

La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100059
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	354798
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter McGregor

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1222
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	329
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Hall
Headteacher	Maureen Williams
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2007
School address	Highgate Road London NW5 1RP
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 45 lessons taught by 45 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students, staff and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at school policies, development planning, information about students' performance, monitoring records and governing body minutes. The team received and analysed questionnaires completed by 281 parents and carers, and others by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How popular and successful are the specialist areas, mathematics and science?
- In which way does teaching ensure that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers?
- How effectively is a balance struck between behaviour management and encouragement of students' involvement in learning?

Information about the school

Above the average size for a secondary school, La Sainte Union has a large sixth form of its own which also forms part of a consortium with three other neighbouring schools. It accepts sixth form students from all faiths and none. The girls in Years 7 to 11 are from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, predominantly White British and Black British African which make up about a quarter each of the school roll. The proportions are above average for students known to be eligible for free school meals, and those speaking English as an additional language. A below average proportion has special educational needs and/or disabilities, mainly dyslexia and difficulties associated with behavioural, emotional and social issues or physical, speech and hearing needs. La Sainte Union has specialist status for Science with Mathematics and International School status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

La Sainte Union is a good school which has made significant improvement since its previous inspection. The sixth form is good and improving. Students' attainment remains high, with exceptional results in English and religious education. Students make good progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities because of the targeted specialist support they receive. They feel extremely safe and show outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Attendance is high and students display a strong commitment to hard work. They generally behave well in lessons and behaviour around the school buildings and site is excellent. They appreciate the importance of healthy living, although they do not always put into practice what they know. The quality of relationships among students, and with the staff, is exceptionally good. The excellence in care, guidance and support provided is exemplified by the rigour and consistency of the attendance procedures and the outstanding quality of pastoral care.

Teaching is good in a wide range of subjects, with some outstanding practice, resulting in enjoyable, rapid and sustained learning. A few lessons are less successful, such as in science and mathematics when teacher talk takes precedence over students' involvement in their own learning. There is also some inconsistency in the effectiveness of assessment procedures. The curriculum provides a range of academic and vocational pathways, meeting the needs of students through traditional courses and innovative activities. Students develop outstanding skills to assist them in their working life and make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. Safeguarding of the students, links with other schools and partnerships with parents, carers and other agencies are all outstanding.

The headteacher, with the support of the leadership team, is changing the culture of the school to one where staff are more accountable for their actions. Heads of department remarked that 'the school is in transition', as they adjust their practices to ensure that developments take place, once the need is identified through self-evaluation and external review. Staff morale remains high at the same time as this significant change at the core of the school is being achieved. The inclusive approach, in the sixth form as well as in Years 7 to 11, is testament to the strong drive to provide equality of opportunity for all. High and improving standards, extremely rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning which is leading to improvement in students' progress, along with the excellent aspects of school life, are indicative of an outstanding capacity to improve. The school provides excellent value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to increase the rate of progress throughout the school, improve the quality of teaching and learning within this academic year, by providing more opportunities

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in lessons for all students to be involved in engaging activities that meet their assessed needs, particularly in the school's specialisms of science with mathematics.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Based on high attainment in examinations, which represents good progress from above average attainment on entry, students' achievement at La Sainte Union is outstanding. It has been so for the past three years and is still improving. In lessons, students are articulate, capable communicators both orally and in writing. In Year 9, when set the task of composing an argument to justify their views on teenage slang, students enthusiastically arranged ideas on paper and were able to put them across convincingly in discussion. Students are also numerate, careful problem solvers. More than nine in every ten gain a GCSE A* to C grade in English; a large majority attain these grades in mathematics. Science results are above average but not as high as in mathematics. No group of students underachieves because almost all work hard and enjoy their lessons, and the teaching is effective. The quality of learning is exemplified by a Year 8 student's comment, who referred to being 'set challenging targets which we work hard to achieve with our teachers' help'.

Students feel extremely safe and entirely confident about whom to go to if they have any problems. Younger students greatly value the peer mentor work of Year 11s, in helping them to settle into the school and resolving any difficulties they might have. Students appreciate the freedom they have during lunchtimes and break periods and respond with great maturity, behaving extremely well whether in the dining room, around the site or in classrooms. A small number are too silly in a few classes and this can disrupt learning, although most staff deal well with such incidents. Students know that a balanced diet is important and many participate in extra-curricular sport, as well as enthusiastically engaging in physical education lessons. Some of the food eaten at break and lunchtime, and the fizzy drinks consumed, indicates that a few have not yet adopted the healthy eating practices of the majority.

