

Wolverhampton Girls' High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104402
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	324040
Inspection date	9 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Ted Wheatley

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 (total)	753
Sixth form	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Ribbins
Headteacher	Julie G Lawton
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2006
School address	Tettenhall Road Tettenhall Wolverhampton WV6 0BY
Telephone number	01902 312186
Fax number	01902 328770

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

- The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:
- how well the school supports students with English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic backgrounds so that they achieve well
- how well the school has dealt with apparent underachievement in mathematics
- how well students in the sixth form achieve.

Evidence was gathered from data on current standards and achievement, examination of students' work and school documents, observation of lessons and discussions with the headteacher, governors, staff and students.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a small selective girls' secondary school which is a specialist languages college. The majority of girls are from White British backgrounds, with about a third from minority ethnic families and a significant minority with English as an additional language. The majority of students come from Wolverhampton, but an increasing proportion come from surrounding areas.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an excellent school. Standards are very high and students achieve outstandingly well. Students' achievements go well beyond purely academic success and include their personal development. The great majority of parents recognise these successes and are delighted their daughters attend the school. A typical comment from a parent, summing up the responses of many, to the parental questionnaire was, 'My daughter has settled in well and is making excellent progress. There are excellent sports and extra activities to participate in which really adds to her enjoyment of school.'

Standards are very high across the school and the level of achievement by students from all backgrounds is impressive, given the above average attainment on entry to the school. In languages especially, students excel, reaching very high standards and they enjoy studying the wide range of languages offered. The very small number of students with specific learning difficulties make excellent progress due to sensitive support. Achievement in mathematics at Key Stage 4 slipped a little in recent years and the school recognised this issue. It identified the reasons as assessment of coursework owing to some variations in the level of guidance given, and successfully dealt with them and, as a result, achievement has improved to equal that in other subjects. While the majority of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieved extremely well, the school identified slight underachievement in Key Stage 4 by a small number of students with English as an additional language and laid on intensive support for them which effectively resolved the problem. Students are highly motivated to learn, and although they sometimes recognise that on rare occasions teaching does not fully engage them, they work continuously hard to do well.

Students' personal development is excellent, as is their spiritual, moral and social and cultural development. While the focus of the school is on academic excellence, this does not detract from the obvious enjoyment of students to engage in the wide range of other activities that the school provides, or to initiate activities they want to follow themselves. For example, students have found work placements in Spain, established a philosophy club and organised individual community experience in the children's ward of a local hospital. Students make a significant contribution to the school and wider communities. They support and help each other extremely well and take an active part in the school community. Form and school councils take their concerns to the school's leaders and governors and appreciate the way their views are taken into account. For example, students expressed concern at the amount of homework they receive, as did a small number of parents in the questionnaire, and this is being dealt with by the school and governing body. Beyond the school, students take an active part in raising money for charities, working in local primary schools, especially in teaching languages, and hospitals and establishing links with schools overseas. As a result, they have an outstanding understanding of the values and beliefs of people from different backgrounds in this country and overseas. Much of this is a result of the extensive work of the language college, which supports links with France, Spain, Japan, India and Russia, amongst others. Students' attendance and behaviour is excellent; they work safely and sensibly in often quite small rooms and have an outstanding grasp of the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. The great majority take part in at least one physical activity each week. Students are exceptionally well prepared for their future lives.

Teaching is excellent and very focused on students achieving academic excellence. Teachers have considerable subject expertise, plan work effectively and conduct lessons at a fast pace.

Their explanations and the materials provided for students are exceptionally detailed and help promote high standards. Questioning is searching and in many instances forces high quality answers from students. Occasionally, the intensity of academic challenge and pace of work leads to limited student involvement in debate and discussion and to restricted opportunities to express personal ideas, which a few parents have commented on. However, students are keen to achieve well and the great majority enjoy lessons and what they learn in them. The curriculum is outstanding. All students follow two languages to GCSE and can pursue a third if they wish. The range of activities to enrich students' experience is particularly wide, especially as a result of the contribution of the languages college. For example, collaborative work between students and a school in India, a French exchange and work placement in a French law company widen students' experiences. There are drama, music, sporting and debating activities that students enjoy and readily participate in. Healthy lifestyles are promoted very effectively and there are planned opportunities for students to make informed choices about their personal safety, health and well-being.

