

St Paul's School for Girls

Vernon Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, West Midlands B16 9SL

Inspection dates

9–10 May 2017

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- This is a school with very high expectations of pupils and staff. It also provides impressive pastoral care and high-quality support for all who need it.
- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, very ably supported by senior leaders, has seen the school improve since its previous inspection. Teaching and outcomes are now both outstanding.
- Governors provide genuine support and strong challenge to leaders. They are reflective and determined to see the school continue to improve.
- Middle leaders form a strong, united and effective team. Senior leaders support them well but also trust them to lead improvements in their areas of responsibility.
- Pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 has been very strong, in all subjects, for the last three years. The most able pupils do especially well.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress in all subjects because of high-quality teaching and well-focused extra help when they need it.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is excellent. Teachers and other adults support these pupils very well.
- Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to plan lessons that interest and challenge pupils. They have high expectations of pupils' conduct and achievement.
- Teachers use questions skilfully and pupils respond thoughtfully. Consequently, pupils develop a deep understanding of what they are studying.
- Relationships are excellent throughout the school. Pupils feel supported by their teachers, other adults and their peers. Consequently, they are happy to tackle challenging work without fear of failure.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable in lessons and around the school. They are unfailingly courteous and well mannered.
- Pupils are diligent, enthusiastic and resilient learners. They are articulate and keen to do well. They work equally well independently and when collaborating with others.
- Sixth-form provision is well led and improving, but not as effective as key stages 3 and 4. Students' progress, although good, varies between subjects. Leaders do not plan and monitor some aspects of students' study programmes as well as other areas.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the school's sixth-form provision by:
 - raising standards in weaker subjects to match the high standards evident in many subjects, by sharing the good practice that exists in the school
 - ensuring that all students undertake well-planned, high-quality, non-qualification activity that complements their academic studies.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- A clear ethos of high expectations, matched with high-quality care, compassion and support, suffuses all that the school does. Staff are proud to work at St Paul's and morale is high. Pupils are equally proud of their school and they enthusiastically repeat the mantra that 'I am a St Paul's girl; there's nothing I cannot achieve.' Since the previous inspection, leaders have maintained the school's deserved reputation for pastoral care. They have added to this an expectation that each pupil should excel academically.
- The headteacher provides clear and principled leadership. A strong senior team and highly competent governors support her very effectively. Pupils, parents and staff value her strong leadership. All staff who completed the online inspection questionnaire and almost all parents who responded to Parent View agreed that the school is well led.
- Leaders know the school well. They are never complacent but identify and tackle weaknesses quickly and effectively. They have an accurate view of the quality of teaching across the school and they target training to those areas, subjects and teachers where it is needed. Staff value the training and opportunities that leaders provide and several staff have trained, developed and been promoted within the school. Since the previous inspection, teaching has improved and pupils' progress has accelerated sharply. Both teaching and outcomes in key stages 3 and 4 are now outstanding.
- The school's pastoral and subject middle leaders form a hardworking and united team. They value the strong support provided by senior leaders, but they are not dependent on it. Instead, they are trusted to lead developments in their areas, and they do so very effectively.
- Leaders make excellent use of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils. These pupils make strong progress as a result. Leaders carefully identify each pupil's particular needs and provide extra help if it is required. This might take the form of extra help with literacy, specific careers advice or additional support for parents to encourage regular attendance. Leaders' aim is that disadvantaged pupils should achieve the same very high standards as other pupils in the school, rather than just matching those achieved by non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. To this end, leaders commissioned an independent review of their use of pupil premium funding in January 2016. Implementing its recommendations further sharpened their plans and processes.
- Leaders make equally good use of the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium. They provide highly personalised programmes of extra support for pupils who join the school with weak basic skills. Consequently, these pupils catch up rapidly.
- The use of additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a strength of the school. Leaders accurately identify pupils' needs and provide teachers with clear guidance about how to meet these needs in lessons. Teachers use this guidance well when planning lessons so that pupils thrive. When any pupil needs extra help, additional support is provided. Leaders carefully evaluate all extra support to check that it is having the desired impact.

