

Blackfen School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101465
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	376569
Inspection dates	23-24 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Adrian Lyons HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1331
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	281
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	William Stone
Headteacher	Matthew Brown
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 April 2009
School address	Blackfen Road Sidcup DA15 9NU
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 39 lessons and 39 teachers. Other teachers were seen for brief parts of lessons. Meetings were held with groups of students, the Chair and members of the Governing Body, groups of staff and leaders. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school and departmental development documents as well as students' work and assessment data. They also scrutinised 115 parental questionnaires, 152 students' questionnaires and 90 questionnaires returned by staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Do leaders effectively monitor and accurately evaluate the school's performance and use this evaluation to secure improvement in all aspects of the school's work, and are recent improvements sustainable?
- Why has the performance of core subjects varied over the last year?
- How well is the school monitoring the progress of more able students, and what is the impact?
- How effective is assessment at encouraging student progress?
- How effective is the school's work in promoting attendance?

Information about the school

Blackfen is a larger than average secondary school in a selective area. It has a mixed sixth form. The majority of students are White British. A small number of students from a wide range of ethnicities make up the below-average proportion of minority ethnic students in the school. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. A below-average proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has recently established a centre for visually impaired students. The school has specialisms in mathematics and computing.

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

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It combines a caring ethos with academic success. Typical of comments received from parents was, 'Blackfen School has proven to be a very caring, supportive school and my child has received good results'. There is a strong record of improvement in recent years. The headteacher and senior leaders are held in high regard by students, staff, parents, carers and governors. The results of improvements can be seen in several areas and most obviously in the accelerated improvement in GCSE results in summer 2011. These improvements, including raising attainment in the main school and the sixth form, improving behaviour and more systematic leadership at all levels, give powerful evidence of the school's good capacity for further improvement.

There is now a sharper focus on students' progress and many lessons are more engaging with varied learning activities. The large majority of teaching is good or better. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and classroom relationships are productive. Throughout the school, students are well motivated and engaged. As a result, the large majority of students make good progress. There remains a small minority of lessons that are no better than satisfactory. In these lessons activities are not sufficiently varied and paced so that students are fully engaged, and the needs of different ability groups are not met well enough. Less successful lessons are more common in Key Stage 3 than in other years although even here most lessons are good. Teaching and progress are more positive in Key Stage 4. Across the school there remains some inconsistency in the quality of teaching and consequently in students' progress across subjects. Management structures have been changed and middle leadership is becoming increasingly effective at reducing remaining inconsistency and driving improvement.

The school has introduced a programme to identify and rapidly support and improve teachers where aspects of practice are less than good. This is having positive results. In the summer 2011 examinations, attainment at the end of Year 11 was above average and represented a considerable improvement on recent years. Students' progress also improved and progress from entry to the end of Key Stage 4 is good. The proportion of students making better than expected progress is above average overall and especially so in mathematics. In the sixth form, there has been a clear upward trend in attainment over recent years and students now make very good progress. The school's own evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement is accurate. Part of the reason is that the school has strong systems for identifying and tackling individual underachievement. As one parent reported, 'Particularly pleased

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with the way the school has dealt with my daughter's recent decline in effort. Steps were taken to get back to previous levels'.

Some areas of the school's work are outstanding, specifically safeguarding and governance. The school's arrangements for ensuring students' safeguarding are exemplary. This is partly due to the expertise and engagement in this area of teaching and non-teaching managers and members of the governing body.

Behaviour is good. Inspectors observed students in lessons, in the corridors and around the school during break and lunchtimes. They found the school to be calm and well-ordered. The vast majority of lessons were well-focused and students were engaged in their work. Students' personal development is generally strong, but the extent to which students develop healthy lifestyles is a relative weakness identified by inspectors, parents and carers and students.

