

Queen Mary's High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104261
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	286894
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Cathy Morgan HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	709
6th form	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Diana Woods
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2002
School address	Upper Forster Street Walsall WS4 2AE
Telephone number	01922 721013
Fax number	01922 32387

Age group	11–18
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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

Queen Mary's High School is a smaller-than-average selective grammar school educating girls between the ages of 11 and 18. It is oversubscribed and attracts students from a very wide area and a range of ethnic backgrounds. The number of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is very low. The school is a specialist language college and has been awarded a second specialism in mathematics and computing with effect from April 2007. It also holds an International School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school is modest in its self-evaluation that it is a good school. Inspectors judge the school as outstanding because it consistently enables students to attain the highest academic standards. The outstanding leadership and management team is well supported by the governing body. The headteacher's vision, together with a very strong senior team, has led to a continuous rise in standards since the previous inspection, enabling students to achieve well. Personal development, care, guidance and support, the curriculum and sixth form provision are outstanding. Students' attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning are also outstanding, as is the commitment of the staff. The school has developed excellent local, national and international links and effective partnerships with others which have a direct and beneficial impact on staff and students. There is rigorous analysis of the performance of specific groups of students in order to improve achievement which, although excellent at the end of Year 9 in mathematics, remains lower than expected in science and English. GCSE and A-level examination results are outstanding and have continued to improve since the time of the last inspection. Students are particularly able, however, and the proportion reaching their full potential in examinations is lower than expected in a minority of subjects. Students benefit greatly from good and some outstanding teaching which enables them to make good progress in lessons. However, the school does not always exploit students' well-developed capabilities in information and communication technology (ICT) to help them to develop their independent learning skills in lessons. There is a strong ethos of care within the school and a shared commitment to provide an interesting, enjoyable and relevant education. The school has the full confidence of parents and of its students. It works well with other partners in order to improve provision. Staff morale is high and there is no doubting their determination to provide the best opportunities for students. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding and reflects the cultural diversity celebrated within the school. Students are extremely well prepared for their economic future. They benefit greatly from the school's specialist status and from an outstanding curriculum.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form to which all girls in the school aspire. Student recruitment and retention rates are extremely high. The curriculum is wide ranging, flexible and responsive to student need. Students make outstanding progress and their examination results are excellent. Teaching is good and students receive extensive academic and personal support. There is rigorous target setting and monitoring of the performance of individual students. Relationships between students and with their teachers are excellent. Although limited physical education (PE) facilities curb the range of extra-curricular activities available, students benefit greatly from opportunities to develop personally and provide vibrant service to the school. They speak very highly of their sixth form experience and consider themselves fortunate to be educated in such a stimulating atmosphere. Students are well equipped with the skills for independent learning and, despite the cramped study facilities, they respond well to the academic challenges their teachers inspire.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the sharing of outstanding practice in the school to ensure all students reach their full potential.

