

# The Earls High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	103860
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dudley
<b>Inspection number</b>	323916
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 October 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ted Wheatley

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>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1182
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Andy O'Connor
<b>Headteacher</b>	Thomas Johnston
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	Furnace Lane Halesowen B63 3SL
<b>Telephone number</b>	01384 816105
<b>Fax number</b>	01384 816106

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a large school which is also a specialist performing arts and modern foreign languages college. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average. Few students have English as an additional language and none is in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is on a large site comprising of several separate buildings. Attainment on entry is above average overall.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The Earls High School is a good school. Standards are above average and the attainment of a significant minority of students is well above average. Students achieve well, particularly in Key Stage 4. Standards in mathematics that were previously too low have rapidly improved and are now similar to those of other subjects. The great majority of parents support the school. They feel well informed about their children's progress and feel that the school is 'keen to help them in weak areas, treats parents with respect and cares for and likes the pupils'. Links with other schools and support agencies are also extremely strong.

The school demonstrates a determination to improve and staff at all levels work hard to make this happen. The school recognises the importance of accurate self-evaluation, but does not have rigorous enough systems to ensure this happens as well as it should. However, it has made key appointments at senior and middle management to deal with this more effectively and this is already steering the school in the right direction. For example, senior managers appreciate the need to tighten how teaching is monitored. Governors play an important role and challenge the school in both appointing strong staff and in pushing up standards, especially at Key Stage 3. The school has dealt with the issue from the previous inspection well, and it has ensured rapidly rising standards in mathematics. Key Stage 3 standards have started to rise, and the focus on self-evaluation is becoming sharper. Overall, the school is well positioned to make further improvements.

Teaching is good. It is sometimes excellent, with work very well matched to students' learning needs. This is most evident at Key Stage 4 where teachers pay close attention to examination demands. At Key Stage 3 the work in lessons is occasionally not matched to the often wide range of learning needs and this slows progress and sometimes leads to students' attention wandering. Marking usually provides clear information on how well students perform, but sometimes lacks the guidance needed to help students improve their work. The curriculum is wide and mostly well matched to students' needs and interests, especially to support them in acquiring academic and vocational qualifications. There is an outstanding range of activities to enhance students' experience and an excellent choice of out-of-school sports, clubs and performing arts and (increasingly) language activities for students to take part in. Specialist college status has contributed considerably to this and the participation levels are high.

Students enjoy school. Behaviour is generally good, attendance is regular and students behave safely in and around the school. Their commitment to eating healthily and taking part in physical activity is excellent. Students take on responsibilities readily. For example, they have regular discussions with the caterers and school governors to make sure school meals are healthy and some work with primary schools on foreign languages and mathematics activities. Students' opinions are valued by the school. The school takes good care of students and tracks their progress effectively. Students are set academic targets but not all of them understand what the targets are, or how to achieve them. The school is safe and secure with careful supervision of movement around the large site.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rate of progress, especially in Key Stage 3, by ensuring work is always matched to students' learning needs.
- Ensure that students understand and use their targets to help them improve their work and that marking gives guidance on how to do this.

- Improve monitoring and evaluation, especially of teaching, to provide a coherent view on how development should be focused.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

While achievement is good, and for some students is very good, students' progress is faster at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. The focus on examination requirements plays an important part in this and work is well structured to help students achieve the grades they are capable of. GCSE results are above average, including in mathematics, and higher in recent years. Students following vocational courses do well, gaining qualifications in a wide range of work-related skills. At Key Stage 3, achievement is satisfactory and improving, most noticeably in mathematics. Achievement is slower because the match of work to learning needs is not consistent. It is too often aimed at the whole class rather than addressing individual students' needs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because support is carefully planned to meet their particular needs.

