

Lordswood Girls' School and The Sixth Form Centre, Harborne A  
Specialist Media Arts College  
Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	103485
<b>Local Authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	308335
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rob Huddleday HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Other secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	664
6th form	190
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Kevin Johnson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Hattatt
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 November 2003
<b>School address</b>	Knightlow Road Harborne Birmingham B17 8QB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01214 292838
<b>Fax number</b>	01214 294840

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

The school draws its pupils from a very wide range of backgrounds within Birmingham and Sandwell, including some areas of significant economic disadvantage. A fifth of the pupils qualify for free school meals. Around three quarters of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Attainment on entry based on Key Stage 2 results is broadly average but the school's own assessments reveal that many pupils have weak literacy skills. Around half the pupils speak English as an additional language although few are new to this country. The sixth form centre draws most of its students from the school but around one fifth are from elsewhere. An increasing number are boys, many of whom have been attracted by the City of Birmingham Basketball Academy which is run in partnership with Four Dwellings High School. Lordswood gained its specialist status in media arts in 2005.

## **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's effectiveness is outstanding. Across the whole range of ability and ethnic groups, the pupils' achievement is frequently excellent. The pupils play their part by having exceptionally good attendance and behaving extremely well. They are conscientious and cooperative and quickly develop mature attitudes so that their personal development, in most respects, is as outstanding as their academic achievement.

Teaching and the curriculum are outstanding. Lessons are purposeful, imaginative and enjoyable. The school's specialist status has been used very effectively to extend the ways in which the pupils learn. There is a clear understanding of the role of media education in developing the pupils' insight into the world of information as well as training them to use digital media. At the same time, the school espouses many traditional values, such as strong discipline, regular homework and a strict policy on uniform. A small minority of parents report that their children find this emphasis irksome, but in spite of this, the inspection team found that the great majority of pupils thoroughly enjoy school. Relationships with staff are warm and the pupils appreciate and thrive in the lively and secure environment.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The teachers and other adults, such as learning mentors, take a deep personal interest in the pupils' pastoral and academic well-being. There is an excellent system of regular meetings between tutors and individual pupils to review progress. The high quality of these interactions play an exceptional part in helping the pupils to achieve their potential and become confident, articulate and self-aware. However, notwithstanding the existence of the school council, the pupils' involvement in making decisions about broader aspects of school life is relatively muted.

The school's leadership is dynamic and distinctive. The school makes its own mind up about what is important and is not afraid to challenge orthodoxies. Teamwork is powerfully evident across all layers of personnel and people are trusted and encouraged to find the most effective ways to deliver results. The extensive team of administrative, technical and teaching support workers is highly valued and given equal status with teachers. Individual strengths are recognised and developed to serve the pupils' needs. Middle managers, termed 'lead professionals', take a collegiate responsibility for promoting developments within departments and across the school so that initiatives are quickly embedded in practice. The school places great weight on evaluating the impact of what it does and modifying plans accordingly. It has shown it has outstanding capacity to continue improving, particularly as all members of staff and the governing body are full partners in securing the school's success.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 1

Attainment on joining the sixth form is broadly average and does not correlate with the school's GCSE standards because of movement into and out of the school. Standards reached by students at the end of their courses have improved markedly in the last few years and are now above average; most subjects have a pass rate of 100%. Performance in subjects is reviewed thoroughly, through the analysis of results and by checking the quality of the students' work in lessons. Leadership and management are outstanding and the school has taken highly effective action to improve provision, which is now consistently outstanding. Students value the thorough understanding their teachers have of their progress and their needs. The tutor review system,

which provides a regular one-to-one progress check for students, is a particularly effective means of ensuring that students remain on track to meet their challenging targets. 'You can never hide away here', said one girl. Students make excellent progress, and their achievement is frequently outstanding. There is a very broad curriculum, offering academic and vocational programmes together with a good range of enrichment and key skills courses. The very low incidence of students dropping out or changing courses indicates that they are given excellent guidance and support.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Explore opportunities for pupils to participate more fully in decision-making within the school and in the wider community.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The school has consistently achieved high standards over many years, and 2007 was no exception. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 was securely above average overall. It is often well above average but standards in mathematics slipped to average because of some disruptions to staffing. The pupils make good progress overall at this key stage, which prepares them effectively for making even greater strides at Key Stage 4, where attainment is exceptionally high. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE passes at A\*-C has been over 80% for the last three years and over 60% for five passes including English and mathematics. All pupils gain at least five passes graded G or above. Achievement across the school from the age of 11 to 16 is outstanding. The school continually seeks to identify and address any relative underperformance by individuals or groups. As a result, the pupils, whatever their starting point or ethnic background, make good and often outstanding progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Pupils feel very secure in school and move round the cramped building safely despite the narrowness of stairs and corridors. Attendance is extremely high and most pupils really enjoy school, though a small handful of parents and carers say that their daughters do not, even when acknowledging that they learn well. Pupils are very knowledgeable about health issues and eat very sensibly at lunchtime, whether they purchase food in school or bring packed lunches. Their excellent behaviour contributes significantly to the high quality of their learning. They work conscientiously and often with real enthusiasm, both as individuals and when collaborating in pairs or groups. Effective provision for citizenship and personal and social education prepares pupils well for life in a multi-cultural society and they are very well prepared for the world of work and further study when they leave school.

