

Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School

Woods Avenue, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 8NL

Inspection dates

9–10 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Over a long period, the headteacher has created a culture where high aspiration has become central and the school's strapline of 'achieving our potential and enjoying the journey' has been brought to life.
- While a major rebuilding is under way, the headteacher has maintained a laser-like focus on teaching and learning.
- The climate for learning in the school is exceptionally positive. Excellent and caring staff bring out the best in pupils. The pupils thrive in a secure and calm environment.
- Staff, pupils and parents are exceptionally positive about all aspects of the school. The pastoral care of pupils is excellent.
- Governors have defined the school's strategic vision and challenged leaders and staff to make it happen. They ensure that priorities are funded, such as pupils' preparation for their next steps and their readiness for adulthood.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activity, with every teacher running at least one activity. There is a very strong focus on literacy.
- Pupils of all abilities make very strong progress and achieve very high results across a wide range of subjects. The school has just been acknowledged by the Department for Education (DfE) as 'one of the most improved schools in the country in terms of the attainment and value-added progress of its disadvantaged pupils'.
- The sixth form has lagged a little behind the rest of the school in improving learners' achievement, but is now improving rapidly.
- Teaching is consistently strong. The sense of enjoyment from pupils and teachers as progress is made is palpable.
- Pupils' personal development is a jewel in the crown of this school. The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is demonstrated through high-quality art, drama, music and sport, as well as pupils' tolerance and empathy.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- With consortium partners, continue to improve the sixth form to ensure that achievement is excellent across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- All 52 staff responding to the inspection questionnaire felt proud to work at this school. Morale is very high. No member of staff disagreed that 'leaders do all they can to ensure that the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching force'. This is a major accolade as decisions, for example around linking pay progression to teachers' performance, have been robust and not always popular.
- After a long journey of steady improvement, the culture of the school is one where both pupils and staff have high aspirations and enjoy coming to school.
- Leadership at all levels is excellent. Senior leaders, including the headteacher, are recognised for their expertise and contribute to improving the wider education system, for example in safeguarding or advising the government on the use of pupil premium funding (the use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils).
- The business management of the school is highly professional. As the school increases in size and a new building is erected, the headteacher has been careful to ensure that key staff can take day-to-day decisions, leaving her free to focus on strategic decisions and the school's core business of teaching and learning. She demonstrates this focus by teaching all Year 7 groups, and through this gets to know them well.
- The school chooses to separate pastoral leadership so that teachers focus on teaching, and non-teaching pastoral heads are always available and focus on pastoral support. For this school, it is extremely effective. A typical parental comment to inspectors was, 'My daughter is flourishing at Bishops. She is receiving a wonderfully holistic education. The head is particularly intuitive about pupils and follows progress keenly'.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. A wide range of GCSEs is complemented by BTEC health and social care at level 2 in Key Stage 4 and at level 3 in the sixth form. At Key Stage 4, the ASDAN CoPE course enables pupils to achieve at levels 1 and 2. English, mathematics, science and religious education are compulsory GCSE subjects at this school, ensuring breadth. Personal, health, social and economic (PHSE) education is effectively taught by specialists. Humanities and modern foreign languages are popular options and results are strong, with over half the pupils achieving the EBacc (the group of subjects favoured by the government). Governors, school leaders and sixth-form leaders from across a consortium of schools meet regularly to discuss strategic issues, including the post-16 study programmes.
- Resources are deployed very well to give pupils equal opportunities to succeed. For example, additional funding is used highly effectively to help pupils who are behind in their literacy or mathematics when they transfer to Year 7. Work to ensure that disadvantaged pupils do as well as their peers is particularly successful. The school has just received a letter from a minister at the Department for Education stating, 'It is clear that you and your staff have provided your disadvantaged pupils with a good start in life'.
- In the school community, staff and pupils have created a model of British values. Specific lessons such as 'life skills' teach the importance of democracy, while GCSE religious education for everyone ensures an understanding of different beliefs. However, the promotion of respect and tolerance goes much deeper into school life.
- Staff training is central to the school's success. Appraisal identifies training needs for both teaching and support staff. Most training is delivered in the school, making use of staff expertise and the sharing of best practice. A teacher described to inspectors how leaders ensure constant improvement: 'I have benefited from excellent leadership from my head of faculty and the senior leadership team, who both challenge and support me as I strive to bring the best out of all of my students'. The quality of teaching and learning is closely monitored through school review weeks, performance management observations, book scrutiny and learning walks. Teachers often visit each other's teaching rooms on a drop-in basis to get extra tips.
- New and inexperienced staff are supported well. The school contributes to a locally devised induction programme. It works with partners to provide initial teaching training. A newly qualified teacher told inspectors: 'I feel since joining this school I have learned so much from those more experienced teachers, who are always more than willing to help and share good practice'.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body provides a shared vision and high level of challenge to senior leaders. Governors' and leaders' ambitions for the school are equally high.

- The expertise of governors is wide and includes, for example, staff from a local university.
 - The governing body reviews all policies regularly. It ensures that policies are up to date, comprehensive, well informed and accessible to all stakeholders through the highly informative website.
 - Governors scrutinise the arrangements for the management of teachers' performance diligently, including challenging decisions.
 - The governing body works with school leaders to ensure that the school is always focused on delivering its vision, for example, ensuring that the curriculum prepares pupils well for the world of work and for adult life.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a highly effective focus on keeping pupils safe. Leaders and governors ensure that procedures, policies and recruitment arrangements are fully compliant with legislation and that staff are well trained in understanding their responsibilities.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Consistently high-quality teaching across the range of subjects and courses enables pupils to make strong and sustained progress. Pupils are taught by subject specialists and teachers' strong subject and pedagogical knowledge gives confidence to pupils.
- All lessons observed by inspectors demonstrated the high expectations that teachers have of their pupils. Teachers are skilful at checking pupils' learning and understanding during lessons.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally strong. The beginnings of lessons are well managed. Pupils arrive ready to work and transitions between activities are rapid, maximising learning time.
- Information about pupils' progress is provided for teachers, and pupils' progress is discussed and reviewed regularly. As a result, additional support and interventions respond to pupils' needs rapidly.
- Additional adults are highly effective in supporting pupils' progress. The school has created a 'hybrid' role of cover supervisor/ learning support assistant so that when these staff are not required to cover teacher absence, they provide in-class or withdrawn support for pupils with special educational needs or disability. In this school, this is effective. Parents of pupils with special educational needs or disability were glowing in their praise for the support their daughters had received and the progress they are making.
- Teachers adapt their plans well to meet the needs of different learners. There is very effective support for pupils with special educational needs or disability. The most-able pupils are challenged well. The effectiveness of the support and challenge for groups of all abilities is seen in the excellent outcomes.
- The school's assessment policy is implemented consistently across the school. The impact of feedback can be tracked through pupils' work. Pupils are highly positive about marking and feedback. Parents are enthusiastic about following their child's progress through their feedback.
- The presentation of pupils' work is consistently excellent, demonstrating pupils' great pride in their work.
- The school's focus on literacy gives pupils a really good advantage in doing well across a range of subjects. Literacy information is highly visible around the school and inspectors were even reminded of the appropriate use of 'if' and 'whether' while visiting the toilet!

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The personal qualities that pupils develop make a significant contribution to their excellent academic and social achievement. The many opportunities for pupil leadership contribute well.
- Pupils understand how to stay safe at school and beyond. They understand and have great confidence in the school's ability to prevent different forms of bullying, discrimination or extremism. Any concerns are followed up thoroughly. Representative of parental comments was: 'The school provides a happy, safe and secure environment for my child to engage with the learning process. She is encouraged to keep focused on her studies and strive to do her best. I believe my daughter is supported well with any pastoral issues.'

- Leaders and governors have created a very positive ethos through the individualised approach to the safety and welfare of pupils. The revised pastoral system contributes very effectively to pupils' behaviour and personal development. Staff are well trained in keeping pupils safe. Case studies indicate that there is highly effective multi-agency collaboration.
- The school's attention to individual needs is singled out by staff and parents as exceptional in this school. Parents report that there is, 'excellent pastoral care for children transferring from primary to secondary education'. They are equally complimentary regarding the transfer from Key Stage 4 to post-16 education.
- Pupils receive high-quality, impartial careers advice and guidance, including individual interviews with Youth Connexions Hertfordshire. The school's activity to prepare pupils for their next steps is very well developed, beginning with the 'life skills' curriculum in Year 7, where pupils begin to develop financial capability through 'budgeting for beginners'. The school's approach to careers guidance and education is excellent, with work-shadowing in Year 8 and work experience in Year 10. Pupils are introduced to a range of options during Year 11, including but by no means limited to the school's sixth form. All pupils are aware of apprenticeships as a possible post-16 option. Pupils' preparation for adult life is unusually coherent and has an unusually high level of progression built in. Youth Connexions Hertfordshire makes a highly positive contribution. Partnerships with employers have been productively brokered through the Rotary Club, for example contributing to the Year 9 two-day Insight into Industry conference.
- Various activities promote learning and personal development and social inclusion. Examples include: enterprise education; Insight into Industry; Black History Month; Fairtrade Fortnight; the climate change conference; the faith and persecution conference; and Holocaust awareness workshops. Pupils have spoken at conferences about their learning in citizenship around identity and diversity. Community service and community sports leaders' programmes extend pupils' understanding of their community. Visits to places of worship, visiting speakers of different faiths, and community representatives develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding very well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils, staff and parents all agree that behaviour is excellent, and this highly positive view of what happens over time corresponded with the snapshot of exemplary behaviour seen by inspectors. Pupils show respect for adults and their peers. This includes respecting and debating views that might challenge their own. For example, in a Year 13 government and politics lesson, pupils were role playing the representatives of parties with whom they personally disagreed.
- Pupils display highly positive attitudes to learning and clearly enjoy it. This in turn contributes to the high morale of teachers. As a teacher put it: 'The ethos of the school is one of caring and mutual respect; it cannot always be put into words; there is a fantastic feel to the place which makes teaching a delight'.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes to school are reflected in high levels of attendance, and their punctuality and resilience. This was seen, for example, in two mathematics lessons where pupils were unafraid to make mistakes and learn from them.
- Around the school, pupils are very courteous and look out for one another, especially in 'pinch points' such as narrow corridors, doorways and stairwells. The organisation of the school is helpful, in that pupils leave their coats and bags and only carry with them just what they need for the lesson. This speeds movement around the school and readiness for work in lessons.
- In almost every lesson seen by inspectors, the vast majority of pupils were obviously thoroughly enjoying their learning. The 'wow' moment as pupils realised something new was a joy to behold.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- The proportion of pupils making and exceeding expected progress in English and in mathematics is now consistently well above the national average. Pupils of all abilities make very strong progress from their different starting points, particularly so in mathematics, humanities and modern foreign languages, all of which are taken by a majority of pupils. Disadvantaged pupils make as much progress as their peers, although they are less likely to take a combination of subjects leading to success in the EBacc.
- Attainment at the end of Year 11 is very high, with the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*–C being consistently well above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils attain similar results as their peers.

- The most-able pupils are challenged well and as a result the proportion of A* and A grades at GCSE is strong.
- Pupils arrive from primary school with attainment that is broadly, or sometimes a little above, average. The school quickly identifies individual needs and works from the outset to accelerate literacy skills. Pupils are encouraged to develop speaking and listening skills that are vital to employability.
- Work with pupils with special educational needs or disability is very effective. The special educational needs co-ordinator is an expert. She has developed special educational needs or disability provision by expanding the team of learning support assistants to deal with specific needs and enabled them to gain qualifications. The result is that careful attention is paid to ensuring that pupils struggling with traditional academic subjects gain a level 1 ASDAN diploma.
- Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as and often better than the majority of pupils who are of White British heritage.
- Pupils who take vocational courses achieve qualifications that prepare them very well for their futures. The excellent preparation for next steps and academic achievement contribute to there being no pupils 'not in employment, education or training'.

