

St Hilda's Church of England High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104721
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	377119
Inspection dates	30 April 2012–1 May 2012
Lead inspector	Anthony Briggs

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
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	837
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joan Stein
Headteacher	Eleanor Benson
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2007
School address	Croxteth Drive Sefton Park Liverpool L17 3AL
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Paul Edmondson

Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 50 lessons taught by 50 teachers. Meetings were held with key staff, middle leaders, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and a parent governor. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including those relating to students' progress, self-evaluation, improvement planning and safeguarding. Inspectors considered questionnaires returned from students, staff and 269 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average girls' secondary school. The sixth form is co-educational and there are 25 boys who attend the sixth form. The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is broadly average, and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is below average. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly typical. The school is part of a sixth form partnership with four other schools. Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable staffing changes, particularly in the mathematics department. The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- St Hilda's is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because systems to track students' progress are not robust enough and not all leaders hold teachers to account for the progress students make in their lessons. Although good, teaching is not consistent in relation to the quality of planning and marking of students' work.
- Students' achievement is good. All groups of students make good progress and attain high standards by the time they leave. Learning observed confirmed good progress with nothing inadequate.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very high expectations and usually use their expert subject knowledge to provide challenging, interesting activities which extend students' skills of learning independently considerably.
- Students' exemplary behaviour contributes to an outstanding climate for learning, and makes a significant contribution to their good achievement. They are keen to learn and proud to come to St Hilda's. Attendance is above average and the percentage of persistent absentees has reduced over time and is below average. Fixed-term exclusions are fewer than seen nationally.
- The good quality of leadership and management is underpinned by a clarity of vision in relation to how students are expected to behave that permeates the entire school. The leadership and management of performance and of teaching are secure but teachers are not always held to account rigorously for all aspects of their work. Tracking systems are not used to plot students' progress and highlight potential underachievement robustly enough.
- The sixth form is good because good teaching is resulting in students making better than expected progress and attaining standards that are significantly

above average. Leadership is good and in 2011, the vast majority of sixth form students gained their first choice place at a university.

- The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who returned an inspection questionnaire would recommend the school to others.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve at all leadership levels, the robustness of systems to track students' progress by:
 - increasing the rigour of the school-wide system of tracking students' progress and ensuring that it is used by all teachers to plan lessons that match the needs of all students
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels, particularly middle leaders, place sufficient emphasis on the progress of all students at whatever levels of attainment, rather than focusing entirely on attaining GCSE grades at A*-C
 - monitoring the quality of teaching more robustly to ensure greater consistency of practice so that all teachers are held to account for the students' progress.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, planning and marking by:
 - focusing lesson planning extensively on how much progress individual students will make during the lesson, not on what activities they will undertake
 - ensuring that there is consistently effective practice in marking and feedback to students across the school ensuring students have an effective understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Data over the last three years indicate that from above average starting points overall, students attain significantly better than those in other schools. However, in 2011 attainment slipped and while still significantly above average on the key measure of the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics, it was less positive in relation to the percentage of students gaining the expected total average point scores. The 2011 data showed a dip in the performance of some middle-attainers and groups, including those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those with a statement of educational needs. The school's tracking data show that there is likely to be significant improvement in the examination results of the current Year 11 students in English and particularly in mathematics.

Students' attainment is consistently above average in the vast majority of subjects in Key Stages 4 and in the sixth form. In the minority of subjects where it is not quite

as high, it is rapidly improving. This is because most teachers take quick and decisive action where there is evidence of underperformance.

In lessons observed, students' learning and overall performance were good. Students, including those with a disability or special educational needs, make good progress in their learning and in their written work in the vast majority of lessons. However, some of the work seen in lessons occasionally results in satisfactory, rather than good, progress because the specific needs of middle attaining students were not given enough focus and these students did not learn as well as they might. In lessons, students are eager to do well. They respond promptly to questions, providing articulate, well-structured explanations. They work purposefully in groups and pairs. They take pride in their written work, as can be seen from the excellent presentation and the care to detail given. They are enthusiastic and accomplished readers, seizing every opportunity to take advantage of the well stocked library.

Nearly every parent and carer who returned an inspection questionnaire believes their children make good progress and inspection evidence confirms the accuracy of their views. Students in the sixth form also make good progress because they are highly motivated and respond well to the additional responsibility they are given for their own learning.

Quality of teaching

Inspectors agree with the overwhelming majority of parents and carers who returned an inspection questionnaire that their children are taught well. The students are also of this view.

Strengths of teaching lie in teachers' knowledge of and passion for their subject and the outstanding relationships between students and staff, resulting in every lesson being calm, settled and purposeful. There is a strong emphasis on developing reading skills and all students, including disabled and those with special educational needs, as well as those who do not speak English as their first language, rapidly develop their reading and swiftly make progress to a high level. Good teaching, combined with a well balanced curriculum, helps all students achieve high standards in literacy, spoken communication and numeracy.

