

Westcliff High School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115339
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	357736
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Joan Hewitt HMI

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1046
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	286
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Murray Foster
Headteacher	Dr Paul Hayman
Date of previous school inspection	20 February 2008
School address	Kenilworth Gardens Westcliff-on-Sea Essex SS0 0BS
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors, including one who focused for half a day on the school's provision for safeguarding students. Inspectors observed 42 teachers teaching 42 lessons and conducted one series of brief lesson visits focused on students' independent learning. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff and with the Chair of the Governing Body. One inspector spoke to two parents on the telephone. Inspectors also observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's development plan, data and analysis, policies, the school's monitoring records and the minutes of the governing body. They considered the responses to questionnaires from 321 parents, 209 students and 91 members of staff:

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

- How consistently is teaching meeting the needs of all groups of students, especially the most able in promoting independent learning and securing good or better progress?
- How effective are leaders and managers at all levels in raising achievement, especially in mathematics and how well does this demonstrate capacity for further improvement?
- How effective are leaders in monitoring and accurately evaluating the school's performance to secure clear and sustained improvement?

Information about the school

Westcliff High School for Girls is a slightly larger-than-average secondary school. It is one of four grammar schools in the area that select students by ability. It gained specialist status in science and engineering in 2003. Students join this oversubscribed school from a wide range of primary schools in a wide geographical area. The large majority of students are of White British heritage. Many other ethnic groups are represented and the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is similar to that found nationally. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below that found nationally and all speak English fluently. Eligibility for free school meals is much lower than average. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than average. The sixth form includes students who transfer from other schools including a few boys. The school has achieved a number of awards including National Healthy Schools Status and The Diana 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

In this outstanding school, students achieve both academic excellence and develop exceptional personal qualities so that when they leave the girls are confident, responsible and compassionate citizens. The school uses its resources highly effectively so that all students make outstanding progress. In English especially, students make rapid progress throughout their time in school. Other subjects too are very successful in maintaining at least good and often outstanding results. In mathematics, the progress is also outstanding and has improved over the last three years so that in 2010 the large majority of students achieved A* or A grades at GCSE.

The reason for this outstanding progress is the rapidly improving quality of teaching. Over a third of lessons are outstanding and few are less than good. Students have excellent attitudes to learning and their exemplary behaviour is a significant element in supporting their learning. In outstanding lessons teachers use skilful questioning. This excellent practice is conspicuously successful in developing students' creative and independent learning skills, especially the most able. In these lessons girls confidently assess their own and others' work and so develop a clear understanding of how they can improve. In good lessons these skills are not always maximised. The impact of the school's specialist status has been an instrumental factor in securing improvements, particularly in delivering high quality training for all staff.

Senior leaders ensure any underachievement is identified quickly through a thorough and sophisticated tracking system. The interventions, which include planned actions by the teacher and additional support outside lessons, are very effective. For example teachers sometimes prepare tailored worksheets to help individuals with work they are finding difficult. Consequently all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. The morale of teachers is high. Their professional pride in seeking to improve outcomes for students has resulted in a safe and inclusive atmosphere where all cultures and backgrounds are valued for the diversity they bring to the community.

The school's work with partners is equally strong especially in the work done with outside agencies for those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Other partnerships combine to enhance learning especially in the school's specialist subjects. For example, the link with Chelmsford Engineering Society at Anglia Ruskin University has provided students with access to Young Engineers courses. The impact is clearly seen in the rapidly improving progress of students in the school's specialist subjects. Girls interest in engineering is inspired by curriculum enrichment

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and an array of fascinating activities, for example, a team of girls enter the 'Flying Cow' in F24 car competitions.

Students' enjoyment of school is seen in their very high levels of attendance, their participation in extra-curricular activities and their willingness to take on roles of responsibility. They say they feel safe and that adults look after them well.

