



St Paul's School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103531
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 286690
Inspection date 21 February 2007
Reporting inspector Gwendoline Coates HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Vernon Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Edgbaston
Age range of pupils	11–19		Birmingham B16 9SL
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	0121 4540895
Number on roll (school)	806	Fax number	0121 4564803
Number on roll (6th form)	153		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mary Browning
		Headteacher	Angela Whelan
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2003		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Paul's School for Girls is a Catholic comprehensive school that was established almost 100 years ago. It is an average sized school that is significantly oversubscribed. Its girls come from over 50 primary schools covering a socially and economically diverse area. The percentage of girls from minority ethnic groups is almost twice the national average, with Irish being the largest minority group and Caribbean the second, but much smaller, group. The school has average numbers of girls with learning difficulties or disabilities. In September 2005, the school became a specialist mathematics and computing school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Paul's School for Girls is an outstanding school with a distinctive Catholic ethos in which values are shared and careful attention is given to meeting the needs of, and developing, the whole person. Girls talk about the school as a family, a community in which they feel very safe and very well supported. The headteacher has developed and strengthened the school's distinctive ethos. She and her strong leadership team provide staff and girls with very clear direction and leadership. The results of this outstanding leadership are seen in the standards reached, the girls' personal development and the excellent care provided. Every girl is supported spiritually, pastorally and academically to achieve her best, whatever her ability.

Girls enjoy their school and find learning interesting, challenging and often exciting. Teaching is outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. This is despite the depressing state of the numerous prefabricated classrooms which, as noted in the previous inspection report, require urgent replacement. Teachers in the main school ensure that lessons actively involve girls in their own learning. In the sixth form, the focus of lessons is more on teaching than on students being involved actively in their learning, and there is less emphasis on matching work to the needs of the girls. This is reflected in the standards achieved and the progress made; achievement and standards in the main school are outstanding while, in the sixth form, they are good. The school ensures that, through its rigorous monitoring, target-setting and review system, girls meet and often exceed very challenging targets, including the specialist school targets set for mathematics.

The spiritual, moral and cultural development and awareness of girls is excellent. At St Paul's, every girl is valued and diversity is celebrated, for example in the provision of a Muslim prayer room, in the 'Black History' month and the 'Irish Week' celebrations. The excellent curriculum is constantly reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of every girl. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities provide many opportunities for girls to pursue an active and healthy lifestyle and prepare them well in relation to work-based skills and thus for their future economic well-being. The school has excellent links with partnership schools and works extensively with outside agencies to extend the curriculum, improve learning opportunities and support the pastoral needs of girls.

The process of self-evaluation is systematic and extensive at both departmental and whole-school level and leads to continual improvement. A distinctive feature of the school is the extent to which girls are involved in the evaluation of lessons and how this feeds into the school's self-evaluation process. Indeed the school takes very good account of the views of pupils and parents and many examples exist of how responsive it is to their views, including changes to uniform, extended hours, bus safety and changes to the curriculum and to the timetable.

The school is acutely aware of its strengths and areas for development, and excellent leadership and management ensure that it implements strategies for improvement promptly and effectively. For example, it identified a need to improve achievement in the sixth form and the effective action it has taken to tackle this has already had an

effect on students' progress. There is plenty of evidence of improvement since the last inspection in relation to attainment at Key Stage 3, curricular changes and improved accommodation for physical education, art, information and communication technology (ICT) and in the dining area. The effectiveness of these measures, amongst others, indicates that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve. However, owing to lack of funding, the prefabricated classrooms remain.

The influence of specialist school status across departments and within the local community is impressive. This includes the very effective use of ICT in teaching and learning across subjects, the varied support given to developing the ICT competence and confidence of groups of elderly people and vulnerable groups associated with the school, and the mathematics challenges and workshops provided, many of which are conducted in partnership with other local secondary and primary schools.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Excellent leadership and management are strongly committed to improvement and to the development of the whole person. Although in recent years, standards have been broadly average and achievement satisfactory, as a result of very effective action taken to raise aspirations and achievement, standards are improving and good, and students are now making good progress. Teaching is good, and the strong focus on students becoming more independent in their approaches to learning is having a marked effect on their progress. Students are mature and thoughtful young people and are excellent role models for younger girls. They enjoy a well planned curriculum and an extensive range of enrichment activities. They enjoy being in the sixth form, and rightly feel they receive excellent guidance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve learning in the sixth form by setting clear expectations, giving students more opportunity to organise their own learning, think for themselves and develop skills independently of the teacher.
- Vigorously pursue plans for improving classroom accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Girls' attainment on entry to Year 7 is above average. As a result of the excellent progress they make, the standards they reach at Key Stage 3 are exceptional in English and mathematics and are significantly above average overall. Attainment in mathematics has shown continual improvement over time. Girls enter Year 10 with above average attainment and, as a result of excellent progress, they achieve exceptional results at GCSE. School data indicate that standards achieved and progress made improved in 2006 and further improvement is evident in the detailed monitoring data for the current

