

St Paul's School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103531
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336101
Inspection dates	28–29 April 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	986
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Browning
Headteacher	Miss Angela Whelan
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2007
School address	Vernon Road Edgbaston Birmingham
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They visited 45 lessons, and observed 45 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with staff, students and governors. They observed the school's work and looked at governors' minutes, aspects of community work, the minutes of meetings with the school improvement partner, subject evaluations and school action plans and evaluations. They also scrutinised 726 parent and carer questionnaires, 76 staff questionnaires and 154 student questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how successful the school had been in maintaining its high standards since the previous outstanding judgment
- the reasons why students appear to make better progress in the main school than in the sixth form
- the extent to which the school's self-evaluation had taken account of the revised criteria for behaviour, being healthy, use of assessment, curriculum and equality of opportunity.

Information about the school

St Paul's School for Girls is a Catholic comprehensive school that was established over 100 years ago. The school is very popular with more girls wanting to attend than there are places. Its girls come from over 50 primary schools covering a socially and economically diverse area. The proportion of girls from minority ethnic groups is almost twice the national average, with Irish being the largest minority group and with increasing numbers newly arrived from Poland. The proportion of girls who are learning English as an additional language is average and increasing. The proportion of girls with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, as is the proportion who are eligible for free school meals. In September 2005, the school became a specialist mathematics and computing school and in September 2009 it was designated a High Performing Specialist School and added science to its specialisms. It has received a number of prestigious awards including the Healthy Schools Award and the International Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Paul's is an excellent school which continues to provide an outstanding education. The students are extremely loyal and supportive of their school because they feel it meets their needs extremely well. As one student said, reflecting the views of many, 'St Pauls is a wonderful supportive school and I love it here.' Parents are also extremely pleased with their children's education with comments like, 'An excellent school that meets the needs of girls of all abilities. Fantastic, caring staff.' The school's excellent spirituality is palpable and embracing and integral to much of what happens. Students respect each other and also, through a rich variety of activities, the views and beliefs of others outside of school. They have a clear understanding of the key elements of community cohesion and exemplify tolerance, understanding and empathy with others, especially those less fortunate than themselves.

Students start school in Year 7 with standards which are average. They make very good progress and standards at the end of Year 11 are high. While this academic progress is of a very high standard, it is the students' personal development which is often exemplary. This is a direct result of the extremely high quality care, guidance and support which staff provide. Girls mature into responsible individuals. They are extremely courteous and all their behaviour observed during the inspection was of the highest possible standard. Students have extremely high expectations of both themselves and their fellows and, as a result, they are shocked if any of their peers should fail to live up to these ideals. When students described what they see as very rare incident of poor behaviour, while understandably frustrating for them and their parents, these are very infrequent and of a relatively low level when compared with other schools. The recently introduced pastoral support room has been very effective when working with a very few students who need additional help.

Students enjoy school and this is often because they are able to follow a highly appropriate curriculum which is extended with a very exciting and extensive range of additional courses, clubs, activities and educational visits and visitors. Teaching is good with many outstanding lessons. When teaching is at its best, students have opportunities to work independently, they are fully stretched, work is challenging and their learning is excellent. When teaching is not as good, these opportunities are missing and lessons are often too teacher dominated. This is noticeable across all years but is particularly evident in some sixth form lessons. Formal assessments are used excellently to identify how well students have achieved and to identify how they can improve to meet their challenging targets. However, day-to-day marking is inconsistent and at times is cursory, and fails to inform students how to improve.

At the end of Year 11, although a significant number of students leave to further their

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education in local selective schools, there is a rising trend in the number of girls who choose to remain at St Paul's. A small minority join from other schools and these undergo an effective induction at the start of the sixth form. Achievement in the sixth form is good