The tenacity of senior leaders has resulted in exceptional improvement since the last inspection. Self-evaluation processes are honed to enable staff at all levels to take decisive and targeted action to ensure improvement continues. The school's evaluation of its work is too modest because on occasions they are too self-critical. Nevertheless, leaders and managers have an acute knowledge of the strengths and areas for development. They have taken highly successful steps to greatly improve the quality of lessons and the impact of this is seen clearly in the outstanding progress students make. The school's capacity to sustain this improvement is therefore outstanding and it offers outstanding value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by using existing outstanding practice to:
 - ensure all teachers develop their questioning skills to further promote creative and independent learning
 - ensure all teachers help students to confidently assess their own work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' attainment has been consistently high over the last three years and continues to rise to exceptionally high levels. In particular, all students gain five A*-C GCSEs including English and mathematics and in 2010 the very large majority gained eight A*-B GCSE grades also including English and mathematics. There is little variation between subjects and different groups of students. Attainment on entry to the school is high and the school does a tremendous job in ensuring that all students make outstanding progress so that many gain the very highest grades. In English, progress is exceptional with the majority of students gaining A* grade at GCSE in 2010.

Learning in most of the lessons seen by inspectors was good or better and in over a third it was outstanding. Students were keen to participate and they had high expectations of themselves. The girls collaborate well and in the best lessons demonstrate very high levels of independence and relish challenging work. All students, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and

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the few who speak English as an additional language, make outstanding progress in lessons because of the outstanding teaching and support they receive.

Students get on very well together, they value the diversity that students from minority ethnic backgrounds bring to the school and consequently the school is a safe and harmonious community. They have a good awareness of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. The behaviour in and out of lessons is exemplary and this makes a marked contribution to their successful learning. Students’ spiritual and cultural development is strong and they regularly take full advantage of opportunities for reflection in lessons and assemblies. In an outstanding religious education lesson, one student commented, ‘this has made me think again about the way I lead my life’.

The girls develop a finely tuned sense of responsibility not only within the school but also as citizens and view their charitable works and community service as an important part of their learning. For example Year 10 students organised a charity week to support the ‘End Polio’ campaign and many Year 12 students participate in an enrichment programme in which they perform services to the local community. Students are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their lives, developing excellent workplace and basic skills, including those in information and communication technology (ICT).

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	2
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

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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How effective is the provision?

Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection and it is now outstanding. In the most effective lessons teachers provide challenging and engaging tasks which inspire students to think deeply and work independently. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and very good relationships with students. This results in an outstanding learning environment in which students are confident to experiment with new learning. In the very best lessons, teachers’ skilful questioning results in students’ creative and independent learning. This impressive level of skill is not yet fully consistent across all lessons.

During lessons, teachers offer students high quality feedback. Students are all aware of their targets and in most lessons they have a precise understanding of what they need to do to improve. Leaders and managers are working well to ensure this excellent practice is adopted consistently by all teachers.

The outstanding curriculum is responsive to students’ needs and the school is innovative in seeking to ensure they tailor courses to meet individuals’ needs. For example, as a result of introducing a three-year GCSE course in English the number of students obtaining an A* grade rapidly increased. This innovation has been expanded to include other subjects. For the most-able students there is the opportunity to take an additional GCSE or an Advanced Subsidiary course. Extra-curricular activities are valued and well attended by students. The school has used its specialist status to provide rich and memorable experiences for students, for example the ‘Cosmic Chemistry’ activity day was viewed by students as outstanding and challenged them to see chemistry from a new perspective. The accelerated Key Stage 3 curriculum and the flexible pathways in Key Stage 4 combined with outstanding enhancement opportunities have a significant impact on students’ personal and academic development.

Pastoral teams, along with carefully planned guidance activities, result in outstanding systems for care, guidance and support. Adults give detailed attention to meeting the needs of each individual and as a result students, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, enjoy a high level of care. The work the school does with outside agencies is particularly strong in securing targeted, individual support. Consequently students feel valued, well cared for and able to make outstanding progress. The school places great emphasis on preparing students for their future and consequently guidance at key times is highly effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1

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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?

Leaders and managers at all levels are conspicuously successful in securing improvements in the key aspects of the school’s work. They are highly ambitious and this has inspired the whole school community to embrace high expectations. Consequently, morale is very high and all members of the school, including governors, have a clear understanding of their role in achieving ambitious targets. This ambition is underpinned by rigorous monitoring, sharply focused improvement planning and thorough self-evaluation. The impressive improvements to the school’s work have rightly been focused on strengthening the quality of teaching and in this respect the school has had rapid success in moving from satisfactory at the time of the last inspection to outstanding. This is due to the relentless focus on improving teachers’ skills to meet the precise needs of individual students.

The school prides itself on developing young people with outstanding academic and personal skills and it has been exceptionally successful in this aim. All students have equally excellent opportunities. All aspects of students’ outcomes are monitored and this shapes the highly effective intervention and support so that any emerging unevenness between groups is addressed quickly.

