

Birchfield Independent Girls' School

30 Beacon Hill, Aston, Birmingham, West Midlands B6 6JU

Inspection dates

13–15 March and 19 April 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Sixth form provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Previously inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Although improving, the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet good. There is some variability in the quality of teaching and the resulting impact on learning.
- Leaders have introduced strategies to improve the extent to which teachers' planning meets pupils' needs, but these are not yet embedded.
- As a result of better teaching, pupils' progress is improving but it is not consistently strong. Some pupils are not adequately challenged to do their best.
- Some learning activities are not challenging enough for the most able pupils. This is particularly the case in wider aspects of the curriculum, such as history.
- Some pupils require more support to develop their handwriting and spelling. Pupils' basic errors in English are sometimes not addressed.
- The number of students who are designated as being in the school's sixth form is very small. Students work alongside pupils in key stage 4 classes to further develop their academic and personal skills. The overall quality of teaching that these pupils receive is not yet good.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and staff have established a culture in which pupils feel secure and are safe.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's overall effectiveness. They have focused sharply on developing the skills of staff. They know their school well and are honest and frank about what needs to be embedded further.
- The proprietor is very committed to the school and has supported and challenged leaders to secure important improvements.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved over time. Leaders have introduced effective strategies to reduce any low-level disruption. Pupils also say that behaviour has improved.
- This is a happy and positive school. Pupils say that they enjoy their learning. They conduct themselves well throughout the school day.
- The school provides rich opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the impact of leadership and management by fully embedding the effective strategies that have been introduced and sustaining the rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation.
- Improve the quality of teaching across the curriculum so that all pupils, including post-16 students, make the best possible progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers' planning develops further and makes sure that learning activities match the needs of pupils more closely
 - teachers set work that provides consistent stretch and challenge so that the most able pupils can make more rapid progress
 - teachers adapt learning quickly if pupils require greater challenge or support
 - recent strategies to address the shortcomings in some pupils' handwriting and spelling are sustained and regularly checked for impact.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor has ensured that all of the independent school standards are consistently met.
- The headteacher and proprietor know the school well. They are skilled and thoughtful leaders who have focused on bringing about important improvements. To strengthen their capacity further, they have also recruited additional leaders with strong skill sets.
- Leaders have successfully developed a positive and hard-working workforce. Staff take pride in what they do and enjoy teaching.
- Leaders are honest and frank about school improvement. They know the school's key strengths and areas for development. As a result of accurate self-evaluation, their action plans target the right areas. For example, they have focused carefully on improving schemes of work and teachers' planning in recent years. This work has been effective. Schemes of work are detailed and set out how the school aims to secure strong outcomes over time. Similarly, teachers' planning has improved and has a sharper focus on meeting pupils' needs. Nonetheless, leaders acknowledge that some of this work now needs to be fully embedded.
- The curriculum is well organised. Pupils enjoy a wide range of experiences. During the inspection, Year 7 were participating in a school trip to learn about marine life, Year 8 were exploring the Second World War and the Holocaust and Year 9 were successfully calculating complex angles of depression.
- A cornerstone of the school's effectiveness is the improvement that has been secured in pupils' behaviour. Leaders have thought carefully about how they can best support pupils so that day-to-day behaviour in class contributes positively to learning. Leaders' work with staff and pupils has been successful. Low-level disruption is not common. Pupils respond well to staff and say that behaviour is good.
- Middle leaders regularly observe learning and check work in pupils' books to identify what needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Leaders advise teachers on what needs to improve.
- Pupils have opportunities to develop their reading skills through the school's well-stocked library. They can choose from a wide range of books, including reference books, classic titles and fiction.
- Leaders provide rich opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. These include visits to museums and churches and welcoming a range of external speakers to the school. Pupils learn about world religions and different cultures. Leaders have made links with a Catholic church to develop pupils' understanding of different faiths. The school is also a member of the 'Three Faiths Forum'. This initiative has allowed pupils from different backgrounds to learn from each other and work together. Pupils are developing a wider understanding of society. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- The majority of parents and carers say that they are happy with the school. Parents have no concerns about safety and say their children are well cared for. One parent commented: 'My two daughters are very happy at the school and receive a lot of support. Teachers and the headteacher make time at very short notice to discuss any concerns we have. They have regular activities which are all educational but packed with fun and get the pupils to interact with each other.' This positive view was typical of many others shared via free-text comments during the inspection.