The senior management team is extremely well led by the headteacher. Leadership at all levels is highly effective and has ensured that the school has continued to develop. The designation as a High Performing Specialist School is testimony to how well the school is doing. The specialist areas of mathematics and computing are central to the school's drive to continue to raise standards. The well-led specialist status has enhanced teaching, learning and the curriculum substantially and promoted achievement of students very well. Staff have developed greater expertise in the teaching of information communication technology (ICT) and many often use this to support teaching in lessons. Governors are very active and offer very good support and challenge for the school. They are well informed and they, along with staff at all levels, have been instrumental in developing an accurate whole school self-evaluation, taking into account the revised criteria. The highly enthusiastic and knowledgeable student curriculum group regularly contributes to the school's evaluation. The new classroom block has greatly improved the school's ability to deliver the curriculum and standards have risen well in the sixth form. These indicate that the school continues to have an outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and achievement in the sixth form so that students succeed as well as they do within the main school.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by ensuring:
 - greater opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning, especially in sixth form lessons
 - marking consistently informs students how well they are doing and how to improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are high with the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, being well above average. The school beat its targets for the proportion of students gaining three or more A* or A grades and met, or was close to meeting, its challenging targets in its specialist areas of mathematics and ICT. Over time, students make very good progress. Observations of lessons during the inspection show that learning is usually good and often outstanding. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make very good progress because they receive very good support and guidance. This is also the same for students who are learning English as a new language.

Students feel very safe and enjoy coming to school. The support and respect shown by

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all students for each other is a strong feature. The need to adopt a healthy lifestyle is exemplified by the high proportion of students who take part regularly in sporting activities. This includes a group observed working very hard with their Irish dancing. A number of students commented that the lack of a suitable sports hall sometimes meant they could not do sports when there were examinations or the weather was inclement. The school supports students very well with their mental health and ensures students can cope with the pressures of examinations. Students report there are very few instances of bullying but, should any occur, they are dealt with immediately and effectively. Older students also offer their services as peer mentors and younger students feel reassured by their presence.

Students develop an excellent understanding of moral issues, especially through their work in supporting less advantaged groups. They have a vast range of cultural experiences and, through their mutual respect and trust, develop excellent inter-personal and social skills. Attendance is high and, along with very well-developed key skills, ensures that students are very well prepared for their futures.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Students make excellent progress through a combination of good and often outstanding teaching, an excellent curriculum with a very wide variety of additional activities and outstanding care guidance and support. Of the lessons observed during the inspection, inspectors saw approximately two thirds good or better lessons, with half of these being judged outstanding. There are consistent strengths in teaching. For example, relationships between staff and students are excellent and students show great respect towards staff, who know their students very well and work hard to make learning interesting and engaging. In turn, the vast majority of students behave in an exemplary manner, showing keenness to achieve their potential. In the best lessons, the pace is brisk and there are a variety of activities, many of which encourage students to learn for themselves. No teaching observed was poor. However, when lessons are not good it is often students who miss opportunities to learn for themselves. Some excellent, well focused, questioning in lessons extends students' learning. Similarly, marking in several subjects helps students to accelerate their progress because it tells them what they have achieved and how to move further forward. However, there is some variability in its quality and depth.

The curriculum matches the needs, interests and aspirations of students very closely and is significant in their outstanding attainment. This includes the curriculum for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities which include a vocational and functional skills courses. Extension for gifted and talented students has developed significantly and provides a structured programme to help them realise their potential. The facility for students to progress at their own rate is increasingly evident in, for example, some Year 9 students sitting the GCSE mathematics examination early. Provision for ICT has improved considerably since the last inspection and computer-based teaching and learning are established through the school, encouraging creativity and learning across subjects.

Outstanding extra-curricular and enhancement activities are wide ranging and very popular, adding to students' enjoyment of learning and promoting their personal, spiritual and cultural development exceptionally well. Enterprise activities contribute to this and also to students' financial and employability skills.

A real strength of the school is its excellent pastoral care. The very caring and spiritual ethos permeates all elements of the school's work. The school has an excellent system for identifying those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and then puts in place outstanding support, including very good partnership work with outside agencies. Students say they are very well informed about future choices when they change schools or when they make choices at the end of Year 9. As a result of this excellent support, safeguarding is seen as the responsibility of all staff.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<p>The quality of teaching</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>2</p>

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leaders give a very strong steer and direction and their vision and ambition for the school is well understood and shared by staff. The headteacher, very well supported by managers at all levels, has a clear determination to ensure the school carries on improving and has put in place excellent systems to ensure all aspects of the school's work are evaluated. This includes some very focused input from the student curriculum committee whose work on community cohesion was indicative of not only how well the school involves students but also how they ensure aspects like community cohesion are the responsibility of all staff and students. Subject and pastoral leadership are very good. Leaders have a clear understanding of what constitutes good practice and a strong commitment to carry on improving.