- Leaders use assessment information very effectively in key stages 3 and 4 to identify any pupil who is beginning to fall behind with their work. Either their teacher, a head of department or a pastoral leader, whichever is considered most appropriate, then provides each such pupil with extra help. As a result, pupils catch up with their classmates and none is left behind. Leaders had not applied this approach with the same rigour in the sixth form prior to this academic year. However, it is now contributing well to students' accelerating progress in Years 12 and 13.
- The school provides a largely traditional academic curriculum in key stages 3, 4 and 5. Leaders have recently introduced some vocational courses into key stages 4 and 5 and these have proved popular and successful. Staff guide, but do not coerce, pupils onto one of several pathways in key stage 4. This ensures that they take subjects that are well matched to their interests, ability and aspirations. In all years, and especially in key stages 3 and 4, the curriculum contributes well to pupils' academic progress.
- Pupils in the main school engage enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include a variety of sporting and artistic activities, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and an air-training corps. Many pupils take advantage of leadership opportunities, including peer mentoring and membership of the school council. Several Year 9 pupils have been trained as 'digital leaders'. All year groups take part in an annual retreat and all pupils have the opportunity to attend a residential retreat.
- Together, the formal taught curriculum, an effective personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme, a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and the school's ethos contribute very strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They contribute equally strongly to pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. For example, inspectors observed pupils maturely discussing inter-faith relationships in a religious education lesson. A history lesson enabled pupils to explore the use of propaganda. Pupils shared with inspectors their belief that they have a responsibility to exercise their democratic rights, given the battles that women fought to secure the right to vote. Pupils are caring and compassionate. For example, they raised in excess of £16,000 for charitable causes during last year.

Governance of the school

- Governance is a strength of the school. Governors know the school very well and are deeply committed to its aim of providing the best possible education for each pupil. They support leaders well and they challenge them rigorously. For example, following challenge from governors, leaders revised proposed curriculum changes for Year 7 English and mathematics.
- Governors actively seek out external expertise to inform their evaluation of the school's effectiveness. They have recently commissioned external reviews of safeguarding, the use of pupil premium funding and the performance of several departments. In doing so, governors have assured themselves of the school's effectiveness and identified further areas for improvement.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties diligently. They check that the pupil premium, Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium and special educational needs funding all provide value for money and have the intended impact.

They ensure that performance-management targets are well focused on school priorities and they assure themselves that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Ensuring that pupils are safe and well cared for is the first priority for everyone who works at St Paul's. Training is regular and rigorous and staff are vigilant of potential problems as a result. Systems are comprehensive and well understood. Consequently, adults are confident in passing on any concerns they have about a pupil.
- The leadership of safeguarding is meticulous. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose and staff keep secure and detailed records. They work well with external agencies to secure additional support for pupils who need it. Governors are proactive in checking that safeguarding systems are effective. For example, they regularly check that the school's single central record is complete and compliant.
- All staff who completed the online inspection survey and almost all parents who responded to Parent View agreed that pupils are safe and well cared for in school. Pupils with whom inspectors spoke repeatedly praised the excellent care and support given to them by their teachers and other adults in school.
- Leaders have made the mental and emotional well-being of pupils a particular priority this year. They have put into place several effective strategies and actions to support pupils who are struggling in some way. For example, inspectors observed an assembly for Year 11 pupils focusing on combating examination stress and helping pupils maintain a sense of perspective as examinations approach.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve and therefore levels of challenge in class are typically high. They use their excellent subject knowledge to plan lessons and activities that are very well matched to what pupils already understand, know and can do. Consequently, pupils rise to the challenge and are able to tackle demanding work. The work that inspectors saw in pupils' books and folders was of a consistently high standard across subjects and years.
- Teachers question pupils skilfully. They do not accept brief or cursory responses. Instead, they probe carefully and draw out more detailed answers from pupils. This causes pupils to think about their response and so deepens their understanding of what they are studying.
- Strong, caring and respectful relationships are evident throughout the school. Pupils like and trust their teachers. They also support each other very well. As a result, pupils are not afraid to have a go at tackling difficult work, secure in the knowledge of their teachers' and classmates' support.
- Teachers use their detailed knowledge of each pupil to plan very effectively for pupils who have additional needs of any kind. For example, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have 'learning logs' that identify the nature of their additional needs and suggestions about how to address them in a lesson.