academic year, which indicate excellent progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. School data for 2006 and current monitoring data on student progress suggest that sixth form students are making good progress resulting in improvement to the previous average standards of attainment, which are now good. There is no significant underachievement amongst any group of girls and, according to the school's data, those with learning difficulties and disabilities make very good progress. Girls meet and often exceed very challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Girls clearly enjoy their education. This is evident in their very good attendance, the very low level of exclusions over many years, their excellent behaviour, respectful and considerate relationships with each other, excellent relationships with teachers and their positive attitudes to learning. Girls are aware of and understand how to keep safe and to look after the safety of others both within school and in their often long journeys to and from school. They feel safe in the knowledge that there is always someone they can talk to if they have any problems. Year 7 girls speak highly about how they were welcomed into the school and supported by staff and older girls. Girls understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and, although many have long journeys to and from school, most girls participate keenly in extra-curricular provision involving physical activity. The bright and welcoming dining room with its varied and nutritious menu encourages healthy eating for those girls who make use of this facility. Girls make a very positive contribution to the school and to the local community and, through the school's specialist status, to the global community. They raise large sums of money for various charities and they are involved locally in voluntary work with vulnerable groups. The contribution of the school council is significant to the life of the school and sixth-form students talk responsibly about the concept of 'service' which they all undertake. For example, they help Year 7 pupils to read and they organise an old people's party at Christmas. Girls of all abilities develop very good work-related skills. They reach excellent standards of literacy and numeracy, respect others' differences and take on responsibilities, and they are punctual and polite. Sixth-form students exercise their responsibilities with maturity and pride.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers are well qualified specialists who have very high expectations of girls' performance and behaviour. They prepare very challenging lessons with activities which are well matched to meet the needs both of the less able and of those who are

gifted and talented. In the lower school, girls' learning styles have been identified and teachers ensure that these are taken into account fully in planning their teaching. In the main school, girls are encouraged to be independent learners who are fully and actively involved in their own learning. As a result of this excellent teaching, girls find lessons exciting, thoroughly enjoy their learning, make excellent progress and thrive. In the sixth form, teaching is very well organised and learning is carefully structured. However, planning does not always make clear what students of different abilities are expected to achieve and there is more emphasis on teaching rather than on the active involvement of students in their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The broad curriculum available at each key stage is designed to meet the needs of girls of all abilities. For girls with learning difficulties and disabilities, a personalised curriculum ensures they are fully involved with the core subjects but are able to follow courses suitable to their abilities and needs that will prepare them better for life after school. An excellent personal, social and health education programme for all girls, including sixth-form students, contributes significantly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school provides excellent opportunities for girls of all abilities to develop their work-related skills, including very good leadership opportunities through the prefect system. The extensive range of additional activities, including sports and games, health-related education, field trips, workshops, visits to art galleries and to the theatre, spiritual retreats and the annual visit to Lourdes, contributes very effectively to the development of the whole person.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding pastoral system and rigorous academic monitoring ensure excellent support is provided for every girl in the school. The highly effective use of data leads to accurate target-setting. Close links with parents and careful monitoring and review of individual educational plans are an integral part of this process for girls with learning difficulties and disabilities. Sixth-form students feel very well supported and are confident that teachers will make themselves available to help. Excellent careers education and guidance includes guidance about university applications.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

A rigorous system of self-review identifies relative strengths and weaknesses in departments. This enables staff to bring about improvement through timely and effective intervention. The school is very responsive to any indication of underachievement among girls.

The school makes very good provision for initial teacher training and is committed to the continuing professional development of all its staff, seeing this as crucial to its ongoing success.

Inclusion and the needs of every girl are a major focus of the school's mission. Equality of opportunity is promoted consistently and the school actively celebrates the diversity of its community.

The contribution of the governing body is rigorous and challenging yet, at the same time, supportive. The school meets all statutory requirements, including the implementation of robust procedures for safeguarding girls. It makes excellent use of its resources to improve learning and achievement and provides excellent 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?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
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	

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	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
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?	1	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 to below 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	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	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	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

St Paul's is an outstanding school with a very distinctive Catholic ethos that values each of you and works very hard to ensure that you all develop both academically and as a whole person. Many of you talked about the school as a family and a community where you are made to feel very safe and very well supported.

St Paul's has many strengths. The personal and spiritual development of all girls is excellent. You clearly enjoy the time you spend at school, even though many of you have to set off very early in the morning to arrive on time. Teachers work very hard to ensure that your individual learning needs are met and, as a result, you find learning challenging and interesting and make very good progress. However, this happens less often in the sixth form. Consequently, although standards of achievement and the progress made by students in the sixth form are good, they do not match the exceptional standards and progress made by girls in Key Stages 3 and 4. You have plenty of opportunities to pursue sports and to develop your cultural and spiritual awareness. Your headteacher and her senior team have excellent systems to identify when you might be in need of additional academic or pastoral help and teachers and other staff provide you with exceptional levels of support and guidance.

There are just two areas that could be improved further.

- Sixth-form students need to have more opportunity to be actively involved in their own learning and develop independent learning skills.
- As soon as finance is available, plans should be implemented to improve classroom accommodation. You know what I am referring to – the prefabs (!) – which, without exception, every single girl who spoke to inspectors during the inspection criticised.