Governance is excellent. Governors are very supportive of the school and have very well defined and effective structures in place. They challenge the school and evaluate the impact of their policies. They have been very rigorous in ensuring that outstanding safeguarding procedures have been fully implemented and that the school gives very good support to the local community. The school also has very good international links and links to enable students to gain a better understanding of multi-cultural Britain.

The comprehensive analysis of examination data and the identification of any slight drop in performance of individuals or groups has enabled the school to secure outstanding equality of opportunity. The school gives excellent value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1
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Sixth form

The leadership of the school has worked hard to improve the effectiveness of the sixth form which is judged to be good. Students make good progress and reach standards which are above average. Students receive excellent advice and guidance with staff prepared to go the extra mile for the benefit of the students. The quality of teaching and learning is good with many lessons that are engaging, well planned and resourced. The curriculum is good and meets the needs of students well through a wide range of A level courses. It is enhanced by links with the local health trust and the Birmingham Conservatoire.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The recently appointed head of sixth form, has introduced clear, consistent, systems to monitor and track students progress. This has enabled more effective intervention strategies to address any potential underachievement. Students' response to sixth form life has been outstanding and they have enthusiastically taken up charity fund raising, mentoring of younger students, and wider responsibility in school and the community.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A large majority of parents and carers responded, indicating the very good links between school and home. Responses from parents were extremely positive, with the vast majority saying that their child enjoyed school. Very good support for students was identified as a strength of the school and one parent commented: 'If I have any concerns about my child's welfare, the school deals with these matters immediately and successfully. Overall my child is doing really well and enjoys going to school. The school has also made sure she feels confident about her further education.'

Poor behaviour in a few classes and bullying were raised as issues by an extremely small proportion of parents. The inspection team found behaviour to be excellent, although they were aware from students that there are very rare incidents of weaker behaviour. Students said very occasional incidents of bullying were dealt with effectively by staff and one parent commented, 'The school have supported my daughter well through a

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period of time when she experienced bullying.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Paul's School for Girls to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 726 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 986 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	258	36	432	60	24	3	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	392	54	328	45	2	0	2	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	365	50	340	47	17	2	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	317	44	383	53	20	3	3	0
The teaching is good at this school	318	44	386	53	14	2	3	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	250	34	411	57	46	6	5	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	191	26	440	61	70	10	6	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	289	40	373	51	23	3	3	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	275	38	402	55	27	4	4	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	279	38	393	54	25	3	6	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	196	27	439	60	52	7	8	1
The school is led and managed effectively	341	47	369	51	9	1	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	379	52	323	44	16	2	3	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 April 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Paul's School for Girls, Birmingham, B16 9SL

When I visited your school recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were impressed with your excellent behaviour and manners and with the outstanding contribution you make to the life of the school and local community. You told us that you really enjoy school and this is one reason, of many, that we judge your school to be outstanding. One of you said in your questionnaire: 'St Paul's is a wonderful supportive school and I love it here. Although I think a new gym is needed.' We agree and have judged that your school is outstanding.

You make excellent progress. Results in your GCSE examinations are very high and A-level results are good. We have asked your school to improve A-level results further to match the attainment at GCSE. We observed nearly all teachers and we judged that teaching is predominantly good and outstanding, although there are a number of lessons which are not as good as others because teachers talked for too long before you got down to work. We saw some very good assessment, including excellent questioning and teachers' feedback and marking of formal assessments. However, some of the marking in your books was not consistent with the best practice and did not always inform you how to get better. Relationships with staff are excellent, as is the way in which you all get on so well together. In order for the teaching to be judged outstanding, we have asked the school to make sure more lessons give you opportunities to work independently and that marking consistently informs you what to do to improve.

Staff care for you excellently, and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education as well as helping you to settle at the start of Year 7. You have a very good understanding your local area. We were particularly impressed by how many of you took part in the extra-curricular sports that are available. Your headteacher and other senior leaders have a very clear understanding of what needs to be done and they are very determined to carry on the excellent work within the school. They are supported by some excellent subject and pastoral leaders, teachers and governors. We wish you well at this excellent school of which you are justifiably proud.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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