

Newlands Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110051
Local Authority	Windsor & Maidenhead
Inspection number	310186
Inspection dates	23 - 24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Maria Dawes (HMI)

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

Type of School	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1129
Sixth form	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Wastell
Headteacher	Mrs Tracey Briggs
Date of previous school inspection	01 November 2004
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Telephone number	01628 625068
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors for schools and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Newlands is a larger than average 11-18 girls' comprehensive situated in Maidenhead. It has a very large number of feeder schools and draws girls from a generally advantaged area with some pockets of economic and social deprivation. It has a larger than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, although very few are at an early stage of English acquisition. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, including those with a statement of educational needs, is below the national average.

The school has been a Specialist Technology College since 2002 and is a designated Training School. In addition, it is part of the Maidenhead federation of five local secondary schools and a special school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Girls at Newlands describe their school as 'open, enthusiastic, focused and happy' with 'something for everyone'. This is a good school which not only allows girls to reach exceptionally high academic standards but to develop into mature, well-rounded young people prepared for the next stage of their education and life. Central to this is the strong sense of community and the good relationships amongst staff and girls that contribute to their achievement and enjoyment of school. Girls involve themselves enthusiastically in the life of the school and this results in them taking a pride in their school and an eagerness to do well.

Standards are well above average in all year groups. Throughout their time at Newlands girls make good progress and the results in public examinations at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13 are very high. Consistently good teaching and the girls' very positive attitudes are significant factors in explaining the high academic standards. Lessons contain interesting and challenging activities to which girls respond well. However, girls' independent learning skills are less developed, which restricts them always making better progress. Systems for tracking and monitoring girls' academic progress and subsequent support have recently been strengthened. However, these are still inconsistent and need further time to embed.

The curriculum is good at Key Stage 3 and 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Since the previous inspection the range of vocational and applied opportunities for older girls has been increased. However, take-up of these courses has been limited and the school is continuing to seek ways of enhancing this provision. There is a wealth of extra-curricular and enrichment activities in which the majority of girls get involved.

Technology college status has had a good impact across the school, especially in terms of driving up levels of attainment where the majority of targets from the specialist bid have been met. Curriculum provision has been broadened, and there has been substantial support for community partners. The school is aware of the need to use specialist status to drive teaching and learning improvements across the school. The new designation as a training school is already successfully supporting this initiative.

Girls feel well cared for and treated as individuals. Teachers know the girls well and there is a wide range of support systems in place. Girls particularly appreciate their opinions being sought through forums such as the school council. However systems for ensuring that girls views are taken into consideration, regarding the impact of provision and how it might be improved, are underdeveloped.

The school is well led and managed. Staff are committed to getting the best from the girls and team work is a key strength amongst all managers and teachers. The headteacher and school leaders have a very clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have made many improvements since the last inspection. It is well placed to make further good improvement. However, the wealth of relevant information that the school collects does not always lead to the most strategic actions being put in place to ensure even more rapid improvement. The school does not always set in place rigorous success criteria or interim reviews by which they will judge the success of their actions.

Newlands enjoys an excellent reputation in the local community and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One parent with two daughters at the school sums up the sentiments of very many parents writing to the inspection team when she says, 'The excellent progress our daughters are making shows they are both receiving a first-class education. They are also enjoying themselves - lucky girls!'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the sixth form is good and has improved since the last inspection. Standards are well above national averages and achievement is good. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise, with the best lessons characterised by clear objectives, a brisk pace and challenging activities. Opportunities for independent learning are well-developed and the quality of care is good. As one girl commented, 'The teachers know my needs and they know me.' Personal development is good and girls demonstrate exemplary attitudes, behaviour and maturity in lessons. They communicate effectively and there are good relationships between staff and girls. Effective monitoring ensures girls are clear about their targets and how to improve, whilst regular reporting allows for good communication between the school and home.

The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory. It meets the needs of the majority of girls and the school is aware of the need to further broaden and diversify the choices available. The fact that not all girls follow the enrichment programme in Year 12, instead opting for an AS in Critical Thinking, means some girls do not receive their full entitlement. Opportunities are provided for involvement in the community and some girls work in the lower school, for example, as reading partners or sports prefects. Many girls feel they could do more in this respect, especially in developing further their responsibility and leadership skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use data and other information more strategically to identify and monitor actions that will further raise achievement and standards.
- Increase opportunities for all girls to develop independent learning skills that will provide greater individual responsibility and promote even higher aspirations.
- Engage with girls in ways that will allow more involvement in the life and work of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Girls start Newlands with above average standards, although within the school there is a comprehensive range of abilities. They make good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and achieve significantly above average results in the national tests at the end of Year 9. In particular, girls achieved exceptionally high standards in mathematics and English with a very high proportion achieving the highest levels in their examinations.