The great depth of students' involvement in school life and further afield is an outstanding aspect of their development and manifested. For example, as sports leaders, in the school council, with its various committees, such as those associated with anti-bullying and working against child labour worldwide, and the generation of large sums of money for charities. They are very well prepared for adult life, not least through their high levels of literacy and numeracy, their cooperative approach to one another and staff, and their excellent attendance. Students' spiritual development is a strength of the school. Students reflect upon issues with great thought and care, such as in geography lessons when discussing population growth and the supply of food. They have an excellent feeling for what is right and wrong as a result of the school's Christian ethos. Students of all cultures and backgrounds get on extremely well together, appreciating the common bonds that exist between them.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Much of the teaching observed was good or outstanding. Teachers know their subjects very well and use this effectively to improve students' understanding and skills. The level of challenge provided in English, and often in arts subjects, is exceptional, with many opportunities for paired and independent work and peer- and self-assessment. The good or excellent pace of work characterising these lessons resulted in the fullest engagement and concentration of students and very effective learning. In science, and to a lesser extent in mathematics, although teaching and learning were at least satisfactory, teacher talk tended to dominate, which resulted in passive learning. Students were less secure in knowing how to assess their work and tasks were not well enough matched to their needs. Tracking of students' progress in Years 10 and 11 is very effective and similar rigour is being established in Years 7 to 9 as shorter-term targets are introduced.

The curriculum offers students a wide range of pathways to success, including many in the sciences, covering academic and applied courses at different levels and reflecting the school's specialist status. Year 7 students entering with below average attainment are tutored in English and mathematics in small classes to help accelerate progress. The school has responded effectively to the needs of Year 10 and 11 students by adapting the range of work, including the introduction of more diploma and young apprenticeship programmes. Other initiatives to broaden students' experience are currently being established, such as 'drop-down days', where the timetable is suspended and students

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work together for extended periods on areas such as thinking skills, justice and sustainability. The time available for physical education has been increased this year to two hours each week. Extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and music, are popular and successful. A homework club after school is provided although attendance is limited by the long journeys many students have.

At the heart of the school is the students' welfare and this is a key element in promoting their outstanding personal development and high attainment. The high quality pastoral care is based on a well-established, excellent framework of communication between tutors, heads of year, heads of key stage and senior leaders. All students become well known, so potential difficulties are identified early and wherever possible resolved. The needs of vulnerable students are very well understood, with specialist support secured where necessary. The school has been quick to recognise the diverse needs of individuals and groups such as those from Congolese and Polish communities, establishing highly effective support groups. The students and their families trust their teachers and feel confident to share concerns, knowing they will receive support and guidance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Parents, staff and students hold senior leaders in very high regard. They see the outcomes of highly successful driving improvement in extremely motivated students, doing very well academically. The vision of excellence is embedded throughout the school, alongside warmth and care which are palpable. The senior team use their complementary skills to good effect for all in the school community. The drive is clear to achieve greater consistency in the quality of teaching and assessment, thus improving students' learning and progress, particularly in areas connected with the school's specialist status. Accurate and robust self-evaluation points clearly towards the need for greater accountability and even higher attainment. The accurate picture of teaching and learning results from thorough monitoring. There is no complacency, with aspirational and higher targets set each year.

The school has excellent links with key agencies, clear and effective policies, strategies and procedures that help safeguard the students extremely well. All staff are trained in child protection. Records show that bullying and racist behaviour are minimal and students report how keenly aware they are of cyber and other forms of bullying. Procedures for promoting equality of opportunity and tackling any discrimination are excellent. The school's key role in the local Three Faiths Forum illustrates its commitment to educating students to value the multi-faith communities where they live and study. It has a clear

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appreciation of its context and has worked sensitively to forge links with a school with a high proportion of Muslim students. Reflecting its International School status, strong links with a school in Tanzania as well as others abroad, and with the family of Catholic schools to which it belongs, are an indication of the drive to promote community cohesion. Leaders have not yet conducted an audit on this aspect of its provision to ensure that objectives are being met. Governors have a good knowledge of the many strengths of the school and development points. They are making steady progress in developing links with departments and checking that all policies are scrutinised with sufficient frequency.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students at La Sainte Union are very well prepared for their sixth form education in the La Swap consortium, formed between four schools that work closely together to maximise opportunities for students. Common timetables, assessment frameworks and procedures for care, guidance and support enable students, both male and female, to select courses with confidence in one or more of the schools. Most take courses in two centres.

