

Watford Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117575
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312658
Inspection dates	3-4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Paula Heaney HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1250
6 th form	350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P McCloskey
Headteacher	Mrs H Hyde
Date of previous school inspection	3-7 November 2003
School address	Lady's Close Watford WD18 0AE
Telephone number	01923 223403
Fax number	01923 350721

Age group	11-18
Inspection dates	3-4 October 2007
Inspection number	312658

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a comprehensive school where a quarter of the students are selected on academic ability and a further 10% on musical aptitude. The majority of girls enter the school with standards that are well above national averages. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is significantly below the national average. The proportion of children from minority ethnic groups is significantly above the national average, as is the proportion whose first language is not English. The numbers of students receiving free school meals is significantly below the national average.

The school has visual arts specialist status, recently re-accredited, and achieved a second specialism in mathematics and computing in February 2007. The school works closely with Watford Grammar School for Boys in the provision of joint courses and curricular activities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

What makes Watford Grammar School for Girls outstanding is the focus on each girl as an individual and an almost relentless drive to ensure that everyone achieves their very best. The strong and highly effective leadership by the headteacher and her team has resulted in a school with a very supportive ethos, committed to developing thinking skills, and providing a very high standard of care and education. Self-evaluation is analytical and accurate, and based on a high level of understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Improvement since the last inspection has been marked, and the leadership team and school staff demonstrate both the commitment and the capacity to improve the school still further. The school sets challenging attainment targets, which are invariably achieved, and sometimes exceeded, by the students in their test and examination results.

Standards are very high across the school and in the sixth form. In 2007, school data indicate almost all students achieved very high levels at Key Stage 3, the large majority achieved grades A*-B at GCSE and all students passed their A-level examinations, with most achieving higher grades. The progress students make is also excellent with a high proportion staying on into the sixth form and almost all making the transition to university. Students from different backgrounds all make particularly good progress and students with lower abilities make excellent progress.

Students are aware of how to lead healthy lifestyles and there is very high participation in a wide range of sporting activities. Students feel very safe and secure at school and they contribute to a variety of community-based activities such as charity fund raising. Strong inter-personal and work related skills are developed through a broad range of curriculum subjects. These are enhanced further through business enterprise activities and through opportunities provided through the school's specialisms in the visual arts and in mathematics and computing. The curriculum meets the needs of all the students very well in the main school and in the sixth form. There is an impressive range of additional activities, which enables the students to stretch their skills and knowledge further. Attendance is high and behaviour is very good.

Teaching and learning are of a very high standard. The best lessons are challenging, well paced and enable all students to reach their potential. Teachers support students very effectively to develop their thinking skills and independence. Staff monitor the girls very well and additional support sessions enable students to catch up on their work when teachers detect they may be falling behind or need help. Most students know what they need to do to improve despite some variability in marking. However, the approach to academic monitoring in the main school is not consistent. The leadership team is aware of this and has identified it as an area for development. Careers and further education guidance is highly effective.

A very large majority of parents are extremely positive about the school and praises the staff for their efforts in bringing out the best in each girl and in providing a happy atmosphere where students are challenged to work hard, reach their potential and develop into confident and independent learners.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Most students continue their education in the large sixth form and greatly value the teaching and support they receive. A level standards are very high and well above the national average. The progress students make is outstanding including those who start with more modest GCSE standards on entry.

Students' personal and social development is outstanding. They are fully involved in the life of the wider school, running activities and providing support for younger students. Teaching is challenging and very well informed and the excellent curriculum provides wide subject choice. Students praise the substantial additional curriculum provision that helps them develop considerable independence and maturity. Students are very well cared for and the careful monitoring of their progress ensures they meet and even exceed their targets.

The cohesive team of senior and middle managers provides outstanding sixth form leadership in all areas, including the organisation of care and support, the monitoring of progress and the provision of very well informed educational and careers guidance. Overall the sixth form is highly effective and provides excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the consistency of academic monitoring by building on the current best practice.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students enter the school with standards that are largely above average. They make excellent progress and test results at Key Stage 3 are high. Almost all students achieve the expected standard and a significant proportion achieve the higher levels. In 2007 school data show students exceeding their targets for English, mathematics and science.

Students make excellent progress in Key Stage 4 and achieve a very high standard. School data for 2007 show almost all students achieved five or more GCSE A*-C, including English and mathematics, and a large majority achieved the highest grades. Almost all students achieve the high targets set. Students from minority ethnic groups progress as well as other students and those with learning difficulties make excellent progress. A large majority of students continue their studies into the sixth form.