Throughout Key Stage 4 girls continue to make steady progress and by the end of Year 11 consistently reach very high standards. In 2007, 72% of girls achieved 5 or more A* - C grade GCSE passes including English and mathematics. These results are well above the national and local average. There was however some variation between subjects and a small minority of girls did not reach their challenging targets. Ensuring all girls make maximum progress has been made a high priority by the school. In particular, careful monitoring of underachieving girls is leading to targeted support and inspection evidence shows that girls are making good progress.

Focused support for girls with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are at early stage of learning English means that these girls achieve as well as others in the school.

In the sixth form girls attain outstanding standards. In 2007 the GCE A-level pass rate was over 98% with 51% of all examinations taken passed at grade A or B.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Girls enjoy school and are particularly appreciative of their supportive relationships with both teachers and fellow girls. Attendance is above average and the school works hard to improve the attendance of those who come to school less regularly. Girls' maturity and positive attitudes lead to a calm atmosphere in the school although a few girls let themselves down by behaving in a silly manner. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and girls respond thoughtfully to the full range of opportunities they are given. They show secure understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and are enthusiastic about physical activity.

Girls feel confident that they are well-prepared to face the responsibilities and choices of life. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community and enjoy doing this, although some feel that their opinions could be taken into greater account. Girls feel safe in school because they are confident that adults take their concerns seriously and will respond to their needs. They are well-prepared for the world of work. Standards in basic skills are outstanding and girls are generally confident and articulate. They develop good teamwork skills through the many opportunities they are given to work collaboratively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. There are robust systems for monitoring teaching and learning so that the school knows the strengths of teaching and where further development is needed.

Varied teaching and learning styles, along with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and the regular setting of homework, are all helping to promote effective learning. In good lessons girls are aware of their targets and are engaged in learning. This promotes positive relationships with all staff. Teachers check knowledge by asking girls challenging questions and effectively use follow up questions to confirm their understanding. Assessment and marking are improving following the introduction of a rigorous system of work sampling. While lesson planning is good, there is some inconsistency in matching resources, tasks and learning objectives to meet the needs of all girls.

Girls demonstrate good personal skills in lessons and are keen to learn. However, there are insufficient opportunities for them to develop independent learning skills in order to take responsibility for their own learning. This is restricting the learning of girls especially in Years 10 and 11.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum for all girls at Key Stage 3 and 4 and a satisfactory one in the Sixth Form. It has good breadth and balance in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and all statutory requirements are met. The school has made good use of its specialist status to develop the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 so that all girls experience the full range of technology subjects. Girls also study three languages in Year 7 and then choose two of these in Years 8 and 9. These developments have resulted in the majority of girls opting for a language and a technology course at the end of Year 9. The school recognises the need to develop a more flexible curriculum, which takes greater account of the individual student. A wide range of options are available to girls in Years 10 and 11. The provision of vocational courses is improving with good links to a local learning centre and college. However, the impact is restricted by a lack of understanding by parents and some staff of how the courses meet the needs of girls.

Provision for girls with learning difficulties and disabilities is good although that for gifted and talented girls is at a relatively early stage. There are opportunities to develop work related skills and provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved. There is a comprehensive range of enrichment activities to meet the wide range of girls' interests, for example in music, sport and drama. Take-up for these is very good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's quality of care, support and guidance is good. All adults work hard to support girls and have their best interests at heart. Consequently, girls feel well looked-after and express appreciation of the level of support offered to them. As one said, one of the best things about the school is 'the way they support you in everything'. The school makes good use of an appropriate range of help from outside agencies and organisations to offer a comprehensive range of support to meet all needs. The recent setting-up of the student focus centre enables the school to offer support to girls who are vulnerable to a range of problems such as poor attendance or inappropriate behaviour. These girls feel pride in the progress this enables them to make. Safeguarding procedures are robust.

The provision of academic guidance, through the monitoring of progress and subsequent intervention is developing and is not yet consistent throughout the school. Not all girls are confident about their understanding of what they need to do to improve their work, although Year 11 girls are well informed about this and talk confidently about their areas for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and the school is very well led by the dedicated headteacher and leadership team. All staff have a shared commitment to high academic standards and the promotion of girls' personal development. They particularly appreciate the opportunities to be consulted and involved in any changes that are put in place.

Rigorous and robust systems are in place to monitor the work of the school including the quality of teaching and learning, leading to a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development by school leaders. This has led to improvements since the last inspection. However, information is not always used strategically enough to inform the most appropriate actions. In addition, actions are not always accompanied by measurable success criteria that will allow senior leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of any changes over time.

This is an inclusive school and a variety of well-established systems exist to support all girls. Links with the community are very good and specialist school status is well led and having a positive impact on the school. Professional development activities are increasingly effective in developing the capacity of all staff. In particular, this has improved the quality of work of middle leaders who now play a pivotal role in developing and evaluating provision, including teaching and learning and the monitoring of girls' progress.

The governing body knows the school well and provides the headteacher with good support whilst offering appropriate challenge.

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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	2
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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
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	2	2
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	2	
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	