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

### **Grade: 2**

The students treat each other with respect and consideration. They feel very safe, commenting that rare incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. They have an excellent awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle; indeed, participation in physical education is very high. The active school council represents the views of students well, for example about students' requests for more careers guidance. The 'Going for Gold' awards are valued by students and encourage excellence in all aspects of school life. Attendance is satisfactory and is improving in response to the school's evolving systems. Occasionally, when work is not challenging or suitable, or slow paced, students become bored. There are also occasions when low level disruption from a few students hinders learning and, in this small number of lessons, this is a cause of frustration for the majority who conduct themselves well. However, usually, students greatly enjoy their learning and rapidly develop confidence in their own abilities. They particularly enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Their good academic and social skills prepare them well for the future. Students' social, moral and cultural education is good.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching staff form warm and productive working relationships with students, which support the development of confidence and self-esteem. Learning objectives for lessons are carefully explained, so students are clear about the purpose of their learning. A good range of activities accommodating a variety of learning styles are used successfully to engage students' interest. In some lessons, especially in English, students' speaking and listening skills are developed well through frequent, well-planned opportunities for collaborative work. However, in the small number of lessons that lack pace there is occasionally low-level disruption to learning. In a minority of lessons, the tasks set do not match the needs of all students, especially the most able. Teachers have good subject knowledge and students benefit from their understanding of examination requirements, especially in Key Stage 4.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum meets the needs of most students well and particularly in Key Stage 4 because of the wide range of academic and vocational subjects. This includes diplomas and strong links with other institutions and employers. As a result, students develop a very good understanding of the world of work. However, recently introduced long lessons in some subjects are not enjoyed by all students and the school has not yet found out why. The provision for more able students is good, enabling them to study AS-level courses early, such as the history of art. The library promotes literacy skills effectively and is used well by the community. Extra-curricular opportunities are outstanding. Students enthuse about the very good provision in physical education, performing arts and information and communication technology. The school's two specialisms enrich the curriculum well and increase students' self-confidence, and there is an increasing range of opportunities to study modern foreign languages. The successful 'House' week, where students work together in teams across year groups, enhances collaborative learning. However, for students in Key Stage 3, the curriculum does not always match the needs and interests of all learners.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The process of ensuring students are safe is extensive and thorough. Very good relationships support students' good personal development. There is a well-planned and improving programme of careers advice, in response to students' requests. Academic guidance is sound and all students have targets based on thorough assessment procedures. However, students do not always understand their targets or how to reach them. They are unclear about what they need to do to improve their work. The quality of day-to-day marking is also too varied and sometimes does not help students to understand the steps they need to take next. Nevertheless, guidance at the end of Year 9 is effective, enabling students to follow appropriate courses in Key Stage 4. The school manages the transition from primary schools into Year 7 very well. One parent commented 'The school has an excellent induction programme.' The school has excellent links with welfare and social services to support students who need additional help.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher and senior leadership team provide a clear sense of direction on how the school should improve. Statutory targets are challenging and well used to drive improvement. Staff are committed to improving standards and achievement. However, monitoring and evaluation processes do not provide a complete picture of areas the whole school should focus on developing. Some good work goes on in individual subjects, with recognition of areas to improve and support for staff to do so. New appointments at senior level are contributing effectively to improving whole-school self-evaluation, especially of teaching and learning. The school's track record on improvement is good and there is a strong drive to improve further. Governors are fully involved in the school's development planning; they have a clear idea of where improvements are needed and provide a good level of challenge for the school. Governors, school leaders and staff have effectively established an inclusive and cohesive community. Through its specialist college status, a number of very productive links with other schools and

organisations in the local area and region have been forged. These help to improve and widen the curriculum, which students benefit from enormously.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Earls High School, Halesowen, B63 3SL

Thank you for making our time in your school so enjoyable. Those of you we spoke to gave us a very clear idea of how good your school is. That helped us considerably in putting together our judgements.

These are the main things we found out about your school:

- The Earls High School is a good school. You reach above average standards and some of you do better than that. You do best in Key Stage 4 and your success in mathematics has improved a great deal.
- Teaching is good and the headteacher and other staff work hard to make it even better.
- There is a wide range of subjects for you to study, meeting all of your needs for further education and employment once you leave school. The school has a large number of links with other organisations, many because it is a specialist school. These links help make the curriculum interesting and exciting.
- You behave well and enjoy being at school. You take on responsibilities willingly and have good systems to make sure that the school listens to your concerns.
- Your understanding of how to stay healthy is excellent. You eat sensibly and take lots of physical exercise.
- You are well cared for and staff make sure you are safe in and around the school.

To improve things further, we have asked the school to:

- Improve how well you make progress, especially in Key Stage 3, by ensuring work is always matched to your learning needs.
- Make sure you understand and use targets to improve your work and that marking gives you the guidance needed to do this.
- Introduce whole-school systems to check how well the school is doing and make sure all staff know what has to be done, especially to further improve teaching.

You can contribute to improvement by asking for help if you think work is too easy, and by telling the school council when you think there are areas that the school can improve upon.

With best wishes

Ted Wheatley Lead inspector