The quality of care, support and guidance is excellent. Relationships between students and staff are exceptional as are those between home and school. The school keeps parents very well informed about school activities, though not quite so well about student council actions, an issue being addressed because the school puts great store by listening to students' views and values their contribution to improving the school. Students feel absolutely secure going to any member of staff for support if they need it and they report that there is no bullying or harassment. Academic guidance is very effective. The assessment and tracking of students' progress is accurate. All students know their targets, the level or grade they are currently working at, and what they need to do to improve further. Student reviews and consultations with parents play a very large part in the effectiveness of this. Marking also plays an important part, although it does not consistently provide guidance and staff do not always check that advice is heeded. However, marking and tracking student progress is improving because of effective approaches developing through specialist language college work, although these are not consistently applied across the school. Support for students is especially good. For example, support for students with English as an additional language is very effective in ensuring that their progress is as good as it could be. Procedures ensure all safeguarding requirements are fully met and the school is safe and secure.

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher provides outstanding direction for improvement and the ability to sustain excellence. She is exceptionally well supported by senior staff and others in leadership roles. Governors play a significant part in helping the school sustain its effectiveness. They are exceptionally well informed and challenging and they participate comprehensively in the school's self-evaluation and development planning processes. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school acts promptly when it identifies areas to improve. Given the school's excellent record and the effectiveness with which it deals with areas to improve, its capacity to sustain high standards and to improve where necessary is outstanding. Efforts to promote community cohesion are excellent. These are exceptionally well supported by the specialist language college work with local schools, especially because it involves students so frequently. In addition, the links developed through the language specialism foster an excellent understanding and respect for life in different communities in Britain and around the world.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision is excellent and students in the sixth form reach very high standards and make outstanding progress. The curriculum is extremely wide and improving through consortium arrangements with other schools. In particular, the range of foreign language courses on offer is excellent and students really enjoy the opportunities this provides for them to widen their studies. Guidance for students is excellent at all levels. Teachers readily provide academic support when needed. The review process to check on students' progress is extensive and involves parents fully. The quality of information about higher education and life at university is outstanding and the school makes effective use of past students, trips to universities and advice from local university staff to make sure students are fully informed when they come to make choices for the future. Students' behaviour and attitudes are excellent and they take an active role in the school, from supporting younger students academically and pastorally to helping run school activities and after-school meetings for parents. They engage in a very wide range of out-of-school activities, many in 'enrichment time' on Wednesday afternoons, and thoroughly enjoy and appreciate the opportunities the school provides for them. Those who are prefects value these roles and play an active part in school life, for example by attending governors' curriculum meetings and advising on ways the school could improve. The sixth form is exceptionally well led and managed by staff who are continually seeking ways to improve provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure students' increased participation in lessons by providing frequent opportunities for them to express their own opinions and ideas.
- Make sure that marking contributes effectively to students' understanding of how to make further progress by providing clear advice and checking that the guidance is followed.

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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 ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	1

¹Grade 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

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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 eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

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

10 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Wolverhampton Girls' High School, Wolverhampton, WV6 0BY

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I spoke to many of you during the day and you provided really useful information which helped me arrive at my judgements.

These are the main things I found out about your school.

- You are students at an excellent school. The standards you reach are very high and your achievement is exceptional.
- The headteacher, staff and governors are outstanding in making sure that the school continues to provide an excellent education and in quickly dealing with any issues they feel may limit your achievement.
- Teaching is excellent. The range of subjects, especially those which widen and enrich your experience, are exceptionally good. The range of activities available because the school is a specialist language college is particularly good.
- You enjoy school, behave superbly, work exceptionally hard, take part in the many activities available with enthusiasm, and initiate activities you want to do.
- You undertake responsibilities willingly, and carry them out successfully.
- The way you help and support each other is excellent and your understanding and respect for people from other religions and cultures is outstanding.
- Your grasp of the importance of leading healthy lives and the degree to which you take part in physical activities is remarkably good.
- The school is exceptionally safe and staff take excellent care of you.

To improve things, we have asked the school to do the following:

- ensure your participation in lessons increases by providing frequent opportunities for you to express your own opinions and ideas
- make sure that marking gives you clear advice on how to make further progress, and staff check that you follow the guidance given. You can help. If you feel your opinions are valuable in lessons, try to express them, but of course politely. Also, if you are not sure how to improve your work, ask, and follow any guidance you are given. Yours faithfully

Ted Wheatley

Lead inspector