

Walthamstow School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103103
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	286558
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Tony Noonan HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	895
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Bennett
Headteacher	Rachel Macfarlane
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2002
School address	Church Hill Walthamstow London E17 9RZ
Telephone number	020 8509 9446
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Age group	11–16
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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

Walthamstow School for Girls is a comprehensive community school for girls aged 11–16. It is a popular school within the London Borough of Waltham Forest with a strong local reputation, currently providing for 895 students. It serves a socio-economically deprived area with a large number of students eligible for Free School Meals. Around four in five students are from minority ethnic groups with half having English as an additional language. The school gained specialist status as a mathematics and computing college in September 2004 and it is a Beacon school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Walthamstow School for Girls is an outstanding school. It is a very popular with a proud tradition of serving the local community for over one hundred years. Few schools in similar contexts do as well as this school to prepare students so well for life. The school was described as exceptional in its previous Ofsted inspection in 2002 and this high quality of provision has been maintained. Staff work hard to inspire students to embrace the school motto 'Neglect not the gift within thee'.

Although the attainment of students on entry to the school is below the national average, their standards are very high when they leave. Students obtain significantly better examination results than would be predicted based on their prior attainment. This positive picture is the case for all groups of students represented in the school. Almost all students progress into appropriate further education courses.

The behaviour of students is excellent. They participate enthusiastically in the broad range of extra-curricular activities. One parent commented: 'the school has identified and nurtured talents I didn't even know existed in my child!' Teaching and learning is outstanding with a clear sense of enjoyment evident in many lessons and enrichment activities. A broad curriculum is offered, but the school is rightly looking at ways to extend the range of vocational provision. Support for all vulnerable students is good because of the strong, specialist provision in school and the close links with various agencies. Students with learning difficulties and those with disabilities make very good progress and achieve very well. The large numbers of students with English as a second language are supported very effectively.

The school's capacity to improve is excellent. This is demonstrated by the improvements since the last inspection and the gaining of specialist status in mathematics and computing. Rigorous quality assurance processes and accurate self-evaluation oversee the high quality teaching and outstanding achievements. The exceptional leadership of the head teacher, well supported by an able senior leadership team and committed staff, make the school successful. This teamwork provides a strong framework for staff to ensure the school builds on and enhances its success when transferring to new school buildings.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the range of vocational provision
- Ensure accommodation and resources are enhanced through the Building Schools for the Future programme.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement and standards are outstanding. The attainment of students on entry to the school is lower than the national average, yet they achieve significantly better results than most similar schools. This represents real progress. In terms of value added measures, the school is in the top ten percentile rank for all subjects nationally. Results at Key Stage 3 are very good and exceed the targets agreed with the local authority. A high proportion of students gain the expected level 5 or higher in English, mathematics and science.

This high level of performance is maintained at Key Stage 4, where the school's trend of improvement is greater than is seen nationally. The proportion of students obtaining five or

more A* to C grade passes at GCSE/GNVQ was 76% in 2006. This is well above the national average of 58% and 12% higher than results achieved by girls. The pass rate including English and mathematics was 69%, compared to 44% nationally.

All groups of minority ethnic pupils in the school perform to this high standard. The performance of Pakistani, White British and Black Caribbean students is particularly high. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities receive very effective support and make very good progress from KS2 to 4. In 2006, all of these students gained five or more A* to G grades at GCSE.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This is outstanding. Students' enjoyment and appreciation of the school are reflected in good attendance. Students' behaviour is excellent. They get on exceptionally well with each other and with adults in the school. The atmosphere throughout the school is calm and relaxed. Students report that bullying is rare and when it does occur they know it is taken seriously and dealt with promptly. They feel safe and well supported by staff.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have a clear sense of fairness and respect the views of others. Students enjoy taking part in prayers and assemblies and their ability to contemplate is evident in many ways. Through the curriculum and enrichment activities, they experience moments of surprise and delight, humility and sympathy. Students are very innovative in raising money through enterprises such as 'Make your mark with a Tenner' and contribute to many local and international charities.

Students take pride in making their voices heard in the school and feel their views are listened to and acted upon. They are consulted well through sports and form representatives. The vigorous student council helps students to develop a sense of the democratic process. Students have a role in the appointment of staff and in the design of the new school buildings. Their cultural awareness is very strong because the school takes account of their diverse backgrounds, thus adding a rich dimension to the curriculum. Students know what is necessary to stay fit and make the most of the healthy food options offered at lunch time. They understand how to avoid unnecessary risks both in school and in the world outside. The attitudes and skills developed by students will support them very well through the next stage of their education and in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding because students rarely experience teaching which is less than good and much is excellent. From Year 7 teachers establish a strong learning culture, with a good emphasis on students' enjoyment of learning. Most lessons are well paced, stimulating and challenging, with students experiencing a good range of activities which encourage both collaboration with others and independence. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent.

Teachers and teaching assistants use a variety of effective strategies to ensure all students are engaged and motivated. They use their expert subject knowledge to make lessons exciting and relevant as, for example, in a geography lesson on the New Orleans flood. Effective use is being made of computer-linked whiteboards to make lessons come alive. Students respond

enthusiastically and are determined to do their best. They often ask searching questions of their teachers. While, in a few lessons, teachers talk too much, in many discussion is lively. This results in students making excellent progress.