With over 40 courses available, covering both academic and vocational needs, as well as financial management and philosophy for life sessions, the curriculum provision is outstanding. A comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities includes popular and successful clubs and visits, for example the European Youth Parliament. Careers advice and guidance on entry to higher education are most helpful.

Attainment is above average showing students make good progress from their starting points, particularly in A-level sociology and physical education. A-level English, sociology, history and religious education are very popular courses at La Sainte Union, reflecting students' GCSE successes in the these subjects. Students with additional learning needs make similar progress to their peers as a result of good quality intervention to meet those

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needs. High retention rates in both Years 12 and 13, and good and improving attendance, show that school systems and support are very effective. Good independent study skill development is facilitated by a well-resourced centre and appropriate expectations of tutors. Students take their responsibilities in the sixth form and main school seriously, as members of their own council and, for example, helping as peer mentors and supporting lunchtime clubs.

Teaching is good but inconsistent across subjects. Teachers invariably have good subject knowledge which they use well to provide information required by examination board specifications and to answer students' questions clearly and accurately. Students benefit from cooperative group work and helpful assessment. Occasionally, lessons are too teacher directed and this limits opportunities for students to be engaged in learning because they spend too long listening to the teacher.

The sixth form is well led and managed. The priority is to raise attainment through more consistently good teaching. The well-developed and rigorous tracking system is helping to assess underachievement and provide appropriate support. The large number of students involved in the consortium, over 1,300, enables efficient group sizes and cost effective provision. Senior leaders of all the schools work closely together for the benefit of students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire about their children's education were very positive about all aspects of school life. They value greatly the safe environment, the effective manner with which behaviour is managed and their children's experiences overall. A very small minority considered that the school did not help their children to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspection evidence supported parents' overwhelmingly positive views and their concerns about students' adoption of healthy lifestyles. Although students are engaged in physical exercise, the quality of the food some eat is not always appropriate.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 281 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1222 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	149	53	125	44	5	2	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	168	60	109	39	2	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	121	43	134	48	14	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	142	51	128	46	4	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	134	48	145	52	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	109	39	151	54	16	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	84	30	156	56	30	11	3	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	115	41	130	46	9	3	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	100	36	167	59	3	1	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	150	53	113	40	10	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	78	28	161	57	16	6	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	128	46	144	51	2	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	164	58	114	41	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



8 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School, London NW5 1RP

Thank you for the very warm welcome we received when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you, hearing and reading your views.

La Sainte Union is a good school where you attain high standards in your GCSE examinations and make good progress in your studies. This continues into the sixth form where your results are above average. Results are improving year on year. The school has many strengths. Some of the key ones are listed here:

- You do particularly well in English and achieve excellent GCSE results.
- You are very sensible, get on very well together and with the staff.
- You behave well, exceptionally so around the school during breaks and in the lunch period.
- Your attendance is excellent and you feel extremely safe.
- You enjoy school, try hard and want to succeed. You take responsibilities seriously both within the school community and in the wider world.
- A large number of you are involved in sports activities and you all understand how to live healthily (though not all of you eat as healthily as you could).
- The staff care for you extremely well and you appreciate this.
- You have a good range of courses to study in Years 7 to 11, and the choice is excellent in the sixth form.
- Most of your lessons are well taught and you find them interesting.
- The headteacher and senior staff are highly effective leaders. They know what to do to help make the school even better and are making important changes.

We have asked the school to ensure that teaching is consistently good or outstanding, so that you work hard and do as well as you can in every lesson, especially science and mathematics. Teachers should always use assessment information to plan work to meet your different needs and ensure that more time is given over to you working independently, finding out and learning for yourselves.

You can help by working hard in all lessons and always behaving well.

Yours sincerely

Peter McGregor

Lead inspector

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