Governance

- The proprietor knows the school well and is fully committed to it. He has dedicated much of his time and skills over the last two years to supporting and challenging leaders. He keeps detailed records of his discussions and meetings with leaders, and has high expectations of what should be achieved.
- The proprietor establishes targets and monitors the performance of pupils. Like leaders, he is honest and clear about his appraisal of the school's overall effectiveness. He recognises the school's strengths and is keen to build further on those areas that are not yet securely good.
- The proprietor has a good working knowledge of the independent school standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's safeguarding policy reflects current legislation and meets requirements. The policy is published on the school's website.
- The school has two designated safeguarding leads who are appropriately trained. They attend regular update training sessions organised by the local authority. All staff are appropriately trained in recognising and reporting indicators of abuse, neglect or the risks associated with radicalisation. Staff are trained in other areas of safeguarding, including female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff are highly vigilant and aware of what to do to keep pupils safe. Pupils feel safe at school and parents have no concerns about the safety of their children.
- The curriculum has been enhanced with workshops to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe. Pupils know about keeping safe online and are aware of the associated risks of grooming, exploitation and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet good. Leaders have secured improvements over time but recognise that this effective work must be embedded further.
- Teachers have improved the overall quality of schemes of work and lesson plans. However, some activities do not yet offer an appropriate level of challenge for pupils. Although extension activities are evident in some lessons, in line with the school's

expectations, teachers do not routinely adapt lessons if pupils find learning either too easy or too hard.

- The quality of teaching is variable. For example, in English lessons, some teachers do not address misconceptions or basic spelling errors quickly enough. As a result, some pupils misspell common words repeatedly. Similarly, some older pupils have not been supported adequately to ensure that their handwriting is of a high standard.
- Leaders have begun to address these weaknesses, which further demonstrates the strength of their capacity to secure improvements. However, this work is relatively new and the shortcomings identified have not yet been fully addressed.
- Some teaching in wider areas of the curriculum, such as history, lacks challenge. Pupils learn about a wide range of historical terms and concepts but some activities are too easy for the most able pupils.
- Where teaching is strongest, such as in mathematics, teachers use effective questioning to deepen pupils' understanding. As a result, pupils demonstrate resilience and remain on-task. Teachers with strong knowledge and skills are also able to skilfully extend learning and make maximum use of lesson time. In these lessons, pupils are fully engaged in their learning and make more rapid progress.
- Inspectors observed teachers using effective questioning in English. In one lesson, the teachers' questioning supported pupils to deepen their thinking skills. In Islamic studies, pupils were observed to be highly engaged. The teacher had planned learning that closely matched pupils' needs. In a physical education (PE) lesson, pupils received valuable verbal feedback from the teacher and demonstrated high levels of cooperation.
- The school has not identified any pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, leaders are quick to spot pupils who fall behind. Interventions and one-to-one support are offered to help pupils catch up.
- The school provides parents with regular reports on how well their children are progressing. Parents say they are happy with the information they receive from school.
- Homework is set in line with the school's policy. The school has a strong focus on helping pupils to learn independently. Pupils understand this and they complete homework to a high standard.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are very positive. Pupils help one another and are keen to share their ideas and views. They respect the opinions of others.
- Pupils receive impartial careers guidance and advice. For example, all pupils in Year 11, and the small number of post-16 students, attend careers interviews. The school also welcomes a range of external speakers to talk about career choices, including careers in the police force and charitable trusts. Pupils that inspectors spoke to have a clear idea of what they would like to do when they leave school.

- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, they attend regular workshops on staying healthy and forming positive relationships. Pupils learn about different types of bullying. They know how to report any incidents and are confident that teachers will resolve their concerns. As a result, bullying is extremely rare.

Behaviour

- Improvements in behaviour have been a key success for the school in the last two years. Any low-level disruption is addressed quickly. Pupils only need occasional reminders to stay focused or participate in lessons. Pupils respond well to any prompts and instructions from staff.
- Pupils say that behaviour has improved. Pupils are courteous and polite and clearly enjoy one another's company. One pupil stated how much she enjoys the fact that she can spend time with girls of different ages. During lunchtime, pupils were seen to cooperate very well with one another. Adults were also on hand to offer support and even join in with a game of badminton.
- Attendance is just above the national average. Any pupils whose attendance falls below 95% are carefully monitored. The school works with the local authority to take appropriate action to challenge or support families should attendance become a concern.
- Leaders have established a strong and purposeful community in the school. Staff and pupils enjoy being with one another and relationships are strong. As a result, behaviour has improved over time and is a key strength.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The progress that current pupils are making is not consistently strong.
- Pupils' work in books shows variable levels of progress. This is particularly the case in some aspects of English and the wider curriculum. For example, some pupils in key stage 4 are not making strong progress in learning and in the application of their basic skills. Some pupils make basic errors in their spelling. Some of these errors are not routinely addressed by teachers.
- In aspects of the wider curriculum, such as history, activities can sometimes be quite easy for pupils to complete. As a result, pupils are not challenged in their learning. This is particularly noticeable for some of the school's most able pupils.
- Pupils' progress is stronger in mathematics. Observations of teaching and work in pupils' books show how teachers' effective planning and questioning offer greater levels of challenge.
- GCSE results are improving over time. Results in English, mathematics and science show an improving trend by the end of key stage 4. In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in English and mathematics was in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in English was above the national average.
- Pupils who left the school in 2017 moved on to further education colleges to study a wide variety of courses. These pupils are regularly invited back to school to talk about their experiences. Current pupils say that this helps them to prepare for their next steps. Pupils