The school has robust systems to ensure the safety of students. Policies are well structured and rigorously monitored and evaluated. Outstanding partnerships, particularly those forged through the school’s specialist status enhance almost all aspects of school life, including curriculum provision and the professional development of staff. Engagement with parents and carers is good because the school uses a wide range of approaches, including electronic communication.

The governing body is well organised and has good systems to help them evaluate the work of the school. Governors support the school effectively and hold it to account when necessary. However direct systems for seeking the views of parents and carers and students are underdeveloped and governors rely too heavily on information gathered by the school.

Community cohesion is promoted strategically and it is embedded in the work of the school. It has a marked impact beyond the school; for example all girls take part in voluntary service activities as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award. It is further enhanced by the work which the school does in supporting primary and secondary school partners in improving their science and engineering provision.

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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	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
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
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The majority of students stay on to the sixth form and a minority, including a few boys, join from other schools. This reflects the high regard in which the sixth form is held. Attainment at A Level is high and the progress students make from their already high starting points is good. This is rapidly improving and progress in lessons is now outstanding. This improvement is a result of recent changes to the guidance students receive as they select their courses. Almost all students complete their courses and a large majority go on to take up university places.

Students are outstanding role models in the school. They work with younger students in a variety of ways enthusing them to be an active part of the lively community. They enjoy sixth form life and the teaching they receive is generally outstanding because, as in the main school, lessons are planned to be active and engaging. This means that learning moves on at a brisk pace as students become increasingly independent.

The curriculum is highly effective in matching the needs and aspirations of students, who are all high attainers with ambitions to secure professional careers. Leaders and managers have a flexible approach to programmes so that additional challenge and support are tailored to individual needs. Students demonstrate high levels of maturity and responsibility. Their community contributions are particularly strong and highly valued by both staff and students. The care and guidance students receive are outstanding and students speak highly of the support they get from the head of sixth form and the able pastoral support co-ordinator.

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The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding and demonstrate the same relentless pursuit of excellence as found in the main school. A clear example is the way in which leaders and managers use the sophisticated tracking systems to analyse progress and take a detailed approach to planning additional support. As a result of excellent guidance and the emphasis on developing community responsibility, students are very well prepared for their future.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

A large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed with all of the 13 statements. They were very positive about the experiences their children had at the school. A very small minority voiced concerns that the school did not take account of their suggestions and concerns and a few cited instances when the school had not responded to issues they had raised. Inspectors found that the school has clear systems to address concerns when they are raised.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Westcliff High 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 321 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1046 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	171	53	131	41	16	5	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	152	47	159	50	7	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	141	44	166	52	7	2	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	150	47	145	45	15	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	122	38	170	53	20	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	85	26	169	53	46	14	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	85	26	177	55	43	13	4	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)	115	36	164	51	19	6	2	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	130	40	161	50	16	5	4	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	106	33	170	53	21	7	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	61	19	183	57	32	10	6	2
The school is led and managed effectively	112	35	165	51	29	9	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	164	51	141	44	12	4	0	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 all 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring term 2009/10 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 pupils' 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.



8 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Westcliff High School for Girls, SS0 OBS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We appreciated hearing your views, looking at your work and spending time with you in lessons. We were particularly impressed with your excellent behaviour and with how hard you work. You told us you think the school is outstanding and we agree. In particular we were impressed with:

- the outstanding improvements in your progress and personal development since the last inspection
- the excellent teaching and quality of your lessons
- the outstanding curriculum and the impact specialist status has had in providing you with lots of opportunities in and out of school
- the work of senior and middle leaders in improving the school and making sure each one of you is known well and helped to do your very best
- the outstanding care, guidance and support you receive.

Your outstanding headteacher, senior teachers and all the staff have worked hard to make sure you are well cared for and that you achieve the highest possible academic standards. It is clear they are keen to make things even better. In order to help them do this they should:

- Increase the number of lessons that are outstanding by making sure teachers learn from each other so that all lessons are as good as the very best. This will help all teachers use questions to help you to further develop your skills as independent and creative learners. Teachers should also learn from each other to help you assess your own work confidently so that you always know exactly how to improve your work.

You can play your part by continuing to work and behave exceptionally well.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt
Her Majesty's Inspector

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