In the sixth form, attainment on entry to A-level courses is above average. Students make very good progress and gain A-level results that are well above average. There has been an improvement in A-level examination results since the last inspection. School data for 2007 show all students gained passes and most achieved the higher grades. The vast majority of students complete their courses and most progress to higher education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students develop into highly self-motivated, responsible young people who have excellent social skills because their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They readily reflect on the needs of others and respond by engaging in extensive charity work. Their excellent behaviour demonstrates a very clear understanding of right from wrong. They have a very good appreciation of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and most, in addition to choosing to eat healthily, participate enthusiastically in the wide range of extra-curricular sports on offer. The students say they feel safe, and free from any intimidation or harassment. Relationships between pupils of all cultural background are exemplary and the ethos of a highly caring and mutually supportive school pervades every area. The students enjoy every aspect of being at this school and attendance is high. A very strong feature is the exceptionally high acquisition of inter-personal skills that enables the pupils to relate to teachers and especially visitors in such a positive way. Many show initiative and have a real flair for enterprise, as for example through the high level of participation in Young Enterprise clubs that girls have set up and run themselves. Despite a recent lack of a fully operational school council, many students find ways of contributing to the school community and its organisation very effectively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is stimulating and well paced in the best lessons. There is a high level of student participation and students respond positively and enthusiastically to the level of challenge provided. Teachers encourage independent learning and the development of thinking skills is implemented across the curriculum very effectively. The best practice often incorporates the use of information communication technology (ICT) to support learning very well. In the best lessons teachers make highly effective use of summaries to check students' understanding and how well they have progressed. Whilst there is a degree of inconsistency in the quality of marking, most students are made aware of what they need to do to improve.

Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and instil a genuine enthusiasm for their subject. They have high expectations of students' work and foster positive attitudes to learning very effectively. Inspectors saw a wide range of pair and group work as well as independent learning and the level of student motivation and cooperation was very high. Students make excellent progress and demonstrate a genuine enthusiasm for learning. Behaviour is very good overall and exemplary in some lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The carefully planned and well-balanced curriculum is very well matched to students' needs, interests and preferences. The school is very successful in ensuring students have a sound understanding of vocational pathways. The firm emphasis placed on developing students' skills prepares them very successfully for their future studies and the world of work.

An impressive variety of additional activities and clubs stretches students' learning very effectively and advances the development of vocational skills and expertise further. Students speak very enthusiastically about the programme and value highly the opportunity to introduce new clubs and societies to reflect their interests. A supportive network of community links with local schools and other organisations underpins learning very effectively.

The school's specialist status in both the visual arts and mathematics and computing adds further to the richness of the curriculum. Students develop their thinking skills and the visual presentation of their work across the curriculum and additional activity programme and this enhances the curriculum to a high degree.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Child protection procedures are very well established, ensuring students are safe in all areas of the school. There are very few concerns about bullying and other misbehaviour and these are dealt with promptly and very effectively. Parents and students praise the excellent support. The monitoring of academic progress is good and it is outstanding in some subjects and in the sixth form. The school recognises that there is some inconsistency across the school in the methods of assessing and tracking student progress, particularly in the earlier years.

There is a wide range of support strategies to identify and support students with particular needs. The excellent enrichment programme not only supports the many gifted and talented students but also targets those pupils who, it is felt, would benefit from extra learning and closer monitoring and support. This ensures most students meet or exceed their targets.

Careers and further education guidance is a very strong feature. Developing an understanding of the world of work features strongly in the main school and helps students make well informed later choices for university education. Sixth form students praise the information and guidance they receive for higher education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher has an outstanding vision and sense of direction that she has shared very successfully with the staff and students. Appropriate and challenging targets are set and met both for academic achievement and to develop the school's specialist capability.

The close-knit senior leadership team is very successful in promoting the ethos of the school and in monitoring the effectiveness of priorities for improvement. Inspectors agree with the staff who said that senior leaders are 'dynamic, inspirational, and caring, and a role model for others' and that staff are 'encouraged to think and do things differently'. Individual students are well known and respected. Equality of opportunity is promoted actively and very successfully so that all pupils achieve to a very high standard and to the best of their abilities.

This nurturing style of leadership and management permeates throughout the whole school very successfully. Professional development and training results in continued success in the school. Performance is monitored and evaluated very well at all levels.

Finances and resources are used efficiently and effectively to secure excellent value for money. The governing body is very effective in discharging its responsibilities. The governors know the school very well, are actively involved in its running and provide outstanding support and questioning challenge in appropriate and equal measures.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	-----------------------	--------------

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 disabilities make progress	1	

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	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	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

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.

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	
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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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



5 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Watford Grammar School for Girls, Watford, WD18 0AE

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 an excellent school which is very well managed. Results are outstanding and are well above national averages. Most of you achieve higher levels and grades in your tests and examinations and this is exemplary.

The quality of teaching is excellent. The best lessons were interesting, well paced and challenging. Your teachers support you very well and ensure you achieve to the best of your abilities. Your attendance is very good and your behaviour is excellent. You enjoy very much the range of activities and sports on offer through the school.

We have asked your headteacher and staff to ensure there is a consistent approach to the way your work is monitored and recorded across the main school to aid teachers in their decision-making and in the setting of targets for you to work to.

Keep up the good work!

Best wishes

Paula Heaney
HM Inspector of Schools