

# Southfield School for Girls

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122113
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northamptonshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	314218
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Brooker HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	951
6th form	126
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Phyllis Lockwood
<b>Headteacher</b>	Susan Dunford
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17 January 2005
<b>School address</b>	Lewis Road Kettering NN15 6HE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01536 513063
<b>Fax number</b>	01536 518487

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The school draws its students from 48 different feeder primary schools from across Kettering and the surrounding rural area and the nearby towns of Wellingborough and Corby. The majority of girls are from White British backgrounds, although a small proportion come from other ethnic heritages. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below the national average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is oversubscribed and enjoys a relatively stable staff and student population. However, it is still recovering from an extremely difficult period just over three years ago when all the student data and school resources were lost because of an enforced move due to asbestos contamination. The school has specialist sports college status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Southfield School for Girls is a good school. It has a number of obvious strengths, particularly the students' outstanding personal development and well-being.

The school's hard work has secured its continued rehabilitation and improvement since the last inspection. The dedication of the staff is reflected in their strong commitment to the students, whose mature and sensible behaviour is an outstanding factor in their successful learning. The school's extremely positive ethos is firmly rooted in the warm and trusting relationships that exist between students and adults. The excellent climate for learning underpins the school's good teaching, and where the students' excellent attitudes combine with the most effective teaching, lessons are outstanding. However the quality of teaching varies widely.

The curriculum has been suitably strengthened and is good. It meets the needs of the students and offers them a very wide range of enrichment opportunities, many of which are promoted by the school's sports specialism. Participation rates in out-of-school activities are impressively high and contribute greatly to the students' positive attitudes, healthy lifestyles and wider personal development. Parents value the good care, guidance and support that the school provides. One parent summed up the views of many in writing, 'I am extremely happy with all aspects of my daughter's schooling. Southfield has provided a secure, safe environment and encouraged my daughter to do the best that she can.'

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They develop into mature and responsible young adults who show a strong sense of responsibility and a genuine concern for others. Their personal qualities and skills prepare them well for the next stage in their education and for later life. The majority of students have a very well developed understanding of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles, know how to stay safe and really enjoy school. Students make a particularly strong contribution to their own school and to the wider community through a variety of different initiatives. The school is rightly proud of the many accolades that individual girls and groups of students receive for these wider contributions, many of which are undertaken voluntarily.

Achievement is good and standards are generally above average, particularly at Key Stage 3 where the core subjects of English, mathematics and science perform well. The strong performance of English and mathematics is sustained in Key Stage 4 so that a significantly higher proportion of students gain five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, than is found nationally. Many sixth form students excel in their A levels. Given their starting points, achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Leadership and management are good. Although it is more than three years since the school's dislocation led to the loss of all its data and teaching resources, the impact of this disruption has been profound. The headteacher's appointment, two years ago, was timely. She has provided good strategic leadership and strengthened the school's management by establishing systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluation, based on much better use of assessment data and robust performance management. She has skilfully but gently developed more effective leadership and management at all levels within the school. The school's monitoring schedule is in place, but procedures for analysing data and evaluating the school's provision and outcomes are not sufficiently rigorous, particularly in the sixth form. Nonetheless, the way that the school has continued to improve and has overcome the legacy of past difficulties demonstrates that it has satisfactory capacity to improve.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

The effectiveness and the efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Standards are broadly in line with those seen nationally. Given their starting points, most students make satisfactory progress, although achievement is consistently good in some subjects.

The broadened sixth form curriculum is now good. Sixth form teaching is satisfactory. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, and in many lessons the students make good or outstanding progress because of their very positive attitudes to learning and the excellent relationships with teachers. Too often, however, students spend a disproportionate amount of time listening passively and taking notes. In these lessons work is inadequately matched to students' needs.

Many of the students choose to stay at the school, rather than study elsewhere, because they value the strong care, support and guidance that staff provide. Sixth form students are excellent role models for younger students and make an outstanding contribution to the school, for example as sixth form buddies for younger students, and also in the wider community. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The many well established extra-curricular opportunities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Young Enterprise, develop in students good skills for their future lives.

Day-to-day management of the sixth form is effective. However, monitoring and evaluation of the sixth form have not been sufficiently rigorous, and shortcomings have not been identified and addressed.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Develop more rigorous procedures for evaluating provision and analysing assessment information, particularly in the sixth form, so that weaknesses are identified and addressed.
- Ensure that the best practice in teaching and assessment, including marking, is more widely replicated.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

#### Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is good because students make good progress as they move up through the school. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similarly good progress and achieve well.

The standard of students' work when they start in Year 7 is broadly average and by the end of Year 9 standards in English, mathematics and science are above the national figures. This good progress in English and mathematics is sustained through Key Stage 4, so that the proportion of students who achieve five higher grade GCSEs, including in these core subjects, is significantly higher than the national average. However, despite the impressive GCSE headline figures in 2007, the school did not meet all its specialist college examination targets and recognises that the performance of girls with comparatively low prior attainment was below expectations. This underachievement was, to a large extent, the legacy of weaknesses in curriculum planning. Current Year 11 students follow a broader range of options that are better matched to their particular needs. School data indicates that results at GCSE are set to rise further in 2008.

