

Westcliff High School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115339
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	311917
Inspection dates	20–21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1027
6th form	267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Foster
Headteacher	Dr P B Hayman
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Kenilworth Gardens Westcliff-on-Sea SS0 0BS
Telephone number	01702 476026
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Larger than average, this grammar school is one of four in the local authority that select students by ability. The students come from a wide geographical area, including the borough of Southend-on-Sea, and the school is regularly oversubscribed. The school's socio-economic context is relatively favourable and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. Attainment on entry is well above average; the school reports that data on the current Year 7 is above that of previous year groups. Sixth form provision includes students from other local schools who can meet the entry requirements. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and of those who have English as an additional language is just below the national average, all are fluent in English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with a statement of special educational need is very low. The school has attained the following national awards: specialist status in science and engineering, the Healthy Schools Award, the Diana Award and is currently seeking Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with some good features; the students' personal development is outstanding and their attitudes to learning are excellent. Provision in the sixth form is outstanding. Overall, the students' care, welfare and guidance are good.

Standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 are significantly above the national average although achievement varies across the core subjects. Public examination outcomes are significantly above the national average; however, when the girls' prior attainment is considered, achievement is satisfactory in the main school. At A level, standards are outstanding and achievement in the sixth form is good overall. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds are more successful in the main school than their White British peers. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made good progress.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory; however, inconsistencies in performance became evident during the joint observations carried out by inspectors and senior staff, and these were more numerous than the school expected. The previous inspection report had found 90% of teaching good or better; although the school's recent self assessment expressed the view that 60% of lessons were good or better, inspectors found this figure to be only 45% in the main school and found 16% of the substantial sample of lessons visited to be inadequate. The quality of learning and pupil progress is strongest in the sixth form where staff facilitate learning through the use of challenging questions and the systematic use of assessment more effectively than in Key Stage 4. The school's self-evaluation notes significant changes in staffing in the last two years.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, and the school's science and engineering specialist status has been developed appropriately. Although the quality of teaching and learning in the main school has declined since the previous report and levels of achievement have fluctuated in the last three years, improvement since the last inspection has been sound and the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. Overall, self-evaluation is satisfactory although more positive than the judgements given in this report. Senior leaders were invited to observe teaching with HMI; the views they expressed on that occasion concurred with the judgements given by inspectors. However, the school's quality assurance activities are not conducted with sufficient frequency to identify weaknesses nor robust enough to ensure that improvement is secured.

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning in the main school and in the development of an appropriate pupil tracking system, together with weaknesses in the organisation of the extensive curriculum were significant factors in the variations noted between standards and achievement.

The girls' excellent attitudes to learning made a major contribution to the quality of education provided; their searching questions and articulate, well-argued responses brought many lessons to life. One young lady commented 'Westcliff has been a huge part of my life and will probably be so for years to come - I will always be proud to be a Westcliffian!'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Outstanding sixth form provision attracts many students from other schools because of the school's specialist science and engineering status. Standards are outstanding and students

make good progress in most subjects. However, information provided by the school indicates that three quarters of AS entries achieved A or B grades although the school was disappointed in the results from a number of subjects.

Sixth form retention rates are exceptionally high and destinations of students when they leave the school are tracked to share career ideas with other students. Personal development and well-being are outstanding and preparation for future economic well-being is enriched through well-planned enterprise activities. A student noted the school provided 'a friendly environment, and an extraordinary amount of enthusiasm and support - Westcliff leaves a lasting impression.'

Exciting and motivating teaching in psychology, physical education, art and Year 13 tutor time facilitated independent learning. These lessons challenged students to seize opportunities, value debate and clarify their thinking. Similarly, innovative teaching was noted in eight out of ten sixth form lessons; the quality of teaching and learning observed in the sixth form was outstanding.

The steadily improving curriculum has undergone some radical changes as a result of student feedback, for example the introduction of the Universities Award and AS engineering, law and dance. Rigorous and regular reviews of support by the effective sixth form team track student progress and provide negotiated target grades in many areas; however, the views expressed by some sixth form students and AS outcomes indicate these processes are not consistently effective across all sixth form provision. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in Key Stage 4.
- Eliminate the inconsistencies in teaching and learning in the main school.
- Ensure the whole school tracking of student progress is developed and implemented as soon as possible.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are significantly above the national average at Key Stage 3; however, the school's own self-evaluation notes that most students' attainment on entry is well above average. The proportion of students, who attain the higher Level 7 at Key Stage 3 and thereby make the expected progress, varies significantly between English, mathematics and science. In 2007, Key Stage 3 achievement was outstanding in mathematics, satisfactory in science and significantly weaker than might be expected in English where the school's decision to enter students early for the Standard Assessment Tests had a negative impact. The provisional results of the 2008 Key Stage 3 tests in English, which have also been taken early, are more positive.

In 2007, GCSE results were above the national average in all subjects. The entire year group obtained five higher-grade passes at GCSE that included English and mathematics. At the highest level, 56% of grades obtained were A* or A and three quarters of the students obtained eight passes at grade B or better including English and mathematics, although this declined in

2007 from the previous year. However, given their well above average attainment on entry and the good progress these girls made when they were in Key Stage 3, the number of students who obtained A*/B grade passes was lower than expected. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 4 was satisfactory overall. Evidence supplied by the school notes that outcomes in 'a number of subjects; business studies, drama, English literature, food, biology, chemistry, textiles, music and physical education were lower than expected.' A-level results have been reviewed in the sixth form section of this report.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The students' personal development is outstanding. Excellent relationships exist between the girls who strongly assert that bullying and racism do not exist in their school. Students enjoy their lessons and younger girls interviewed during the inspection all said that school was 'fun'. They value the exceptional range of opportunities and extra-curricular activities provided to develop their personal skills and learning.