In the best lessons, teachers focus overtly on what students need to learn by the end of the lesson and over time. They take account of students' prior attainment in order to match tasks to the students' needs. Lessons are planned carefully so that students are engaged actively and given well structured opportunities to work in a variety of ways, such as collaboratively and independently. Teachers assess students' progress continuously during lessons and change the pitch of work for individuals and groups where required. In a Year 10 Spanish lesson, highly engaging and enthusiastic teaching motivated and excited students to complete a range of well matched tasks that developed their speaking and pronunciation of advanced Spanish phrases. As a result of the teacher's encouragement and specialist knowledge, students worked extremely well together, making rapid progress and inspiring each other to do their best. Many teachers are skilled at developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, creating regular opportunities for reflection, sharing of views and encouraging higher order thinking.

A small proportion of lessons are satisfactory rather than good. In these lessons, planning focuses more on activities rather than promoting learning. Some teachers mistake students' passivity for tacit understanding. Insufficient account is taken of the range of abilities within the class, with all given the same work, irrespective of different prior attainment or targets, and with too much focus on examination results rather than if students are making better than expected progress. Consequently, some students make only satisfactory progress.

The quality of marking, although mainly good, shows some variation. Much acknowledges students' efforts and some gives good guidance on how to improve their work, but not all informs students how well they are doing or what to do to improve. Not enough teachers use assessment data to systematically plan for the learning needs of each student.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

As at the time of the previous inspection, behaviour is exemplary and contributes significantly to students' achievement. The majority of parents, carers, staff and students feel that behaviour is excellent and has been for years. Students are extremely respectful and courteous to staff and each other around the school and in lessons. Their behaviour in lessons is never less than good, but can, if tasks are not engaging, be on the passive side. All students display a sincere willingness to learn and behave accordingly, doing as asked and always trying their hardest. They behave at their very best when they are engaged fully in their own learning and are challenged or excited by the work they are presented with, particularly on the many occasions when independent work or group collaboration help them to learn at a very good pace.

Expectations of how well students should behave are exceptionally high. Students understand the rules and abide by them to the letter. For example, not one student was seen with a mobile phone in school at any point during the inspection. In discussion with a group of Year 10 and 11 students, none were able to recall an example of when their learning had been disrupted by misbehaviour.

Students have a very secure understanding of what constitutes safe behaviour and know the importance of staying healthy. They feel very safe and have a full understanding of what constitute different forms of bullying such as cyber-bullying. They say that bullying rarely happens, but when it does, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students spoken to are happy in the knowledge that there is somebody they can turn to for help and advice, should they need it. They enjoy school very much and are appreciative of the way that the teachers are prepared to 'go the extra mile' for them.

The overwhelming majority of students who returned an inspection questionnaire stated that they enjoy being at St Hilda's and feel safe. This is reflected in students' attendance figures which are above average and rising.

Leadership and management

There is a clear steer from the headteacher and an expectation of high professional standards from students and staff alike. The headteacher cares greatly for the students and staff and has an unrelenting vision for raising standards and improving the students' education. Consequently, there is a clear commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school, with an increased focus on students' levels of progress rather than just on their attainment. Capacity for sustained improvement is good. Opportunities for professional development are appropriate and linked closely to the priorities of the school.

The school self-evaluation is accurate, particularly in identifying the strengths, but is less clear about some of the weaknesses. There is some inconsistency in the way systems for monitoring and tracking the work of the school are used. For example, systems for tracking the progress of students, although in place, are not robust enough to ensure that the progress of every student is monitored closely. Middle leaders know what their roles and responsibilities are, but not all hold the staff within their subjects to account rigorously enough for the progress students make. The quality of teaching is not monitored as rigorously or robustly as it could be. Senior leaders are rightly aware of the need for a more rigorous approach and are focusing on ensuring greater consistency in everything the school does.

Members of the governing body hold the school to account and have an appropriate awareness of the strengths but are less secure about pinpointing the weaknesses in students' progress. Safeguarding procedures meet government requirements and give no cause for concern.

The curriculum meets the needs of students well through a well matched range of courses. This is particularly evident in the sixth form where students are prepared well for the next stage in life and are mature, thoughtful young adults.

The school promotes equality of opportunity successfully and there is no evidence of discrimination in its work. The ethos of the school is particularly strong and is underpinned by a mutual respect between adults and students. There is an almost tangible air of calmness and determination to succeed that permeates all aspects of the school's work.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



2 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St Hilda's Church of England High School, Liverpool, L17 3AL

Thank you very much indeed for your help and warm welcome when my colleagues and I inspected your school. We found our discussions with you extremely useful in helping us to make the judgement that your school provides you with a good quality of education and that your behaviour is outstanding.

You make good progress because of the good teaching and your positive attitudes to learning. Many of you told us how proud of your school you are and how you really enjoy coming to school each day. We were particularly impressed with the way in which you work so well together and the mutual respect you have for each other's views, opinions and beliefs. What really stood out for us was the excellent way you behave around school and in lessons. It is clear that you respect everything that St Hilda's stands for.

There are some things the school could do to take it to the next level. We have asked that leaders improve the tracking of how well you are progressing and that everybody puts more focus on the progress you make in lessons and throughout your time at St Hilda's and not just on your final result. Leaders and managers need to ensure a greater consistency of practice throughout the school. We have asked that teachers plan lessons so that they focus more on how much you will learn rather than on what you will do. We also want teachers to mark your work more effectively, so you understand how well you are doing and exactly what you need to do to improve.

Once again, thank you very much for your excellent hospitality. It was a delight to meet you. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Briggs
Lead Inspector

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