The most able pupils also have learning logs. Teachers make very effective use of this information when planning activities. Because of this, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able pupils make strong progress. Similarly, teachers' planning incorporates strategies to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make equally strong progress.

- Teachers' assessments and feedback to pupils are regular and help pupils to improve their work. Therefore, pupils know how well they are doing in each subject and, specifically, what they need to do in order to improve further. For example, teachers' detailed analysis of regular tests and assessments in mathematics highlights areas where pupils' understanding is not secure. Teachers then successfully provide extra support to address these gaps.
- The school's focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy is highly effective. Pupils read for at least 20 minutes each day. They are encouraged to take part in debating and public speaking events and a spelling bee. 'Problem-solving Tuesday' sees pupils tackling a weekly mathematical problem. Pupils become 'numeracy ninjas' as they demonstrate their arithmetic proficiency.
- Teaching is at least good in the sixth form and is outstanding in several subjects. However, over time, it has been less effective in some subjects. Leaders' careful analysis of the reasons for this, including external reviews of some subjects, combined with well-targeted training, is yielding improvement.
- In key stages 3 and 4, assessment information has been very well used in recent years to identify pupils who are falling behind their peers. Teachers and leaders then provide high-quality support that helps them catch up. Leaders have introduced this approach into the sixth form more recently. It is contributing to students' accelerating progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are typically confident and articulate. They are keen to do well and they exhibit excellent attitudes to learning in lessons. They listen carefully to their teachers and to each other. They discuss and debate maturely and with confidence.
- Pupils are reflective and resilient learners. They are unafraid to make mistakes, understanding that they often lead to learning something new. They are not overly reliant on their teacher, but are able to work effectively by themselves or with others, as appropriate.
- A well-planned PSHE programme in all years helps pupils to understand how to stay safe and healthy. Inspectors observed pupils learning about some of the dangers that can arise when using the internet and, specifically, about sexting and grooming. Consequently, pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They told inspectors that bullying is extremely rare and most have had no experience of bullying in school. Pupils repeatedly told inspectors about the confidence that they have in their teachers and other adults to support them through any difficulties they might experience.

- Pupils value the comprehensive careers guidance they receive in all years. Pupils in Year 11 and students in Year 13 told inspectors that they feel very well prepared for their next steps in education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are unfailingly polite, friendly and helpful in lessons, at social times and as they move around the school. Pupils told inspectors that poor behaviour in lessons or around school is very rare indeed. Inspectors saw no poor behaviour during the inspection's two days.
- Pupils enjoy school and, consequently, attendance is consistently higher than the national average for secondary schools. Pupils are punctual, despite many of them travelling a considerable distance to school on public transport.
- The school has high expectations of pupils' conduct. It has clear policies for dealing with poor behaviour. However, sanctions rarely need to be used. For example, fixed-term exclusions are infrequent and fewer than 10 pupils have been excluded this year. No pupil has been excluded more than once, because they learn their lesson and do not repeat poor behaviour.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is of the same exemplary standard as the rest of the school. Sixth-form students provide excellent role models for younger pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 11 have been consistently very strong over the last three years, in all subjects. They make especially strong progress, from their starting points, in English and mathematics. For example, progress in English placed the school in the top 6% of schools nationally in 2016, while progress in mathematics placed it in the top 2%. Pupils also make impressive progress in most subjects, including science, history, geography and religious education.
- Pupils of all abilities are very well prepared for post-16 study when they finish Year 11. They develop excellent study habits and very strong basic skills. For example, the proportions of low- and middle-ability pupils who achieve GCSEs at grades A* to C in both English and mathematics are well above those seen from similar pupils nationally.
- The most able pupils make especially strong progress from their high starting points in all subjects. For example, their progress in mathematics in 2016 placed them in the top 1% of schools nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar and slightly better progress than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. In mathematics, they make significantly better progress, from their starting points, than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. They benefit from outstanding teaching and well-targeted extra help funded by the pupil premium.
- The most able disadvantaged pupils make very strong progress in all subjects.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they benefit from outstanding teaching and very well-planned additional

support. For example, leaders provide high-quality, personalised support for pupils who have significant additional needs that impact on their attendance. Consequently, these pupils continue to make good progress, despite sometimes sporadic attendance at school.

