

# Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117527
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	312644
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 September 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paula Heaney 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>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	666
6th form	90
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Cllr Mrs Susan Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Theodora Nickson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 November 2003
<b>School address</b>	Woods Avenue Hatfield Hertfordshire AL10 8NL
<b>Telephone number</b>	01707 275331
<b>Fax number</b>	01707 270244

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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

Most girls enter Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School with standards that are above national averages, although there are few with very high or very low ability. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is below the national average. The proportion of pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds is also below the national average, but the percentage is increasing. The school's intake is from a wide social-economic range from Hatfield, Welwyn Garden City and from outlying villages. There is an average of over 30 feeder primary schools each year. The numbers of pupils receiving free school meals is well below the national average. There are some pockets of deprivation for students living in Hatfield.

The school belongs to the Hatfield Extended Schools' Partnership and the Welwyn Hatfield Sports' Alliance, sharing resources and facilities to offer an extended schools' programme. The school is also an active member of the Welwyn Hatfield 14-19 Collaborative Group. The school holds the ArtsMark Gold and SportsMark awards and it has achieved the National Healthy Schools' Standard. It holds the Investors in People standard and is a Post-16 Citizenship Champion.

School buildings are identified as a barrier to learning.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The inspection agrees with the school's self-evaluation that this is a good school and has good capacity to improve further. Pupils' achievement is good and improving. The standards the pupils reach are above average at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The school has tackled effectively the reasons for the recent lower GCSE results and underachievement in English and pupils are doing well. Recent changes to the curriculum, available options and choices, teaching and learning and staffing support this. The curriculum includes work-related qualifications and options to interest and motivate pupils, and there are developing opportunities to stretch the most able. Standards in the sixth form are good overall and improving. Students take a broad range of AS and A level courses and an increasing range of vocational options. Students achieve well with many progressing successfully to university.

The school's self-evaluation reflects well where improvements need to be made. During the inspection teaching and learning were good overall across the school and the sixth form, with most lessons seen graded as good, in line with the school's own judgements. In these lessons, pupils responded enthusiastically and made good progress because the planned activities challenged and involved them. A few lessons were less well paced with an over emphasis on whole-class teaching, and opportunities for targeting pupils' individual needs and abilities were missed. Assessment is not used well enough by teachers to guide teaching and learning, particularly of key skills.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and they behave very well. Pupils are proud of their school and they like the opportunities it presents. They feel the environment is safe and caring and that they are very well supported. The sixth formers play a particularly strong part in supporting and mentoring younger pupils. The wide range of additional activities available to pupils at lunchtimes and after school is valued. The sixth formers received specific praise from inspectors for their involvement in the community volunteer programme, to which a large majority are strongly committed. Pupils at Key Stage 4 and students in the sixth form have opportunities to take part in work experience activities, which they enjoy. The large majority of parents speak highly of the school and describe it as a caring and supportive school, dedicated to the development of each girl.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. A good curriculum offers a wide range of A levels and some vocational options, including BTEC First Diplomas, through a consortium of five local schools and a college of further education. There is a good variety and take-up of extra-curricular activities, including work experience. The progress students make is variable but good overall. Standards reached in 2007 exceeded the national average. Attendance and punctuality are good and the dropout rate is low. Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and develop students' independent learning skills effectively. Students speak highly of the skills they develop which prepare them for the future well.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all pupils are involved and challenged actively in lessons across subjects by improving further the quality of learning, and the teaching which underpins it

- Ensure all teachers make effective use of assessment to guide teaching and focus more clearly on the development of pupils' key skills.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Overall, standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good in the main school and in the sixth form. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, particularly with specialist help and support. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with standards broadly above average, but with increasing numbers of average ability pupils. The school has an outstanding record in enabling its pupils to make good, and often very good, progress to secure above average standards by Year 9. However, progress has slowed gradually in Years 10 and 11. Inspectors accept the school's reasons for this as related to staffing issues and a curriculum not matched well enough to the needs of the pupils. There has also been underachievement in GCSE English, which led to standards falling to only average overall in 2007. The school has responded well to this wake-up call and, particularly over the past year, important changes in staffing, teaching strategies, the curriculum, assessment procedures and targeting have resulted in some significant improvements, and standards in English are now rising again. Year 10 modular examination results and current Year 10 and 11 work already confirm that pupils are achieving well. Pupils' standards and progress in mathematics and science by Year 11 are particularly praiseworthy. Standards in English are improving as the current Year 11 pupils are already meeting, or exceeding their target grades.

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

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good and improving. The innovative life skills programme is a main activity in this area and a strength. Girls know how to lead a healthy life style and prepare for their future economic well-being well. The school provides a friendly atmosphere and pupils feel safe. Sixth form students provide very good role models as mentors to younger pupils and are active in settling new entrants into the school.