A number of parents remarked that the school does not take account of their children's views; however, students noted they were listened to and they valued the school council as a means of making their views known. Behaviour is exemplary, both in lessons and around the school. Students feel safe, and know how to stay safe in the wider community. Many girls have exceptional personal skills and use these to make an outstanding contribution to both the school and wider community. For instance, peer support is particularly strong; the 'Chips' and 'Listener' programmes provide support for all who require it. The school provides an environment where students learn and develop excellent awareness of the need to live a healthy life-style, and the canteen recently won a healthy school dinners competition.

Students participate in an exceptionally wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including a recent school visit to China. The school works hard to ensure that students have a comprehensive understanding of multicultural issues. Overall, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and social development exemplary. Students are well prepared for their economic future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in the main school; however, there is considerable variation in the quality of lessons. Students have an excellent attitude to learning; they behave impeccably even when insufficiently challenged by undemanding activities.

Typical features of the best teaching are high expectations and a brisk pace, linked with challenging, practical activities that bring a fresh edge to learning throughout the lesson and capture student interest. In these lessons, the students respond enthusiastically and make excellent progress; they know what they are expected to learn and are guided exceptionally well in how to measure their own success during the lesson. As a result, they work with a distinct desire to succeed and improve.

In the least successful lessons, weaknesses in planning take insufficient account of the students' learning needs; some activities lack challenge or pace and in others the teachers' questioning lacks the necessary rigour, breadth and depth to provoke higher-level thinking. As a result, the most able students mark time and make insufficient progress. One sixth of teaching observed in the main school was judged inadequate by inspectors; half of the inadequate lessons were identified during the joint observations with senior staff.

Good support is provided for the small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The use of assessment for learning is a feature of the work of some departments and individual teachers; however, inconsistencies in its development and in the way departments interpret the school's marking policy limit the effectiveness of academic guidance in the main school. The school's capacity to track student progress particularly at Key Stage 3 is under review; it is intended that the new procedures will be operational by September 2008.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The main school curriculum is satisfactory; it is broad but is unbalanced in some areas by the major difficulties in the existing timetable the headteacher reported to the governing body. Although the school has tried to address these matters, too many classes are taught by more than one teacher, and this adversely affects the consistency of learning within some subjects and the headteacher has expressed his concerns on this matter to the governors.

Students in Years 10 and 11 have a choice of options, including vocational subjects; links with business and industry help students develop skills they value for the world of work. Specialist science and engineering status has been used to provide facilities that benefit all and to enhance extra-curricular activities. In the last two years, girls have been entered for Key Stage 3 examinations at the end of Year 8 in order to facilitate the introduction of more demanding work or the provision of additional enrichment opportunities. However, the introduction of this policy had a negative impact on the 2007 English tests results.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school evaluates its provision of care, guidance and support to be outstanding. The inspection judges it to be good at present because the close and systematic monitoring of students' progress remains incomplete and this places limitations on the academic mentoring. The school does have a very effective system in place to support students who need counseling; provision is available for those who have worries or concerns. Overall the pastoral support offered to students is very good and exclusions are rare. Support and guidance for students through work-related learning is good. Students are informed about their future options for education and careers and the school liaises well with other agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory with strengths in some areas. Self-evaluation was more positive than the judgements given in this report. Quality assurance procedures are satisfactory overall but require improvement to ensure that inconsistencies in the quality of provision are eliminated. The headteacher noted the school 'received strong advice from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust that (our) plan must be reorganised so that the key aims are more succinct'; the current school improvement plan is clear and appropriate. Senior managers direct improvement and promote the well-being of learners through high quality care and support. However, the use of assessment and the development of academic guidance remain inconsistent in the main school despite considerable work by senior staff; the headteacher expects this to be operational at the beginning of the next academic year.

The governance of the school is generally satisfactory, though the role of governors in holding the school to account in areas such as students' achievement could be developed further.

Middle management is satisfactory overall, with some departments and sections of the school more dynamic than others, or more consistent in their application of whole school policies. The leadership and management of the provision for the small numbers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good, as is the leadership of the sixth form.

The science and engineering specialist school status has resulted in a significant enhancement of curriculum opportunities and evidence of rising standards in the sixth form. Resource management is good and the significant budgetary surplus is appropriately targeted at the planned new building. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and provides satisfactory value for money.

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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?	3	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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 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	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

22 February 2008

Dear Students,

Inspection of Westcliff High School for Girls, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 0BS

I wish to thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of the school. You greeted us with courtesy and consideration wherever we went. The attitudes to learning you displayed were exemplary.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain why we judged standards and achievement to be satisfactory when GCSE results are high. Your attainment on entry is significantly higher than that of the students in secondary schools nationally so it is right to expect high standards from all of you. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades at GCSE has slipped somewhat in recent years and, as a result, the overall progress made has been no more than average. Standards and achievement remain good in the sixth form because teaching and learning are more consistent and the use of assessment to provide academic guidance more systematic. I have asked the headteacher to improve achievement at GCSE by developing the best elements of the challenge and academic support provided in the sixth form.

Many of your parents took the time to write to me about the school, please give them my thanks. I have tried to answer their questions in the report and I would encourage you to read the whole document at www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/ and then use the school's post code to go straight to the report. We interviewed a number of groups of students, one of whom spoke for many of you 'Westcliff has been a huge part of my life and will probably be so for years to come - I will always be proud to be a Westcliffian!

It was a pleasure to meet you and I look forward to hearing about your future success.

David Jones Her Majesty's Inspector