- Make more effective use of ICT to provide further opportunities for students to work independently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Inspection confirms the school's self-evaluation that achievement and standards are good overall. Students join the school with attainment that is significantly higher than the national average. The school builds well on this and is in the top 25% of schools nationally on the Key Stages 2 to 4 value-added indicators. The standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 are outstanding and this represents good achievement. Students' performance in mathematics is exceptionally high and girls make much better progress in this subject than in English and science. The proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics is outstanding and reached 99% in 2006. Almost two thirds of grades awarded were A* or A, which represents good achievement. The few students with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress as a result of the excellent support they receive. Students are set challenging targets and they achieve outstanding results in many areas of the curriculum. Their performance in some subjects such as science and German, however, is not as high as it could be. Achievement and standards in the sixth form are outstanding. Students' pass rates are excellent and a significant proportion achieve the highest grades. Rigorous target setting and monitoring of performance ensures that students realise their high potential at A-level. Students do so well because they are well equipped with the skills for independent learning and respond to the academic challenges which their teachers inspire.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students feel safe and thoroughly enjoy school. This is demonstrated by their excellent punctuality and attendance. There is a deep commitment by the school to ensuring that all students achieve well, both personally and academically. School assemblies, tutorials and 'thought for the day' activities are outstanding and make a powerful contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students' behaviour around the school and in lessons is impeccable and borne out of the strong ethos of mutual respect. Teachers use praise effectively and their evaluation of the new 'behaviour for learning' programme demonstrates some early success in tackling the underachievement of a minority of girls. Students have a good understanding of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and, although PE facilities are very limited, girls participate in a range of sporting and fitness activities. The school and sixth form councils give students good opportunities to express their views and play a part in the school community. They were instrumental in the organisation of the new healthy menu options and the 'grab and go' lunch facility. Students make a very important contribution to the local and wider community through a broad and varied range of activities, including extensive fundraising and support of charities. The preparation of students for their future economic well-being is outstanding. Students benefit from extremely well-organised work experience and extensive guidance when making choices about careers and further study. The school does not always make best use of students' ICT capability to enable them to extend their independent learning skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers have high expectations of students. In turn, students' attitudes to their studies are excellent and they are conscientious, diligent learners. The majority of lessons are characterised by enthusiastic teachers, excellent planning, positive relationships and the use of a variety of challenging and imaginative tasks. This is often further enhanced by effective questioning strategies and opportunities for student discussion. There is variation in the use of ICT across subjects, however, and a few lessons involve students in too much note taking. This prevents them from developing their independence and extending their investigation and problem-solving skills. When provided with these challenges, students participate fully, demonstrate their initiative and improve the quality of their learning. Sixth form students are taught well and lessons are characterised by their assiduous attention to the topics being taught. Students are enthusiastic about the level of challenge extended to them and take great responsibility for their own success. Their excellent attitude to learning and determination to succeed is, in part, responsible for their outstanding progress and results. Assessment information is used well to monitor students' progress in achieving challenging targets. Recent improvement to this system is leading to the earlier identification of students in need of additional support to enable them to reach their full potential in all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education, careers advice and work experience is excellent. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is carefully planned to meet the needs and capabilities of all students. Excellent links with the local authority, local schools, the community, industry and higher education enhance the experiences and achievement of students. Initiatives such as the Year 9 industry day, international activity weeks, the 'Walsall Challenge' and the 'India' evening extend students' learning and increase their motivation. Students benefit greatly from an extensive range of excellent enrichment opportunities, including trips, theatre visits, overseas visits, sports and arts activities. The school's specialist status is impacting well on the curriculum and on students' understanding of international issues. It enables them to study a wide range of languages from Year 7, including community languages and Japanese. Students are also able to make effective use of excellent ICT facilities in these subjects. The sixth form curriculum is outstanding in that it offers a breadth of A-level subjects. There are excellent opportunities for students to undertake additional work experience and extra-curricular activities such as critical thinking. The school is extremely responsive to students' needs and provides flexibility in the curriculum to enable a broad range of subjects to be studied. Students benefit greatly from the 'philosophy and ethics' days and the effective use of 'thought for the day' activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students are strongly guided and supported by the well-structured academic support and pastoral care system, which includes valuable features such as relaxation and stress-relief activities. Sixth form students receive excellent guidance that prepares them well for progression into higher education. All students know their targets and how to improve further. Vulnerable students are supported well and child protection procedures are extremely robust. There is good provision for the small number of students with specific learning difficulties or disabilities. Frequent monitoring of their individual education plans ensures that they make good progress. Support for those who are particularly gifted and talented is very effective. Liaison with parents and a wide range of external agencies is excellent and ensures that students are well guided in making choices for careers and further study. Teachers ensure that students work in a healthy and secure environment and risk assessments are thorough. Links with the many partner primary schools are strong and highly effective initiatives are used to aid the transition of students into Year 7.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. Her modest yet passionate commitment and clear strategic vision have been instrumental in developing a culture of high expectations and aspiration throughout the school. The school has continued to improve since the time of the last inspection and the capacity to improve even further is excellent. Developments are carefully prioritised and costed. Judicious financial planning ensures that the school provides excellent value for money. Initiatives, such as the specialist language college and international school status, have an outstanding and beneficial impact on students. Senior leaders are very effective and have rightly given a high priority to building the capacity of middle managers to improve the quality of provision. Standards have continued to improve and are outstanding at the end of Key Stage 4 and post-16. This has been achieved through rigorous evaluation, effective teamwork and investment in the professional development of all staff. Heads of department provide good leadership and are encouraged to be innovative and autonomous managers. The new staffing structure has been effectively and strategically implemented. It is already enhancing the quality of academic and pastoral support for students. Performance management is embedded in departmental planning and review processes. The targets set by managers are explicit and are linked to improving students' progress. Continuing professional development targets are determined by the school development plan and influenced also by the performance management process. As a result, teachers have high aspirations for their students and respond positively to new initiatives aimed at improving students' learning. There are some inconsistencies, however, in the quality of teaching and the use of ICT to enhance learning. The outstanding practice which exists in some subject areas is not always shared fully across the school. Governors are very effective in their role as critical friends. They have a clear and accurate view of the school's key strengths and its areas for development. Through a thorough evaluation of their own performance, they have rightly identified the need to become more pro-active in monitoring and challenging the progress made by students in individual subjects.

Parents are extremely supportive of the school and say that they are kept well informed of their child's progress. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Student attainment is excellent and enables all to progress into higher education or employment.

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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	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	1
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?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	1	
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?	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.

Annex A

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	
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	2	
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

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your school recently. You were mature and sensible in the way that you spoke to each of us and we really enjoyed talking to you. Many of you were keen to tell us how much you enjoyed school and about the range of additional activities that you are involved in. We were particularly impressed with your positive attitudes towards one another and your impeccable behaviour. Queen Mary's is an outstanding school and academic standards are high. The GCSE and A-level results gained by students are excellent. Achievement is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form, and examination results have continued to improve since the last inspection. Despite this, some students do not always reach their full potential in all subjects. We have asked the school to take steps to improve this. The quality of the teaching you receive is good and some is outstanding. You are active in lessons, work well together to solve problems and, whenever possible, you make good use of ICT. We have asked your school to provide you with more opportunities to extend your use of ICT to help you to develop your independent learning and problem-solving skills even further. You all receive excellent care and guidance. You said that you feel that the school is a safe place to be and that you have many opportunities to become involved in a wide range of enrichment activities and visits, some of them overseas. Your charity and fundraising work is excellent. Members of the student council are working hard on your behalf. Your opinions are valued and you have influenced some important changes within the school. The headteacher and her senior managers make an outstanding team. They know how your school is doing, where things are working well and where they can make improvements. The managers, teachers, governors and staff are highly committed to their work and know that your school has the potential to do even better. We wish you every success in the future.