- The school's own assessment information indicates that pupils currently on roll are continuing to make outstanding progress throughout key stages 3 and 4. Inspection evidence from lesson observations and scrutiny of work in pupils' books and folders confirm that this is the case. Progress remains outstanding across subjects and year groups.
- Outcomes in the sixth form are more mixed than in the main school. Over recent years, overall, students have made good progress and their A-level results have been strong in several subjects, including English, film studies, history, psychology and religious studies. However, they have been weaker in some other subjects, including biology, chemistry, business studies and geography.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is well led. It has many strengths but also some weaknesses. Leaders have a clear focus on raising standards in those subjects where achievement has been weaker in recent years. Improvement is evident for current students. Leaders have sought external advice in each weaker subject and acted swiftly on the recommendations received. However, leaders have not shared the good practice that already exists in school as much as they might. Leaders' checks on students' progress have been much more rigorous this year, adopting systems that have seen standards rise rapidly in key stage 4. Consequently, although some variation remains, teaching is now more effective across subjects and students' progress is accelerating.
- Careers advice and guidance are highly effective. Pupils in Year 11 receive clear, independent information about post-16 courses, with one eye on their career aspirations. In the sixth form, a comprehensive careers guidance programme ensures that students understand the options open to them. They are able to make well-informed choices about what they go on to do when they leave school. Students told inspectors that they particularly value the support they receive from their teachers, their head of sixth form and a learning mentor who works exclusively in the sixth form.
- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. Their behaviour is impeccable. Students enjoy their studies and all who spoke to inspectors said they were glad they had chosen St Paul's. Attendance, although a little lower than in the main school, is high and almost all students complete their courses. Almost all students move on to university when they leave the school. The minority who do not wish to go to university are well supported as they move to apprenticeships or employment.
- High standards in Year 11 mean that few students join the sixth form without having achieved GCSEs in English and mathematics at grades A* to C. However, the sixth form enables almost all that need to improve their grade to be successful. Success rates in GCSE English and mathematics resits are better than those seen nationally.
- The sixth-form curriculum is largely academic, with most students taking A-level courses. Leaders have introduced a small number of vocational courses in the last two

years and these have proved popular and successful. Leaders have worked hard to increase the number of students taking either mathematics, physics or chemistry, as these subjects have historically been unpopular. Their efforts have been very successful. Mathematics is now one of the most popular A-level choices and physics and chemistry have also grown in popularity. The school is now seeing an increasing number of students taking science, technology, engineering or mathematics courses at university when they leave the sixth form.

- Leaders provide a wide range of non-qualification activities for students. A well-planned PSHE programme supports students' career aspirations and tackles other issues, such as personal safety. Students taking vocational subjects complete work placements, as do many other students. There are several opportunities for students to volunteer or to serve the community. They mentor younger pupils. They provide support in lessons and help pupils in Year 7 with their reading. Students are very involved with the school's charitable work. However, leaders do not plan and monitor the work-related and service aspects of the 16 to 19 study programme as well as the academic curriculum. Consequently, leaders cannot be certain that every student has a programme of non-qualification activities that effectively develops their character and employability skills.

School details

Unique reference number	103531
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10032773

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	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,007
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Browning
Headteacher	Dawn Casserly
Telephone number	0121 454 0895
Website	www.stpaulgl.bham.sch.uk/
Email address	enquiry@stpaulgl.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 May 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- This is an average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is well above average.
- An average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress.
- The school's most recent section 48 inspection of religious education took place in April 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and many of these observations were conducted jointly with senior and middle leaders. They also observed two assemblies.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. They met with three focus groups of pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils at morning break and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors considered 44 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 31 free-text responses. They also considered one letter from a parent.
- Inspectors considered 53 responses to an online staff questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, other leaders and seven members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair.
- Inspectors scrutinised several documents, including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings and the school's records about pupils' behaviour, attendance and attainment and those relating to keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
Eddie Wilkes	Ofsted Inspector
Nigel Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector
Lois Kelly	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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