

Skipton Girls' High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121712
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	314089
Inspection dates	5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Chambers HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	751
School	560
6 th form	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Goodfellow
Headteacher	Mrs Janet Renou
Date of previous school inspection	March 2005
School address	Gargrave Road Skipton North Yorkshire BD23 1QL
Telephone number	01756 707600
Fax number	01756 701068

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: students' achievement; students' personal development; the effectiveness of academic guidance; and the school's use of self-evaluation. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, assessment data, school documentation, observation of the school at work, discussions with staff and students, and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but there is no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Skipton Girls' High School is a selective, smaller than average-sized school that serves the market town of Skipton and the largely rural surrounding districts. The number of students has risen significantly over the last three years. The area served by the school has relatively low levels of social deprivation and very few students are entitled to free school meals. Over 92% of the students are White British in origin. Several minority ethnic groups are represented in small numbers, but few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low. The school gained specialist engineering status in 2003. It is an Investor in People and holds the Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Standards are high and students achieve very well. Its specialist status in engineering has an impressive impact on many areas of the school's work. In particular, the excellent curriculum features several options based on engineering not normally available in schools, and students are taking up these in increasing numbers and with increasing success. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. The headteacher and her senior leadership team lead the school very well. The headteacher's vision and drive are widely recognised within the school and the staff show high levels of unity and shared purpose.

Students enter with standards of attainment that are well above average and these are built on very effectively throughout the school. Students achieve very well and results in national tests at Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations are very high. In 2007, all students achieved the benchmark of five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. In addition, 62% of passes were at the highest grades of A* and A, which was nearly four times the national average. Students meet challenging targets in a wide range of subjects, including those relevant to the school's specialism. High standards have been maintained for many years together with an underlying trend of improved progress.

Leaders at all levels evaluate effectively the school's provision and pay appropriate attention to assessing the impact of new initiatives. For example, the change to 'family-based', mixed age tutor groups was thoroughly evaluated through formal questionnaires and through observing its positive effect on relationships and personal development. Development planning at all levels is strong. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school: they provide very good levels of support and challenge. School leaders acknowledge that teaching accommodation and outdoor facilities have come under increasing strain as student numbers have grown. Current teaching accommodation is satisfactory for most subjects but limits students' progress in physical education. The strengths identified in the last inspection have been maintained and built upon and the school demonstrates excellent capacity to improve further.

Students benefit from outstanding care, guidance and support. Appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place. Good transition procedures enable Year 7 students to settle well and those finishing Year 11 to move confidently into the sixth form or employment. An outstanding feature of the school's care is the tutor group system which leads to younger students feeling comfortable in the company of other students from their first days in the school. Academic guidance is very strong. As a result, students show high levels of understanding of their targets and how they can move up to the next level or grade. Even more impressive is that many students can assess effectively their own strengths and areas for improvement.

Students' personal development is outstanding because of the excellent care and guidance that they receive. They show a high level of enjoyment in what the school has to offer and demonstrate this through their excellent attendance and their eagerness to participate in the many and varied extra-curricular activities that are available. Students behave very well. They feel safe in school and report that bullying

is very rare. They are confident that if they have problems there are members of staff that they can approach for advice and support. Students understand the need to eat healthily and to take regular exercise, but opportunities for them to undertake additional physical education are limited by the cramped nature of the school site. Students have opportunities to contribute their views through the effective school council. Older students make excellent contributions to the social and academic well-being of others in their tutor group. Enterprise activities and work-related learning, together with the high standards of their key skills, mean that students are very well prepared for the world of work. The school has established suitable channels of communication with parents but could do more to actively involve parents in school life. Approximately one third of the responses to the inspection questionnaire highlight parents' concern that the school does not take sufficient account of their views.

The curriculum offers an impressively wide range of opportunities and is developing well to make learning more personalised. The school's specialism is reflected in the excellent Key Stage 4 curriculum, where all students take a technology option which includes the opportunity to study engineering or systems and control. Almost all students take GCSE examinations in three separate sciences, statistics and a foreign language. The school caters well for the high ability of its students through arranging for them to enter GCSE information and communication technology in Year 9, and through a recent move for some students to take the Key Stage 3 national tests at the end of Year 8.

Good subject knowledge and high levels of challenge contribute to the excellent quality of teaching and learning. Lessons are typified by excellent relationships and attitudes to learning. Students make rapid progress when they use group discussion to solve well-focused and demanding problems. Almost all parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire feel their children progress well as a result of the skills of the teachers and the inspector agrees.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

A very large proportion of Year 11 students continue their studies in the sixth form and additional students who join from other local schools enhance numbers by about 20%. Standards are very high with performance in nearly all subjects significantly above the national average. Progress is rapid and achievement is very good. The curriculum is enhanced through good collaboration with another local school. This collaboration helps in providing an impressive range of over 20 A-level options, together with a small number of vocational opportunities. Care, guidance and support are good. Appropriate structures are in place, but are not as well coordinated as in the main school. Students' outstanding personal development is demonstrated by their responsible attitudes and very good behaviour. They offer outstanding contributions to the life of the school, for example, by acting as learning mentors to younger students. The sixth form is well led and managed, with new appointments beginning to have an impact on students' experience.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build closer links with parents.

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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?	1	1
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	NA	
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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.

The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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	

Annex B



6 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Skipton Girls' High School, Skipton, BD23 1QL

Thank you for the help that you gave me when I recently inspected your school. I enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views. Many of you told me how highly you regard the school and I agree that yours is an outstanding school. Standards are high and you achieve very well. I was particularly impressed by the way the school's specialist status in engineering influences so many areas of its work. You benefit from being able to study several options that are not normally available in schools, and I am impressed that more of you are choosing these options and with increasing success.

Your attendance and behaviour are both outstanding. The mixed age tutor groups help those of you in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form to take responsibility and help younger students. You told me that these groups help you to feel comfortable and safe at school, particular at the beginning of Year 7. Teachers give you excellent support in your studies and so most of you are clear what you need to do to improve your work.

The headteacher and her senior leadership team lead the school very well. In order to improve the school still further, I have asked Mrs Renou and her staff to build closer links between the school and parents. You can help in this by keeping your parents informed as much as you can. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers
Her Majesty's Inspector