Examination results in the sixth form are broadly average, although they are higher than national averages at AS level and in many subjects at A level. Given their starting points, sixth form students make satisfactory progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are excellent. Attendance has improved and is above the national average. Students feel well cared for and know how to stay safe. They are pleased the school responds quickly to any concerns that they have. Students of all ages are socially aware, are sensitive to the values and needs of others and develop a respect for different cultures. Their highly developed social and moral qualities are shown in their strong sense of responsibility and their willingness to make a positive contribution to their own school and to the wider community. Students are keen to help and support one another and there are countless examples of students initiating, leading or supporting initiatives in their own school, in primary schools and across the town. Their extensive charity work makes a positive contribution to the wider community.

Students feel that their views are sought and listened to. The elected school council has ensured improvements to the school environment, and the School Nutritional Action Group has led an excellent initiative on healthy eating. Students appreciate the variety and balance of food offered at lunchtime. They take advantage of the excellent sporting opportunities to develop their health and fitness, and embrace the excellent links that have been forged with sports clubs in the community and with other schools.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students make good progress in lessons and over time because teaching is good and because of their excellent motivation and attitudes. Lessons are often challenging, lively and fun. In some cases, however, and particularly in the sixth form, learning lacks focus and challenge for students with different abilities, and the pace of learning is pedestrian. Much of the variation is explained by the uneven quality and detail of lesson planning. The school's evaluations of learning are not sufficiently rigorous or systematic, so the best practice is not shared effectively and weaknesses are not quickly pinpointed and addressed.

The assessment and marking of students' work are satisfactory, but also vary widely. In the exemplary practice, for example in modern foreign languages, assessment information is used carefully to plan what different students will learn and how they will work; teachers' questioning is skilfully used to probe and assess students' understanding; and marking is sharply diagnostic. However, assessment is not embedded in planning and teaching across the school, and marking is not always effective in guiding what students need to do to improve.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Since the last inspection significant steps have been taken to improve the curriculum, although the most important improvements have only been made within the last two years and the benefits of these changes are only now being realised. The curriculum meets the needs of the students well. The vocational courses introduced into Key Stage 4 now offer a good range of choices for students of all abilities, with a broader range of courses at Entry Level and Level 1. Plans are in place to extend the vocational subjects from Years 10 and 11 so that students have a broader range of suitable post-16 pathways. The school has effectively incorporated work-related learning and enterprise into the curriculum.

There is an excellent range of extra-curricular and residential activities, which are well supported. As befits the school's specialist status, all students study physical education (PE) for two hours each week, and a growing number of students in Years 10 and 11 opt for courses in PE and dance. Links with other local sports organisations significantly enhance this provision. For example, the school is working with an external organisation to offer football coaching to the students.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

This is a school where the well-being of students is given a high priority and staff are committed to providing them with a high quality of support.

The school has well established systems for tracking the students' progress. Responsibility for monitoring the students is suitably shared between heads of key stage, heads of year, form tutors and subject teachers. Students who are not progressing as well as they should are offered additional support. Target-setting is developing well. Students know their individual targets, but the quality of guidance varies widely, particularly in marking.

The good links with external support agencies, alongside the school's own support mechanisms, mean that students' social and emotional needs are catered for very well. Effective support is provided for different groups of students, including those judged to be at risk and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place and staff are given adequate information on child protection. Transition arrangements to Year 7 are exemplary.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The headteacher has raised the aspirations of staff and students and has successfully strengthened leadership at all levels. She is supported by a cohesive senior leadership team which works hard to develop the school's strongly positive ethos. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's work have been implemented, based on the collation of assessment data and the development of robust performance management. Self-evaluation has been

enthusiastically adopted by the most expert middle leaders and underpins the drive to raise standards in these areas. However, the quality and impact of evaluations by senior and middle leaders are uneven, and analysis of performance is not sufficiently rigorous, particularly in the sixth form.

Governors are supportive of the school, and have a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Action points from the last inspection have been tackled satisfactorily, although inadequacies in sports facilities remain until the sports hall is completed.

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## 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
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### Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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	

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Southfield School for Girls, Kettering NN15 6HE

Thank you for the very positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We were impressed by your friendly welcome and the mature and sensible way that you spoke with us. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in confirming what staff told us about the school.

We agree that Southfield is a good school and were particularly impressed with:

- the high standard of your work and the good progress that you make in lessons and over time
- your excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to learning, and the responsibility and consideration that you show for others
- the very wide range of enrichment opportunities, including extra-curricular and sporting activities, in which you participate
- the positive and wide-ranging contributions that you make to the school and the wider community.

You and your parents raised some issues that we have discussed with the school, but it is clear from speaking with you, and from the huge number of questionnaire responses that we received, that the vast majority of you enjoy school and appreciate the many opportunities that it provides. There have been important improvements since the last inspection. Attendance has improved, standards have risen and the curriculum has been strengthened so that it better meets your needs through a broader range of options. Nonetheless there are important areas that can improve, and we have asked the school to focus specifically on:

- sharing the best practice in teaching and assessment, so that more of your lessons are good or outstanding
- checking its work more carefully and analysing data more rigorously so that any weaknesses can be addressed quickly.

We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker Her Majesty's Inspector

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Paul Brooker  
Her Majesty's Inspector