



Tolworth Girls' School and Centre for Continuing Education

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 102603
Local Authority Kingston Upon Thames
Inspection number 286438
Inspection dates 14–15 February 2007
Reporting inspector Cathie Munt HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)	School address	Fullers Way North
School category	Community		Surbiton
Age range of pupils	11–18		KT6 7LQ
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	020 8397 3854
Number on roll (school)	1394	Fax number	020 8974 2600
Number on roll (6th form)	350		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Don Leask
		Headteacher	Mrs Clarissa Williams
Date of previous school inspection	28 October 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	14–15 February 2007	286438

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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

Tolworth, a large, over-subscribed, non-selective, secondary modern girls' school with a mixed sixth form is situated in a local authority which retains selection at 11+. Most Year 11 girls apply to the large and still increasing sixth form. They are joined by girls and boys from other schools. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is greater than average as is the proportion speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is below the average as is the number known to be eligible for free meals. Attainment on entry covers the entire range with a very slightly larger proportion of higher attaining students than average. The school has earned many national awards including Investors in People, Healthy Schools and Artsmark Gold. In 2000 it acquired Training School status and this has been extended to 2009. It has been a Leading Edge school since 2004 and became a Specialist Technology School in 2005. It is aiming to acquire Foundation Status in the spring of 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'A school is only as good as all those who together form the sum of its parts', said the headteacher at a recent parents' meeting. This indeed is the essence of the leadership and management at Tolworth Girls' School. Everyone has a vital role to play in raising the students' aspirations and in promoting the high standards that are achieved. Together the staff, governors and students have created an exceptional school where learning flourishes and where the notion of service to the community permeates leadership and governance. The school provides an outstanding caring and supporting environment where all students feel safe from the time that they enter the school, develop their personal qualities and make excellent progress towards their set targets. The overwhelming majority of the large number of parents who replied to the questionnaire was most positive about the quality of education that their children receive. 'A brilliant school led by a fantastic enthusiastic head and a team of dedicated teachers' wrote one parent. 'Professionalism at its best' wrote another. The few concerns, voiced by a small number of respondents, showed no overall pattern and were mainly related to individual students.

Given their starting points, the progress made by the great majority of students is exceptional and high standards have been maintained over time. Standards in the sixth form are above average. However, changes in leadership have delayed adaptations to meet the increasing numbers and the changing needs of the sixth form students. Factors that contribute to the high achievement include initiatives to improve students' learning associated with the school's specialism as a Technology College, the continuing high expectations of a very stable staff and the access that students have to other support agencies. Good and outstanding teaching helps students to capitalise on their learning and to make rapid progress throughout their time in school. The most able students and those with particular talents are encouraged to join a national group for gifted and talented students.

A high level of commitment from all of the staff plays an important part in ensuring that the personal development and well-being of the students are outstanding. This includes those students who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. A parent whose child 'dislikes any school' noted how helpful their daughter's 'form tutor, head of year and attendance officer have been', a clear example of the school's effective, collaborative approach to supporting students. Most students have well-developed social skills and understand why they should adopt healthy lifestyles. Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average.

An excellent curriculum is enriched by an extensive and outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. Three Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) provide expert advice within the school and work most productively with partner institutions. The school has been resourceful in making the best use of facilities to meet the needs of the students. However, the limitations imposed by the lack of space and the desire to extend the curriculum further are behind the governors' decision to become a Foundation School. During this time of transition there is the potential for attention to be deflected from raising standards. This is the challenge facing the staff and

governors. The school's very good track record of managing change and governance, which is of an exceptionally high quality, is one of the many factors in the school's continued success.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the sixth form is good. Standards are above average. Students achieve well in their chosen courses, given the school's open access policy. While present leadership and management are good, recent changes in the leadership of the sixth form has restricted the monitoring of key areas such as teaching and learning and curriculum. This has slowed down adaptations to meet the increasing numbers and changing needs of the sixth form students.

More than half of the Year 11 students regularly join the sixth form in addition to increasingly large numbers of girls and boys from other schools. Most remain to complete their courses. Their attitudes are extremely positive and their behaviour is a credit to them. However, they do not consistently follow the signing in system to enable the school to know when they are present. Students have access to a good curriculum with options covering an extensive range of academic courses. The school recognises that not all students are catered for effectively enough by the present range of non A-level courses and solutions are being explored. Students' personal development is good. They communicate confidently with adults, and feel well supported by them. Working relationships are productive. A typical comment made by the students was 'Teachers care about our futures'. Students are well looked after but they consider that more opportunities to discuss their progress with subject teachers would enhance the already effective support systems. Teaching and learning are generally good. Students appreciate teachers' enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, their subject areas as well as the encouragement that they receive to work independently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that during the process of acquiring Foundation Status the school's focus remains on maintaining high standards.
- Develop provision in the sixth form so that it more fully matches the needs of all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are high and achievement is outstanding. In 2005 standards in Year 9 were well above national averages in English, mathematics and science. Results in 2006 indicate that these high standards have been maintained. In four of the five past years, the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, has been well above the national average. Given their starting points, the progress made by the great majority of students is exceptional. No groups underachieve. Those who have

learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress because of the very effective support they receive. Teachers track the progress of each individual carefully and give generously of their time to run 'booster' classes after school to enable students to attain higher grades than their prior attainment would have predicted. These classes are especially effective in supporting those who are on the borderline of achieving their full potential. Further factors that contribute to high achievement include the initiatives on improving students' learning associated with the school's specialism as a Technology College, the continuing high expectations of a very stable staff and the access that students have to other support agencies.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students are outstanding. Students engage extremely well with visitors and relationships throughout the school community are excellent. The majority of students enjoy coming to school and most attend regularly. The school has worked diligently to improve attendance and it is now in line with the national figure. This work is continuing. Teachers have high expectations and the vast majority of students treat the code of behaviour with respect.

High numbers take part in extra curricular sports and other activities. Students report that they feel safe in school because, as they were keen to mention, 'teachers deal with any bullying quickly and confidentially'. They respond well to safety rules and adopt safe practice both in lessons and during breaks and lunchtime when they move about the narrow corridors sensibly. Students understand why they should adopt healthy lifestyles. They make very good use of the facilities provided in the extremely cramped dining hall and its increasingly healthy options. Students willingly take responsibility. For example, they act as 'help liners' supporting younger girls, take a great interest in the effective school council and are actively involved in the interview process for new staff.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall. Most students have well-developed social skills and are keen to talk about their work. Diversity is celebrated through specific activities, such as the Black History Month and the school ethos underpins their moral development. Aware of those less fortunate than themselves, students take part in many fund raising activities. They successfully participate in a range of programmes, such as Learn to Earn and Enterprise Days, which make an outstanding contribution to their economic well being. Programmed 'babies' provide the students with an 'exhausting' insight into parenthood and add a relevant practical dimension to personal, social and health studies.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good teaching and learning in all years meets the needs of all students and results in them making consistently good progress in lessons. Pockets of outstanding practice in departments throughout the school provide fine exemplars and help raise the overall achievement of students. In the best lessons there are a variety of well considered learning activities and students know exactly what is expected of them. In a Year 10 science lesson a well planned sequence of activities developed successfully and built impressively on students' prior knowledge of evolution. Good relationships between teachers and students and effective, unobtrusive class management underpin the quality of learning. When given the opportunity, students work well together as pairs or small groups. This contributes well to their enjoyment of learning. Teaching assistants (TAs) support students effectively. A pupil commented, 'The TAs are lovely, they really help you to learn.' While marking generally was helpful, in a few instances it was not good enough, leaving students unaware of what they could do to improve their performance. In a small proportion of lessons teachers were not effective in their summing up of what had been learned and they did not involve students enough in evaluating this.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides an excellent curriculum for all its students. It is enriched by an extensive and outstanding range of extra-curricular activities including visits and opportunities for residential experience. Participation in these activities by students of all ages is very high. Specialist College status and the curriculum initiatives subsequently introduced make a very strong contribution to high standards. For example, the Jewellery Project day led by a professional artist enabled students to apply their literacy, numeracy and technological skills in a vocational context. Programmes of study are regularly reviewed and changes made are having a positive impact on standards. Advanced Skills Teachers provide strong catalysts for curriculum innovation that meets students' needs more effectively. In mathematics a girl commented - 'I think my mathematics has improved - I didn't like it that much before - but now I love it.' The school offers a wide choice of options in Years 10 and 11 and almost all students are able to study the combination of subjects they prefer. The staff provides timely guidance for both students and their parents at the point when choices have to be made. Curriculum links with local primary schools and colleges are well established. The full citizenship programme of study is taught well, mainly through contributions from a number of subjects. The school recognises that assessment of citizenship is at an early stage.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides an outstanding caring and supportive environment where students feel safe, develop their personal qualities and make excellent progress towards their targets. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities and other vulnerable students are very well supported. Their progress towards targets set in their individual education and personal education plans is regularly monitored and evaluated. The use of tutor time is most effective in offering high quality pastoral and academic support to students. This adds considerably to the progress students make in lessons. Provision for ensuring health and safety is very strong. Child protection and risk assessment procedure are securely in place and staff are aware of their responsibilities. When appropriate, support is enhanced further by the involvement of outside professional agencies.