Students' work is assessed thoroughly. Marking is helpful. Students know at what level they are working, what their target grades are and what they need to do to improve their work further. Some Year 11 students would appreciate greater rigour in planning for coursework deadlines for assessments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced, meeting all statutory requirements. A recent initiative in Year 7 is the 'Building Learning Power' course, which has successfully developed students' understanding of effective learning strategies. In Year 8 students have the opportunity to study non-examination activities of their choice, such as film making and salsa dancing. In Years 10 and 11, in addition to a compulsory core that includes ICT, students choose from a wide range of optional subjects including vocational courses in travel and tourism. While most students successfully aspire to achieving five or more, higher grades at GCSE, vocational pathways for 14 to 16 year-olds are under-developed. Senior leaders are currently involved in a local authority working party in planning for new vocational diplomas, linked, for example, with a local hospital.

For all ages, there is an effective programme of personal and social development, citizenship and religious education. Years 10 and 11 students speak enthusiastically of the quality of debate in religious education. Provision for students who have learning difficulties or disabilities is good.

There is an extensive programme of enrichment activities. As one parent wrote, the school 'has the most amazing range of extra-curricular activities' including some specifically targeted at the gifted and talented. Enterprise activities, industry days and college visits effectively prepare students for their progression from school and future economic well-being. Opportunities such as 'Young Entrepreneurs' are enthusiastically taken-up by students, with a school team recently winning a trip to New York in a national Business Plan competition. The award of mathematics and computing specialist status has enhanced facilities, increased the use of ICT across the school, and raised achievement in mathematics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's outstanding quality of care, guidance and support has a significant impact on students' well being, personal development and achievement. There are strong support systems that nurture academic achievement. For example, the school offers a range of study workshops, after school clubs and revision classes that provide very good subject support. Learning mentors, tutors and Heads of Year know their students very well and monitor their academic and personal development systematically. Students are set targets regularly. There are clear expectations of progress from year to year and from the pupils' starting points, which is tracked exceptionally well.

The school's arrangements to help students make a smooth transition from primary to secondary schools are excellent because of its strong links and outstanding preparatory work. Prospective Year 7 students receive a transition booklet giving them information about the school. If any

of them achieve below their expected level in the primary school, they are offered summer school sessions to enable them to catch up before starting school in the autumn term. Teachers receive very good information about students' prior attainment and individual needs, enabling them to provide effective support. Barriers to learning are removed before they become a problem.

All students are fully included in the life of the school. Students with learning difficulties and those with disabilities receive very effective support tailored to their needs. The high quality teaching and good work of support staff help students who are learning English as an additional language to take part in lessons normally. All adults in the school show a high level of commitment to ensure the health and safety of students. The school's policies and procedures for risk assessment and child protection are embedded and understood by staff.

Students feel very well informed when making choices of GCSE courses. They have very good access to careers advice and guidance. Successful women and ex-students are invited to the school to talk about their careers and to provide non-stereotypical role models.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The head teacher is an inspirational, forward thinking leader who has a clear vision. Her high expectations are driving the school forward. She is fully supported by staff throughout the school who strive successfully to provide an outstanding and interesting education for the students.

The senior leadership team works well together and has created a supportive ethos. The rigorous quality assurance system includes accurate self evaluation. Staff draw on a wide range of evidence to develop an excellent view of the school's current strengths and weaknesses and have identified clear areas of development. This has led to successful initiatives such as middle managers shadowing senior leadership team activities.

The school is well supported by its parents and actively seeks their views. This was demonstrated by the very high response rate and overwhelmingly positive comments in the parental questionnaire issued as part of this inspection. Parents are contacted regularly to discuss the progress of students, for example during academic review days. The student voice is also a strong feature of the school.

Although some accommodation is poor, managers have ensured that this does not detract from the quality of teaching and learning. The school has successfully secured £18 million as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme which will further enhance the quality of provision.

An impressive learning culture exists within the school. Professional development opportunities are good because staff have access to high quality training sessions, such as those on improving students' behaviour. Student exclusions are low in number, but include a relatively high proportion of black students. Staff are aware of this issue and have correctly taken steps to improve the situation. There are many positive black role models among the staff and students.

Governance of the school is outstanding. Governors know the school very well, through activities such as all spending a day annually in school. They are closely involved in the monitoring of the school's development and ensure all statutory guidelines are met. Staff and resources are deployed well and finances are well managed. The school provides excellent value for money.

The school has a diverse learning community and staff and students are proud of its inclusive nature. The strong focus on equality of opportunity is an important factor in creating the school's outstanding ethos and success.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	1
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
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

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the outcome of the recent inspection at your school. Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us. We enjoyed meeting groups of you, talking to your teachers and other staff and visiting lessons. We were delighted to find you all so courteous and cheerful. You display great loyalty and commitment to the school and obviously benefit greatly from your time there. The overwhelming responses of parents who replied to our questionnaire were also very positive about the school. Your views and those of your parents are very important and helped us to understand many of the excellent aspects of your school.

We are pleased to tell you that we judged your school to be outstanding. We were particularly impressed by:

- how much progress you make during your time in school and the excellent examination results
- your excellent behaviour and the way you treat each other with respect
- the excellent teaching and your positive attitude to learning
- the inspirational way the school is led by your head teacher, strongly supported by senior managers and school governors
- the way all staff work hard to support all learners to achieve

To make your school even better, we think your school needs to:

- provide a broader choice of vocational courses for you to take if you so wish
- ensure the new school buildings provide better accommodation and facilities so that you can achieve even more success.

Once again, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Tony Noonan

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools