

Walthamstow School for Girls

Church Hill, Walthamstow, London, E17 9RZ

Inspection dates 28–29 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good, and often very good, progress. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics increased significantly in 2013 and was above the national average.
- The headteacher and the senior leadership team are ambitious for all students in the school. They clearly articulate their commitment to improvement.
- Students' behaviour is good and they feel proud to be members of the school community. Students feel safe at school and say that the skills learnt there help to keep them safe outside of school.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Lessons are well structured and planned, and students praise the variety of activities in lessons.
- The governing body has a good understanding of the school. Governors are committed to improving the outcomes for students and hold senior leaders to account well.
- The school has a very strong programme of personal development for its students. Inclusive care for individuals lies at the heart of the school's ethos and culture.
- Devolved leadership enables middle leaders to have a significant input into the life of the school. This has allowed for rapid improvements in some subjects.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. As a result, students do not make the progress they should in all subjects.
- Teachers' marking does not always show students what they need to do next to improve and students do not have enough opportunities to respond to feedback.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of teaching and learning is not focused sharply enough on how well students are learning, and students' outcomes.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 lessons, six of which were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed assemblies and other activities.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and a representative staff group. Meetings were also held with a representative from the local authority and four members of the governing body. In addition, inspectors met with a wide range of students in formal meetings and spoke to students informally.
- Inspectors scrutinised school documentation. This included the school’s self-evaluation and improvement planning, behaviour logs and attendance data, performance management information, school reviews of the quality of teaching and learning, and safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Inspectors took account of 43 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and an email from a parent. In addition, 68 responses to the staff questionnaire and a letter from a member of staff were considered.
- Inspectors reviewed the school’s own parental surveys.

Inspection team

Kevin Flanagan, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Michael Elson

Additional Inspector

Avtar Sherri

Additional Inspector

Angela Skinner

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Walthamstow School for Girls is a smaller than average secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average, as is the proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, children from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is high.
- The proportion of students in Year 7 benefiting from the funded catch-up programme is below average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- The school is a strategic partner in the Waltham Forest Teaching School Alliance.
- The school is working with partner primary schools to raise attainment in mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - there are more opportunities for the sharing of the very best practice within the school
 - students' experience of teaching, and the progress they make, is more consistent across subjects and faculties.
- Ensure that students' progress and tracking data are readily and easily available, and used to accurately inform planning for school improvement.
- Share the best practice in marking and monitor teachers' feedback across the school to ensure that all marking is of a consistently high standard.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with attainment that is in line with the national average. In 2013, the proportion of students who gained five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics was above average.
- Students make good progress from their starting points in almost all subjects. They make better than expected progress in both English and mathematics, and their progress in English is well above national expectations.
- The school recognised that results dipped in 2012. Effective action was taken and, consequently, there was a 14% rise in the number of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics in 2013.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well provided for in lessons. These students make similar progress to their peers. This is as a result of carefully planned lessons and well thought out intervention strategies.
- Students who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up fund for literacy make similar progress to their peers.
- Those students eligible for pupil premium funding benefit from a wide range of faculty-led initiatives. These students make good progress overall and, in some subjects, better progress than their peers in the school. Their rate of progress compared to all students nationally is high, although there remains a gap in attainment of almost a third of a grade in English and half a grade in mathematics. The school's tracking shows this gap is closing.
- The support provided for literacy is strong. Literacy development is a key focus in many lessons and this is helping students to make rapid progress. This support, along with a strong intervention programme, helps students who speak English as an additional language to make good progress.
- The most-able students make good progress. Their attainment at the highest grades across the whole range of subjects studied, is not yet sufficiently strong for it to be outstanding.
- The school does not routinely enter students early for GCSE.
- Each faculty has its own system for tracking students' attainment and progress, as do pastoral leaders. While this allows middle leaders to make use of data to support learning in their area, it makes analysis by the senior leadership team unnecessarily cumbersome.
- The school runs a number of after-school lessons and a Saturday school. These are open to all students, but targeted groups are encouraged to attend. These lessons are helping students to make progress, but are also indicative of the desire of students at the school to achieve the highest possible outcomes.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Students make good progress as a result.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and positive relationships with students, creating a good atmosphere for learning. Students respond well to teaching and praised their teachers for their care and thoughtfulness. Students enjoy their lessons and feel that the majority of teaching is very good.
- The very best teaching is characterised by high expectations. In these lessons, teachers use a variety of activities and carefully targeted questioning to ensure that students stay focused and understand what is being taught, so that students make very good progress and are exceptionally keen to learn.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not ensure that students properly grasp fundamental concepts and ideas. Sometimes, the teacher moves on before all students are ready, because too little account

has been taken of what they know and understand. As a consequence of this, while progress overall may still be good, some students do not make the progress of which they are capable.

- The most-able students generally make good progress. They are challenged and stretched in most lessons, and are given high-level targets. On occasion though, they finish their work before the rest of the class and suitable extension work is not available. Hence, these students do not always attain the highest grades possible.
- Learning support assistants are very effective. They talked with authority about the needs of the students they support and the strategies that have had a successful impact on their learning, leading to the students making progress that is at least as good as their peers.
- The very best marking provides clear, written comments informing students how they can improve their work. However, this good practice is not universally applied across the school. Time is rarely given in lessons to allow students to reflect on marked work; because of this, the teacher's feedback does not always help them to make the progress they might.
- The school has a very inclusive culture and teachers regularly use opportunities in their lessons to develop wider themes. Students work well together and show respect for one another's viewpoints, and tolerance and respect are reinforced through lessons.
- Almost all the parents and carers who expressed a view said that their children were benefiting from good teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Students behave well in lessons and around the school, and they are eager to learn. This good behaviour and their positive attitude to learning contribute strongly to students' good progress. At times, students can be a little boisterous around the site, but staff presence ensures that this always good natured
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students are clear about how to keep safe in school and were quick to describe the school as a very safe place. They also appreciate the many opportunities that the school gives them to learn how to keep safe outside of school.
- Incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are rare and are dealt with firmly and quickly by the school. Students are clear to whom they should report concerns and are aware of the actions that will follow. There is a clear and consistently applied behaviour-for-learning policy.
- Students' attendance is above the national average and has been so consistently for a number of years. Students are clear about the benefits of regular attendance at school. Any absence is followed up as a matter of routine, systematic records are maintained, and support and guidance are provided to families that require additional help.
- Students are given the opportunity to work in the wider community and beyond, for example raising funds to build and maintain a school in Pakistan. This enriches students' experience of school and exposes them to the diverse and varied world beyond it.
- The school promotes a harmonious environment. Students have opportunities to discuss issues around tolerance and respect for others at regular intervals. The school is a 'Stonewall Champion' school, and students are actively involved in the school's equality group. This ensures that students have a strong, active voice in championing equality for all members of the school community.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school. There is a strong focus on excellent academic outcomes, but also a belief that academic achievement must be fostered alongside the broader development of students as rounded individuals. This belief is shared by

all leaders and managers, and was forcefully reiterated by governors. Staff are proud to work at the school and are all committed to providing the very best for their students.

- The school is developing systems for holding all staff to account for their role in raising students' achievement. Targets set within performance management have explicit links to the attainment and progress of students.
 - The school regularly reviews the performance of teachers in the classroom. During the inspection, senior leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching and learning in lessons were very closely aligned with those made by inspectors. However, the longer-term assessment of the quality of teaching held by the school is more generous than that seen during the inspection.
 - The school invests significant resources and time in a very strong staff development programme. Staff development is often instigated by individual members of staff to support areas of interest and need in specific areas. As such, it is closely linked to those who will most quickly be able to improve things in classrooms. However, this local focus means that senior leaders are sometimes unable to link professional development to the strategic needs of the school as a whole.
 - The school has a very detailed school evaluation and development plan. While a huge amount of time and work has gone into the creation of these documents, they are over complex and lack the clarity and sharpness needed to improve quickly the academic outcomes and life chances of students.
 - Middle leaders are a great strength of the school. They are clearly focused on improving the areas that they are responsible for and have detailed self-evaluations and development plans. Middle leaders are appreciative of the support that the senior leadership team provides.
 - The curriculum is broad and balanced, and enhanced by strong extra-curricular provision. Senior leaders have taken the strategic decision to make the curriculum more academic. Results in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) are strong.
 - The local authority has provided light-touch support in response to the needs of the school.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good and developing understanding of the school, its performance as revealed in the data, and its needs. Governors use this information to question the performance of subjects and student groups, and to challenge the senior leadership team to raise outcomes and standards. There have been significant changes to the structure and make-up of the governing body in the recent past. Governors acknowledge the need to ensure that the governing body has the skills necessary both to support and challenge the school, and have actively sought out development opportunities and the support of the local authority where necessary.
 - The governing body has demonstrated its capacity to take decisive action when appropriate and is providing strong support for the headteacher as the senior leadership team goes through a period of change.
 - Governors know what is being done to reward good teachers and tackle underperformance, and they are closely monitoring the school's work around performance management, the quality of teaching, the use of the pupil premium and achieving value for money. Governors provide support for the headteacher and other leaders in the school, but they clearly articulate challenge where necessary, and hold leaders and managers to account.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	103103
Local authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	440978

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	897
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gillian Barker
Headteacher	Meryl Davies
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2007
Telephone number	020 8509 9446
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