The monitoring and evaluation of assessment data to set academic targets is well established, as is baseline testing on entry to the school in Year 7. Regular reviews take place in which students and teachers are fully involved. However, some of the targets set could be sharper to enable students to have a clearer idea as to what they must do to meet them. Assessment of students with learning difficulties and other disabilities is also robust and those with a statement of special educational need are provided with good quality individual education plans (IEPs) as they progress through the school. There are effective procedures in place to support those students with English as an additional language.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership of the school has been extremely effective in maintaining high standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of learners. Throughout the school there is a common sense of purpose among staff and students resulting in an ethos where students can grow and develop socially and academically and where the needs of the individual are of prime concern. This is promoted most successfully by the highly committed and purposeful headteacher and the able senior leadership team. Her management enables staff to give of their best and to continually consider ways of improving the provision for the students. A high proportion of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire. Parents have a high regard for the leadership and management of the school and, although a few parents voiced individual concerns, the overwhelming majority were most positive in their opinion about the quality of education that their children receive.

Self-evaluation has developed well and takes into account the views of staff and governors. Subject managers show a particularly good understanding of their subject's strengths and weaknesses and have developed a range of strategies to sustain

improvement. Results show that these are effective. Teachers work closely with local schools and colleges. They provide a valuable service using their skills and knowledge to spread the benefit of the school's specialist status. Extensive links with other outside agencies support the school's work admirably. The school's excellent provision and support for students who have emotional and behavioural difficulties is a fine example of its inclusive environment for all learners. By engaging these students, the school is effectively dismantling many of the barriers to their learning.

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis under the efficient and effective organisation of the administrative staff. Robust vetting procedures for all adults who work with learners are in place. However the system of signing out for sixth form students required tightening up. The school is introducing a new system after half term.

The school has a good capacity to improve. The headteacher's purposeful leadership, the senior team's cohesiveness and their clear sense of direction and support for staff have enabled issues from the last inspection to be addressed suitably. Governance is of an exceptionally high quality and is one of the many factors in the school's continued success. The buildings vary in quality and while newer blocks provide light and well designed teaching areas, older parts of the buildings are less suited to independent learning. The school has been resourceful in making the best use of facilities to meet the needs of the students. However, the limitations imposed by the lack of space, together with the desire to extend the curriculum further, are behind the governors' decision to move to Foundation Status. While this process had the potential to divert attention from raising standards, there is ample evidence that the leadership team and the governing body maintained their efficiency, fulfilling their obligations most effectively.

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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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The attendance of learners	3	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

When your school was inspected recently, my colleagues and I enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views. We agree with your parents and carers that this is an outstanding school with a very strong focus on learning and a highly supportive and caring atmosphere. Many of you do very well in exams and all of you make really good progress because, in addition to good teaching, a wide range of additional support helps you understand and complete your work.

Your teachers work very hard, and expect you to do the same, they care for you well and you feel safe and enjoy coming to school. I am pleased to note that your attendance has improved and is now the same as that for secondary schools. You should take a great deal of credit for this. Can I challenge you to go that extra mile and beat this next year? You have a clear sense of right and wrong and the great majority of you behave well. Those of you who find it difficult to manage your feelings get very good support from the TAs and other adults. Most of you want to do well and are keen to contribute to the life of the school. Older students play a valuable role when they support younger ones. We know that you understand the importance of having a healthy lifestyle and staying safe but we were concerned to see that sixth formers did not always sign in and out. It is vital that the school knows who is on the premises in case of an evacuation or some other emergency. Please co-operate sensibly with your teachers and help to make the new system that is being put in place work effectively. Your safety is of the highest concern to us all.

The curriculum is exceptionally well matched to the needs of students in Years 7 to 11 but we agree with the staff that they need to develop additional courses for the sixth form. The school's specialist status brings enormous benefits including a rich variety of additional educational and vocational opportunities. The jewellery that you made was quite beautiful and I know that you learn an awful lot about being a parent from your time with the programmed 'babies'. Staff provide you with very helpful guidance about the next stage of your education but sixth formers would appreciate more opportunities to discuss their progress individually and we have asked the school to provide this.

One of the main reasons for the success of your school is that you have a headteacher who is passionate about your development. She is very well supported by some talented staff in key leadership roles and by hardworking and committed teachers, support staff and governors. They are constantly seeking to improve the school because they want the very best for you. That is why the governors have applied for Foundation Status. While they are planning for the changes that this will bring about, we have asked them to ensure that they keep their eye on standards and make sure that you do as well next year as you have done over the last five or so years.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you every success at school and for the future.

Catherine MuntHer Majesty's Inspector