16 to 19 study programmes

are outstanding

- The sixth form makes a very positive contribution to the school. Sixth formers undertake leadership roles and are effective role models to younger pupils.
- The highly effective 'life skills' programme from the 11–16 element of the school continues in the sixth form, where it is highly valued by learners. Pupils continue to be very well supported for their next steps. In Year 12, there is a focus on employability skills such as teamwork and on social responsibility. In Year 13, the focus moves to university applications and personal finance. Learners are aware of high-quality apprenticeship alternatives to university. There is work experience in Year 12 and the work-related learning requirements of the study programmes are met well.
- Leaders are acutely aware that the outstanding value added in the 11–16 element of the school has been not quite so strong in the sixth form. Learners have made extremely strong progress in vocational courses, but historically progress has been more in line with the national average in academic A levels. Inspectors explored the reasons with staff and are confident that leaders' self-evaluation is leading to improvements in sixth-form provision. Leaders have adjusted the entrance requirements for some courses to ensure that learners have the necessary ability to do well. The preparation for A-level choices has improved to ensure that school staff, together with careers counselling, help learners to choose the best pathways for them. The Year 12 AS results for current Year 13 learners indicate that learners' achievement across the range of subjects is very strong. Retention is high. Disadvantaged learners do as well as other learners. The very small number of learners joining the sixth form without GCSE passes at grade C or above in mathematics or English make good progress in retaking these subjects.
- Learners achieve exceptionally well in the sixth form because the strengths found in the 11–16 element of the school are reflected in the sixth form. Excellent personal support and monitoring complement high-quality teaching, with excellent marking and feedback. Learners take pride in their work and build on the excellent study and learning habits developed earlier in school.
- The sixth form is part of a consortium that enables learners to choose from a wide range of courses. The management of this is highly effective in ensuring schools cooperate to ensure that timetables are harmonised and each school is aware of their learners' progress. The consortium has developed the checking of the quality of teaching and learning, resulting in greater consistency. Mixing with learners from other schools increases their ability to work with people from different backgrounds, including boys.

School details

Unique reference number	137757
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10001322

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	721
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Jones
Headteacher	Theodora Nickson
Telephone number	01707 275331
Website	www.bishophatfield.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@bishophatfield.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6–7 October 2010

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is below average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below average. This is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is a little above average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The sixth form is part of the Welwyn Hatfield 14–19 Collaborative Group, providing a consortium with Onslow St Audrey's School in Hatfield and Stanborough School, Monk's Walk School and Sir Frederic Osborn School in Welwyn Garden City.
- There are no pupils educated in alternative provision.
- The school has been awarded ArtsMark Gold and SportsMark, and has achieved the National Healthy Schools' Standard, the full Department for Education International School Award, The Prince's Trust Institute award in geography and has been designated a Fairtrade school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made 23 short visits and 26 more extended observations of pupils' learning in lessons. The majority of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors observed the pupils in class, in the library and at informal times such as during break- and lunchtime.
- Inspectors met with governors, senior staff, pastoral leaders, middle leaders and pupils from different year groups, including the sixth form.
- Inspectors analysed 12 free-text responses completed by members of staff and spoke to staff about the school during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered 125 parent responses to Parent View, the online survey provided by Ofsted, together with 64 free-text responses from parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance; the school improvement plan; information relating to the quality of teaching; information about pupils' progress; the school's policies and procedures; and the arrangements for safeguarding.

Inspection team

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John Daniell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Diana Fletcher	Ofsted Inspector
Sharon Wilson	Ofsted Inspector

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