that inspectors spoke to have aspirational career plans and say that school helps them to make appropriate choices.

Sixth form provision

Requires improvement

- The sixth-form provision requires improvement. It is important to note that only a very small number of students are post-16. The school does not, therefore, have a dedicated sixth form. The school offers places to students who have missed earlier years of their education and are not ready to take GCSEs in Year 11. The school has carefully analysed the needs of all these students and has implemented individual learning plans.
- Although students are supported effectively with their personal development, the overall quality of teaching that they receive is not consistently good.
- The school tracks the performance of post-16 students but, given the small size of the group, it is not appropriate to report on their outcomes.
- Safeguarding in the sixth-form provision is effective. Students feel safe and are kept safe.
- Students access the same careers advice and educational visits as Year 11 pupils. This is because they are still working towards GCSE examinations and similar qualifications and are not following a post-16 programme of study.
- Students are aspirational and are clear about what they want to do when they enter employment. The school has helped students consider their skills and how these may match different career opportunities. Some students have undertaken work experience in local nurseries to explore what it might be like to care for young children. Students state that they really enjoy these opportunities and have gained lots from the experience.
- Students talk positively about the mentoring that they receive from adults in the school. Students conduct themselves in a very mature manner and their behaviour is good.

School details

Unique reference number	103591
DfE registration number	330/6083
Inspection number	10040660

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 17
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	117
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	5
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Mr Mohammed Rahman
Chair	Mr Mohammed Rahman
Headteacher	Mrs Rehana Mogra
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,995
Telephone number	0121 327 7707
Website	www.bigs.bham.sch.uk
Email address	admin@bigs.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Birchfield Independent Girls' School is an independent secondary school that provides Islamic education for girls in Birmingham. The school opened in 1998 and is housed in a building that was formerly a jobcentre.
- The school employs 28 staff on a full- and part-time basis.

- The school was inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in March 2012. Ofsted undertook an emergency inspection in 2008 and a subsequent monitoring visit in the same year.
- The school does not make use of alternative providers. However, pupils use PE facilities at the Lighthouse Centre in Newtown and King Edward's School.
- The aims of the school state: 'We strive for academic excellence while treating children as individuals. We encourage children to develop their own talents and personality, and we value diversity in our school community.'
- The school is registered for 152 pupils aged 11 to 17 years. There are currently 117 pupils on roll.
- Pupils who attend the school beyond the age of 16 do so because they have missed earlier years of their education. They are able to make up learning they have missed through individualised timetables and by learning alongside Year 11 pupils where appropriate. This gives students extra time to take GCSEs, if required.
- Pupils study a range of subjects including English, mathematics, science, art, Islamic studies, information and communication technology, Arabic, PE and history.

Information about this inspection

- After the initial two days of inspection, Ofsted decided that it was necessary to return to the school to gather further evidence to complete the inspection. This additional inspection day was undertaken by two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor, who is also the chair of governors. Inspectors also met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and those responsible for safeguarding, teaching and behaviour.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils across all year groups.
- Inspectors observed a wide range of lessons, including English, mathematics, science, history, Arabic, Islamic studies and PE. The inspectors also reviewed work in pupils’ books. Many of these activities were undertaken jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors toured the premises of the school and examined key policies, including those related to safeguarding, the curriculum, behaviour, complaints and bullying.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the attendance and admissions registers, the school’s information on pupils’ achievements and behaviour, records of complaints and procedures for recording incidents of bullying.
- The inspectors reviewed the feedback from parents received through Parent View. A total of 22 responses were received.
- The inspectors considered eight responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jonathan Keay, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Mel Ford	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Melanie Callaghan-Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Ashley	Ofsted Inspector

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