

Bishop Vesey's Grammar School

Lichfield Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2NH

Inspection dates 8–9 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- This is a high performing school where students make rapid progress and reach exceptionally high standards.
- Teaching is of a consistently high quality. Many teachers communicate a passion for their subject, inspiring their students to want to learn more. Teachers place a strong focus on ensuring that students know how to improve and what they need to do attain the highest grades.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Standards are consistently amongst the highest in the country. Sixth form students are provided with a wealth of opportunities that enable them to excel, not only academically but also in sport, the arts and in the development of leadership skills. They are outstanding role models for younger students.
- Students' behaviour around school and in lessons is outstanding. Boys show great enthusiasm for their studies and an eagerness to do well. They are polite, mature and articulate, showing respect for adults and each other. They value the school's diverse and harmonious community.
- The school keeps its students safe and ensures that students have the information they need to keep themselves safe. It is a pioneer in developing students' understanding of mental health issues.
- The broad curriculum is very flexible to match students' interests. It includes a strong focus on building the learning habits that will enable students to develop resilience and the skills to manage their own learning.
- An exceptionally wide variety of enrichment activities are available, enabling students to pursue their talents and interests to the highest level.
- The headteacher is very well supported by the senior team and by the governing body. He leads by example, communicating his high expectations of the performance of staff and students. Teachers support each other and display a great desire to constantly improve their own performance.
- Senior leaders, including governors, are focused on ensuring that the school provides an atmosphere in which students can thrive and develop the personal skills they need to prepare them for their future success and as citizens of modern Britain.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in lessons across all year groups and most subjects. Five lessons were seen together with one of the school's senior leaders. Students' English books were examined.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body and staff.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at policies, the school's own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and its plans for development, minutes of meetings of the governing body, records of lesson observations, information about students' progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students' work.
- The views of the 266 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. Inspectors also took individual communications from parents into account as well as the 20 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Katharine Bruce	Additional Inspector
Helen Booth	Additional Inspector
William Houldsworth	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Bishop Vesey's Grammar School converted to become an academy on 1 April 2012. It is a stand-alone academy. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- This selective school is an average-sized secondary school. In Years 7 to 11 it is an all-boys school, with girls joining in the sixth form.
- The sixth form offers academic courses only.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average, with the largest groups being of Indian and Pakistani heritage. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is also above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is low compared with the national average.
- No students attend any off-site alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has experienced some disruption to staffing in the English department over the past two years in part as a result of illness. The head of English took up her post in September 2013.
- The school promotes mental health through the 'Time to Change' campaign.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Use the existing outstanding practice that exists, for example in English, to ensure that all teachers consistently check that students make the best possible use of advice, provided through marking, on how to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is relentless in his drive to ensure that the high standards reached by the students, and the high quality of teaching, are sustained and improved further. He is very well supported by the strong senior team and has successfully maintained an atmosphere in which students take pride in their success and where they can grow in confidence and fully develop their talents and interests.
- Leaders promote high-quality teaching through close monitoring and well-matched professional development, ensuring that all take responsibility for the progress made by their students. Many staff take the role of promoting and championing different aspects of teaching such as 'Building Learning Habits' which focuses students on how to develop the learning skills they need to succeed. As a result, students across the school have an excellent understanding of how and when to seek advice and how they can take charge of their own progress.
- Subject leaders say that they feel empowered to drive improvements. They constantly monitor the quality of teaching within their subject areas, holding teachers closely to account for students' progress. Staff show a desire to improve their own practice, reflecting on their own performance and how it can be improved. Newly qualified teachers and those new to the profession are very well supported, including the provision of mentors and the opportunity to observe skilled practitioners. Subject leaders are keen to share good practice and develop new initiatives across departments, to provide consistency and the opportunity for all staff to develop leadership skills.
- Leaders track progress and closely check all aspects of the school's work to ensure that any student who falls below their very challenging targets is immediately supported. They ensure that all groups of students, including those from different ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language, are treated equally and that there is no discrimination. This means that all are able to succeed. There is a strong focus throughout the school on ensuring all students' wellbeing, including their mental health which leaders recognise can be a particular problem in a high-achieving school.
- Students are mainly taught in mixed-ability sets across all subjects apart from science and mathematics. However, all students are of high ability and the school ensures that the most able are fully stretched and challenged.
- The school has a detailed spending plan for the additional funding provided through the pupil premium and checks that eligible students are fully catered for. The school ensures that the funding continues into the sixth form so that disadvantaged students are fully supported throughout the school, both in providing academic support and mentoring but also to ensure that they are fully included in the many enrichment activities. Leaders are currently targeting disadvantaged pupils in primary schools with a view to providing support for the most able in preparing for secondary selection tests, to increase the proportion of this group of students at the school.
- Safeguarding procedures and policies are thorough and child protection arrangements are robust. There is excellent liaison between the school and external agencies when required.
- The wide range of GCSE and A level courses offered reflects the wide interests of the students. There is an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects), where standards are very high. There is a well-developed approach to raising the profile of literacy and mathematics across the curriculum, together with opportunities to excel in a wide variety of sports and the arts. The curriculum encourages students to develop teamwork, leadership and social skills. These contribute to their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and promote their understanding of British values.
- The enrichment programme offers students a vast range of creative and sporting activities, including rowing, board games and chess, orchestras and other musical ensembles. Visiting speakers, such as those arranged to celebrate 'Black History' month, and writers in residence provide students with a wide range of inspirational experiences. Students told inspectors how much they value the staff's willingness to give up their time on their behalf. Everywhere around the school are pictures of role models, such as famous

sportsmen and writers, many of whom have visited the school.

- Leaders monitor assessment across the school and ensure that teachers use assessment information fully to identify and address any misconceptions. Leaders have decided to move to the new GCSE system of grading across the school starting in 2015. Until then, they are continuing to use National Curriculum levels.
- The programme of careers guidance across the school includes opportunities to visit universities and careers fairs, and guides students to enable them to explore options for themselves. A wide variety of visiting speakers from local businesses and elsewhere enhance this provision.
- Parents are kept well informed through weekly newsletters, students' school diaries and the website. Regular meetings and progress reports fully involve parents in their child's education, particularly in informing parents about any underachievement to ensure that students avail themselves of extra support when the need is identified.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors give a strong lead in the direction of the school. The balance of challenge and support is such that it promotes enthusiasm and a desire to improve further with teachers and senior leaders while holding all to account. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school. They draw on their different areas of expertise, and they make regular visits to lessons, talking to students to gain their views. For example, they recently carried out a survey on the careers guidance students receive.
 - Governors have a strong strategic role in monitoring and supporting teaching and learning. They ensure that teachers' salary progression is linked to the achievement of their students. They fully support the school's leaders in their constant drive for improvement.
 - Governors have a thorough understanding of performance data and how the school compares to others nationally. Governors ensure that they access training and that new governors are appropriately supported to enable them to carry out their role effectively. They ensure that high academic outcomes are maintained and improved, and that the culture of the school is the best that it can be. They focus strongly on ensuring that respect, tolerance and an understanding of individual responsibility remain the school's priorities. They ensure that both students and staff are kept safe and that safeguarding procedures are robust.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Students show a great thirst for learning and are keen to make the most of the academic and other opportunities offered across the school. They value highly the very positive relationships between staff and with their peers, which creates an extremely positive climate for learning in the vast majority of lessons. Students' enthusiasm in lessons is well managed by teachers and students are quick to respond to instructions.
- Students say that the mature and sensible behaviour observed during the inspection is typical. They respect the school's learning environment. There is no litter, and facilities are looked after by students.
- There have been no permanent exclusions over the last three years. Fixed-term exclusions are very low and relate to one-off incidents.
- Attendance rates are well above average and have been consistently high over time. Absence is rigorously followed up and persistent absence is very low. Students arrive promptly to lessons, despite sometimes having to travel a long way from one lesson to another.
- Students are proud of their school. The school is culturally diverse and students demonstrate a high level of respect for each other and for the variety of faiths and cultures within the school. They say that there is no racism or homophobia. Students work and socialise well together. New students, including girls in the sixth form, say that they are welcomed and quickly become part of the school community.

- Students make a very strong contribution to the culture of the school. They enjoy and value the range of opportunities to develop leadership skills through involvement in staff recruitment and leadership of a range of events and clubs in the school. Older students mentor younger students and lead whole-school initiatives such as the 'Time for Change' campaign, to tackle discrimination and the stigma of mental illness. All of these activities and opportunities make a strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students. One Year 11 student said, 'The school provides a strong sense of community which engenders personal pride and responsibility.'

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students feel very safe and say that they value the security of the school site.
- Students have an excellent understanding of the different forms of bullying, but they told inspectors that bullying is very rare. This is borne out by the school's incident reports. However, students are confident that if bullying incidents occur they will be taken seriously, and tackled swiftly, by staff.
- Assemblies reinforce the school's expectations that no discrimination or harassment has any place within the school community. Visiting speakers at assemblies are carefully vetted to ensure that their contributions are consistent with the school's values.
- There is a very well-planned programme, through personal, social, health education and citizenship lessons, to support students in understanding and managing risk. This includes risks related to e-safety, carrying of knives, and well-being issues such as eating disorders and self-harm.
- Almost all staff, parents and carers agree that their child is happy at school, are safe and that students behave well.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The rapid progress made by students in all subjects and year groups, including the sixth form, and the high standards they reach, show that the quality of teaching is outstanding. Inspectors observed teachers displaying a great passion for their subject, which resulted in students also showing great enthusiasm and excitement and being inspired to want to learn more.
- Students expressed how much they value the support and dedication of their teachers and their willingness to spend time providing extra help to ensure that students achieve their full potential.
- Teachers know their students very well and have very high expectations of what each student can achieve. They are highly aware of disadvantaged students within their classes and target them to ensure that they achieve as well as other students. They also ensure that the very few disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported. All staff are trained in how best to support these students according to their individual learning needs.
- Teachers frequently direct the most-able students in their high performing classes to tackle an additional challenge or to take a leading role in the lesson so that they are fully stretched.
- Lessons include a strong focus on students building the learning habits they need to find things out for themselves and to develop curiosity and confidence. Students across the school are reminded of the four 'B's when faced with a question they can't immediately tackle: use their 'Brain', look in a 'Book', ask a 'Buddy', before asking the 'Boss' (their teacher).
- Teachers always ensure that students understand how they will be assessed, with a strong focus on what a model answer looks like and what they need to do to achieve the highest grade. Teachers have very high expectations and are clear that this is where each of their students should be aiming. As a result, tasks are challenging and questioning is probing to make students think deeply. Teachers not only display excellent subject knowledge but also a secure knowledge of how students will be assessed, inspiring their

students' confidence.

- Teachers use assessment information very well to plan lessons, often focusing a task on a previous misconception that they have identified from students' work. Students keep a careful record of the targets that are set for them and what they need to do to achieve them.
- Assessment during lessons, and through marking, is of high quality so that students have a clear understanding of how to develop their learning further. They frequently use assessment criteria to evaluate their own or each other's work, further reinforcing how to attain the highest grades. The quality of marking is strong in many areas of the school, particularly in English, where students have the opportunity to redraft passages of their work or make corrections before their work is marked again. This leads to rapid progress. There is some inconsistency, however, and not all teachers check that students have responded to the advice they have been given on the next steps they need to take to move their learning on.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students start at the school with skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics that are well above average. That means that none are eligible for Year 7 'catch up' funding. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of students gaining five A* to C GCSE passes including English and mathematics is consistently high. In 2014, almost all students achieved this goal. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades (A* and A grades) in all subjects is consistently high.
- Students make exceptional progress. Almost all students make expected progress in both English and mathematics and a very high proportion make more than expected. There is no significant difference between the rates of progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.
- Students who speak English as an additional language achieve equally as well as other groups. The school tracks their progress carefully, aware that these students may need extra support in developing their vocabulary as they progress through the school. The very few disabled students and those who have special educational needs make exceptional progress as a result of the outstanding teaching and support that they receive.
- There is a strong focus on the promotion of literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects, with students encouraged and expected to use the technical language required of each subject. Students show a love of reading and the school library is very well used. The library is a hive of activity and the displays, including the students' book review wall, encourage students' creativity and promote a love of reading. Students recently organised a competition to be photographed reading in strange situations, such as underwater. This created much interest and excitement for students and staff.
- All students are now entered for GCSE mathematics in the summer of Year 11, with the highest attaining students having the opportunity to broaden their mathematical studies, to extend their understanding further.
- The most-able students are strongly supported by the school's leaders and by their teachers, being set challenging targets and opportunities to explore their interests and talents. Where appropriate, students are entered for GCSE in earlier years; for example, in French.
- Disadvantaged students make significantly better progress and attain well above students nationally in both English and mathematics. In 2014, they were less than half a grade behind their peers in mathematics and just over half a grade behind in English. This reflects the staffing difficulties in this subject recently experienced by the school. The school's current progress data shows that students eligible for the additional funding are making consistently outstanding progress throughout the school. Assessment information provided by the school indicates that for 2015 this group are expected to perform better than their peers in mathematics and that the gap will have closed in English.

The sixth form provision is outstanding

- Students in the large sixth form enter with high prior attainment at GCSE. They make rapid progress and, year on year, reach consistently high standards at A level. In 2014, 85% attained the highest grades, placing the school in the top 25 nationally and third in the Midlands.
- Almost all students stay on from Year 11 into the sixth form and complete their sixth form courses.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported, as they are in the main school. They achieve just as well as their peers. Disadvantaged students are supported financially by the school and achieve well above all students nationally although there is a small in-school gap.
- Students say that they value teachers' excellent subject knowledge and their understanding of how they will be assessed. Teachers have a very organised approach that enables students to gradually build on their prior learning, gaining confidence and a clear understanding of what they have to do to gain success.
- Students say that they are well cared for and guided, and kept safe. Their well-being is closely monitored and they are confident that there is always someone who will provide support.
- Students' attendance is well above national rates, indicating their strong motivation and enjoyment of school life. They are careful about their health and, as part of their leadership responsibilities, they champion the 'Time for Change' mental health project by providing an extra level of care for younger students. This also heightens students' awareness of how to look after themselves.
- Girls and boys joining the school for the first time in the sixth form are welcomed, enabled to settle quickly and are fully involved in school life. They say how much they value the transition arrangements that enable their teachers to have a clear picture of their prior attainment so that they can plan tasks that are pitched at the right level.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Leaders carefully monitor students' progress and the quality of teaching, providing one-to-one mentors to support students who fall behind their challenging targets. Careers guidance and support for university application are very strong. Every opportunity is taken to bring in visiting speakers from business and the professions, and students are encouraged to attend careers fairs. Over 95% of students go on to university and, of these, 75% went to Russell Group universities in 2014. There are no students who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS).
- The vast array of enrichment activities enable students to further their individual talents, and many take the lead in these activities; for example, organising concerts and sporting activities. Opportunities such as these, together with charity work and supporting younger students, enables the development of leadership skills and prepares students very well for their future employability skills and for life in modern British society.
- Students are offered a wide variety of academic courses that prepare them well for their chosen career and further study. The offer of STEM courses is being extended further to enable a greater focus on computing. Although it is rarely required, students are able to retake GCSE English or mathematics should they need to improve their grades. General studies, now being withdrawn, is the least successful course because this was not seen as a priority for students as they undertook an extended project, seen by universities as a better qualification for university entry.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137988
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	449783

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	993
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	368
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Craggs
Headteacher	Dominic Robson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0121 2505400
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