Nearly all pupils enjoy their education. About half progress to the sixth form, where most progress to higher education. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are good both in lessons and around the school. The majority take great interest in their work and involve themselves fully in lessons. Pupils have very good working relationships with adults and each other. They learn about their rights and responsibilities well. Participation in many charitable activities is good. A large majority of sixth formers play an active part in the volunteer community service programme.

The school's aim to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is achieved effectively. Students' participation in a number of foreign and domestic trips contributes to their cultural development well.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Teaching and learning are good across all key stages. A key characteristic in most lessons is effective planning, the use of a variety of teaching styles and well-chosen activities to engage and extend all groups of learners. There is rapid progress in lessons when teachers are enthusiastic about their subject, maintain a brisk pace and involve pupils in their learning through challenging questioning and class discussion. Teachers and pupils make effective and imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support more independent learning. In less effective lessons too much time is spent on whole class teaching. Modest expectations and lack of challenge lead to passiveness and pupils' progress is restricted. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support and achieve well. The pupil support centre enables students to make good progress because of excellent resources and encouraging teaching styles. The most able pupils are identified at an early stage, although they are not always offered more challenging work in lessons. In some lessons pupils' assessment of their own work and that of their peers is used effectively to raise their awareness of standards achieved and how to improve. However, assessment to aid the development and improvement of pupils' key skills was not evident in a minority of lessons.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum in the main school and in the sixth form meets the needs of most pupils and students effectively. A review of Key Stage 3 is planned for the coming academic year to emphasise further the development of literacy. Provision in Years 10 and 11 has improved significantly since the previous inspection with the introduction of a more flexible option system and work-related courses provided by a local college. These meet the needs of different abilities and aspirations of the pupils more closely than in 2003. The highest attaining pupils and the gifted and talented are offered a wide variety of activities to extend their learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well provided for. ICT is firmly established in the curriculum across the key stages. Work experience and enterprise learning help pupils to prepare well for the world of work. Pupils appreciate the good variety of extra-curricular activities, clubs, trips and visits abroad as shown by their high levels of participation.

### Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The care and pastoral support provided for pupils and students are good. There is an increasingly strong team of pastoral staff who provide good, individual support for pupils. Girls told inspectors that one of the strengths of the school is that: 'Staff notice if you have a problem', and 'Teachers are good at talking things through with you'. The welfare and safeguarding of pupils are secure, reflecting the good levels of care provided. Careers advice is dealt with well, particularly through the school's life skills programme. Links with other local colleges, agencies and organisations

to support pupils in their future education or career choices underpin well their future development. Academic guidance is sound, and pupils feel they are well supported. However, the use of data in assessing pupils and monitoring their progress requires further refinement. This is part of the school's improvement planning to ensure sharper targets are set, particularly for potentially higher attaining pupils, who told inspectors they are keen for additional challenges.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The headteacher's leadership is very good and is a key factor in shaping the direction of the school. Leadership is focused more effectively on raising academic standards alongside developing pupils as individuals. The leadership team has ensured that staff and governors share a clear and accurate vision of what the school needs to do to improve further. Middle managers are effective because they are involved in raising standards and are supported well by the senior leadership team.

Monitoring is used effectively to analyse where the school is doing well and where further improvements need to be made. The school's self-assessment is accurate. The use of challenging targets to raise standards for all learners is mostly good. Termly monitoring of targets is effective in enabling staff to support pupils more successfully.

The improvement plan is compiled through a whole school approach and is focused well on raising performance across the school. The senior leadership team and staff recognise the need to improve standards further at Key Stage 4, particularly in English. Training is aligned effectively with school aims.

Resources are managed and deployed well. Improvements to the school buildings have been limited due to budgetary constraints, but investment in information technology facilities and a pupil support centre have contributed to improved standards. Governance is good and the governing body are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors provide good support to the headteacher and staff, and question the senior leadership team on progress effectively. The school provides good 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?	2	2
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	2	2

### Achievement and standards

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

<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>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	2	
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

21 September 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School, Hatfield, AL10 8NL

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. Firstly, I would like to thank you for your openness and cooperation during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that yours is a good school. Test results at the end of Year 9 are above average, as are GCSE results in general. You are making good progress according to your starting points but progress by the end of Year 11 has slowed. More recently results for GCSE have not been as strong, particularly in English. Your teachers are working with you to improve this and you now have more varied options and choices in years 10 and 11. In the sixth form the overall points score is above average.

Most lessons were good. These were interesting and challenging, with a good range of activities tailored to your abilities. You told us you enjoy such lessons. Where lessons offer less challenge and pace is slower, you are not always enabled to do your best. Your attendance is good and you enjoy your education. Your behaviour is very good. You enjoy very much the range of activities and sports on offer through the school. The work sixth form volunteers undertake in the community is especially praiseworthy.

We have asked the school to take action on two things:

- to ensure all lessons meet your individual needs and challenge you to achieve the best you can
- to ensure that assessment is helpful, particularly in developing your key skills.

You can help your school by discussing with your teachers how you learn best. We wish you well with your future studies.

Best wishes Paula Heaney, Lead Inspector Her Majesty's Inspector