They converse confidently but the school has not exploited fully their potential to participate in decision-making, both within the school and through greater contact with the local community.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The success of pupils in their subjects and courses is a direct result of the outstanding teaching they experience. Teachers assess work exceptionally thoroughly and plan their lessons to take account of what the pupils have learnt. Ongoing dialogue with teachers about their work enables pupils to be very clear about what they need to do to achieve their targets. They are encouraged to help each other so that lessons buzz with conversation about the work in hand. Teachers have very high expectations and are not afraid to introduce complex ideas or vocabulary in pursuit of the highest standards. The imaginative use of the arts, media and technology in most subjects to bring learning alive and make lessons enjoyable is highly effective in improving the pupils' understanding and confidence. There is a great deal of cross-fertilisation of skills across different departments to help spread the use of good practice in all lessons. The development of literacy and numeracy is supported very well in all subjects. However, very occasionally work is not adapted sufficiently to meet the needs of pupils at different stages of development.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The curriculum and its impact are kept under continual review to ensure that it continues meeting the needs of its pupils and the aims of the school outstandingly well. Specialist designation has brought a significant broadening of media-related courses, which has already yielded strong results in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Specialist school targets have largely been met or exceeded in media and music, though not always in art. The curriculum in design and technology has been considerably strengthened since the last inspection by linking provision more firmly with creative arts. Vocational courses are now very well established throughout the school and the quality of provision in information and communication technology has been strengthened. The school has introduced some accredited vocational courses as early as Year 9 to provide greater pace and challenge. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from some excellent opportunities within an enrichment programme, and pupils with learning difficulties are very effectively integrated in mainstream classes. The school gives careful attention to health and citizenship education and there is a good range of extra-curricular activities to enhance the pupils' enjoyment and achievement.

### Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Throughout the school, the pupils' work is reviewed regularly and consistently in outstandingly effective one-to-one tutorial meetings. This focus on all pupils as individuals makes a powerful contribution to the pupils' progress as they are fully involved in evaluating their achievements and identifying how to tackle any issues. Personal and academic matters are given equal weight. The school quickly identifies those most at risk of underperforming and arranges support according to their need, both by the school staff and through the school's links to parents and

other agencies. Strategies for promoting equality are highly effective, as seen by the high level of racial harmony in a very diverse community and the success of measures to reduce underachievement by specific groups. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are robust.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The headteacher provides outstanding drive and direction and her energetic and consistent focus on sustaining high standards over a long period are exemplary. The school takes a robust approach to tackling underperformance and to enforcing policies but the major thrust of the headteacher's leadership is to inspire enthusiasm and self-belief in what can be achieved. She has gathered and retained a dedicated team of senior leaders, teachers and support workers who have flourished in an environment based on mutual trust and high expectations. A distinctive feature of the school is the way that many roles and functions are deliberately shared between postholders. This policy has encouraged collective decision-making and fostered resilient teams which readily engage in evaluating their performance. The analysis of assessment information is rigorous and influential in informing the decisions which leaders at all levels make about where to put their energies. The teachers are used to being observed and to observing others and appreciate the opportunities given for professional dialogue. The school knows itself extremely well and is constantly evaluating how it might build on its successes. Its clarity of purpose in striving for high standards is sometimes perceived by a minority of the parents as inflexibility. Nevertheless, the school is heavily oversubscribed.

The governing body is ably led and has an excellent grasp of matters both within the school and on a broader educational front. It plays a full part in challenging the school and in giving a strategic steer to its future direction.

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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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	1
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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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**Annex B**

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

12 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Lordswood Girls' School and The Sixth Form Centre, A Specialist Media Arts College, Birmingham B17 8QB

The inspectors enjoyed their visit to your school and are especially grateful to the groups who gave up their lunchtimes to meet with us. This letter gives a brief outline of our findings, which are contained in more detail in the full report.

You go to an outstanding school and make excellent progress, whatever your starting point. The standards you achieve are exceptionally high in the main school and above average in the sixth form. The excellent way in which the tutors regularly review your progress has a huge impact on helping you succeed. The high quality of teaching and the imaginative curriculum are also important strengths. We were very struck with the way that aspects of media education are brought into many lessons in an interesting way. The school makes very good use of a wide range of support workers to help make this happen effectively.

Your behaviour, attendance and maturity are outstanding. Some parents think that the discipline is too rigid and we were keen to hear what you had to say. We judged that most of you appreciate the way the school makes its expectations of you totally clear. We could see that the school is a safer and more purposeful place as a result, and is a happy community. We heard from many of you about the good relationships you have with staff and saw your enjoyment in lessons and around the school.

The headteacher and her staff are constantly trying to find ways to improve what the school offers. They know where things are not yet as good as they want them to be. They are working hard, for example, to solve the staffing problems in mathematics which have disrupted some of your lessons. We are confident that the school will continue to go from strength to strength and that the governing body is highly capable of steering the school's future direction. Our one major recommendation is that the school should involve you more in decision-making about aspects of school life and links with the community. We are sure you will do your bit by taking up new opportunities as they arise.

We wish you all the best for your future.

Rob Hubbleday Her Majesty's Inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector