefully learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some very good aspects. Recent reviews reflect the school's strong commitment to meeting the needs of the individual pupil. Changes have taken place, and more are planned, to allow greater flexibility. In French and music, Year 8 and 9 pupils successfully access GCSE courses, and in Years 10 and 11 they take AS level business studies and music. For those pupils in Year 11 who are unlikely to successfully complete their GCSE courses the school provides the very good "Work Place" opportunity. This offers a small number of pupils the opportunity to combine basic skills, such as information and communication technology, with a range of enterprise skills. The school is aware that it is not currently meeting the statutory requirements for physical education in Years 10 and 11, and has plans to extend the provision, when new sports facilities become available. While the school makes very good provision for citizenship, it does not assess or report to parents on this aspect of work.

The specialist language college status is having a positive influence on pupils' achievement, and extends to some very effective support for local primary schools. The school has been particularly active in developing a wide range of international links including some with countries such as Uganda and China. Pupils visit numerous

foreign countries including a health and social care trip to Sweden. The school provides a good extra-curricular programme.

Students in the sixth form are offered a good range of examination options, and these increasingly include vocational courses such as travel and tourism. Students are well prepared for further stages in their education and their future careers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Pupils feel happy at the school and know that adults will help them and care about their success. They feel safe from bullying and know that action will be swift and effective. There are very good links with local primary schools that help pupils to settle easily into school. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported, particularly by specialist teaching assistants. Procedures to monitor pupils' personal and academic progress are developing well so that pupils have clear targets, which help them to achieve. There are outstanding links with an extensive range of external services and agencies, which ensure pupils well-being. For example, these partnerships provide support on issues relating to stress, bereavement counselling and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Pupils in Year 9 receive very good guidance in a variety of ways to help them choose the subjects they study in Years 10 and 11. They also benefit from a good range of careers advice and work experience in Years 10 and 11. The school provides good links to the next stage of their education with a programme of support for sixth form students going to university and to employment. Pupils' safety is ensured through rigorous health and safety and child protection procedures.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher has shown outstanding leadership since her appointment three years ago. The senior leadership team have brought about extensive improvements and have a very clear vision for the future. The commitment to raising achievement is embedded across the school by enabling staff at all levels to take responsibility and contribute to school development. The good self-evaluation procedure undertaken for the whole school is being strongly promoted as a tool to evaluate and raise the quality of work in departments. Governors are supportive and committed to the school. They contribute to strategic planning and consider developments carefully. Monitoring of teaching and learning has been a major thrust and continues to develop although there is diversity of approach between departments. The use of performance data to set targets, track pupils' achievements, and evaluate the curriculum has increased significantly since the last inspection when it was a key issue. A strong commitment to inclusion is central to the school vision so that all pupils are given equal opportunities. This is particularly manifest in the very good provision for pupils with learning needs and disabilities, gifted and talented pupils and also in the quality of care in the school. Staff are well qualified and meet

the needs of the curriculum with few areas experiencing recruitment difficulty. Support for staff professional development is very good. Finances are well managed despite a small deficit in the budget. The school provides good value for money.

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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	2
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	
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ 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

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	2	
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	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	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?	2	2
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	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	3	
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

Pupils

My colleagues and I greatly enjoyed visiting your school on the 7th and 8th of March. Thank you for making us feel welcome and for talking to us, both in some of your lessons and in other groups. Many of you told us that you enjoy school and the many different activities which you take part in. Some of your parents or carers responded to a confidential questionnaire and we also took their views and concerns into account when making our judgements. We encourage you to read the report as it will let you know in more detail what your school does well and how you can help your school to be even better.

Didcot Girls' School is a good school which provides outstanding care and support and enables most of you to achieve well. The main strengths are: * above average results in Key Stage 3 tests, GCSE and A level examinations* the good progress you make in your work* excellent opportunities for personal development * much good teaching* very good relationships between staff and pupils * good behaviour in lessons and around the school* a good choice of courses and options at all stages* excellent care, guidance and support for pupils* effective leadership and management by the head teacher and senior staff

We have made a few recommendations, in order to make a good school even better. The school should* continue to implement the school's quality improvement systems to raise standards in all areas* raise teacher expectations and achievement of pupils with lower prior attainment.

With best wishes,

Janet Mercer

Her Majesty's Inspector