The school's specialist mathematics and computing status has made a positive impact on raising standards especially through mathematics. The school recognises that there is more work to do in developing students' skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology across the majority of subjects.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching across year groups and subjects, by ensuring that:
 - lessons are consistently planned and adapted to meet students' individual needs, based on assessment of their abilities and requirements
 - teachers use well-focused questioning to check all students' understanding and to extend and deepen their thinking
 - as a result of assessing students, teachers re-shape tasks in lessons rather than sticking to lesson plans
 - marking is used more consistently to monitor students' written work and to give them precise strategies for improving it.
- Increase the promotion and application of literacy, numeracy and information technology across the curriculum.
- Devise better strategies to improve students' participation in active lifestyles and their response to health-promotion strategies.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students taking GCSE examinations in 2011 began Year 7 with attainment that was a little below the national average. Since then attainment on entry has risen so it is now a little above average. For several years, GCSE results were around the national average. The school recognised the need for improvement particularly as, in 2010,

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students' progress from their starting point was not good enough. Results in 2011 improved sharply so that an above average proportion of students gained 5 GCSE higher level passes including in English and mathematics. School data show further improvement in the current Year 11. Similarly, students' progress improved in 2011 and the school's data show students' achievement accelerating further. This was confirmed through inspectors' direct observations. Good progress was observed in the large majority of lessons. The school has become very skilled at quickly identifying students performing below their targets and addressing underperformance through additional support. The school recognises that whilst this has been successful, fewer interventions would be necessary if progress in lessons was more consistent. Students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities make good progress as a result of clear and robust assessment and monitoring processes. In lessons, specifically targeted support for individuals, such as the use of teaching assistants, is often very effective. However, in weaker lessons the progress of students can be hampered by teachers not checking sufficiently that students understand information and concepts.

The vast majority of students responding to the questionnaire feel safe. Students make good contributions to the school, local and national community, for example through working with the local police and local bus drivers to improve safety. Students are well prepared for adult life and the world of work especially through the 'Power Up!' curriculum. This curriculum and the developing international partnerships are part of students' strong moral, social and cultural development. Attendance has recently improved and is above average.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

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How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are confident and have strong subject knowledge. Classroom relationships are very productive. In the best lessons teachers use questioning to make students think deeply, and clearly target lesson objectives at examination criteria. There are often well-paced sets of activities that build learning step by step. Throughout the school, students are very motivated and engaged. In the small minority of less successful lessons, there is a lack of student engagement and a slow pace. In those lessons particularly, but also even in some better lessons, the use of assessment to adapt teaching to meet the needs of different learners is less well developed. The quality of marking in books is inconsistent. Some excellent examples were seen in the subjects where achievement is the highest.

Provision for students with statements of special educational needs and/or disabilities is very effective with specialist teaching for students with visual impairment and very good use of resources. The support in lessons for students with less severe special educational needs is less strong. A lot of good work has been done to improve the curriculum and match it to the needs and interests of different students. Interesting use is made of BTEC qualifications to support the achievement of some girls. The school has recently introduced enrichment subjects such as economics in Key Stage 4. On the other hand, the range and uptake of lunch-time and after-school activities is relatively small.

The pastoral system is very well organised. Girls are in small 'communities' with tutor groups including students from Years 7 to 11. This enables teachers to know individual students very well. Students speak very positively about relationships with staff and between different age groups. As a result, some aspects of care, guidance and support are excellent. Case studies of students whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable show that the school's good pastoral interventions and multi-agency responses have ensured that these students have stayed on track and made good progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have a clear vision for school improvement. Robust systems ensure that leaders at all levels analyse the progress of individuals and groups of students. There is effective communication with parents and carers including regular updates on progress. The school is seeking ways to inform and engage parents better in supporting their child’s learning from an early stage, for example in Key Stage 3 reading and literacy. The education and welfare of students benefit from good partnership arrangements, for example in mutually beneficial arrangements with local schools to support sports leaders and to take sports qualifications. Very good work has been undertaken to promote community cohesion. Particularly strong global links include partnership with a school in India which leads to moral and ethical discussions around issues such as fair trade, child labour and children’s rights.

The school promotes equality of opportunity well. It is successful in raising students’ aspirations. There is a strong focus on ensuring good progress from each individual so that all students achieve their potential. As a result there are no significant differences in the performance of different groups. Child protection has a high profile and staff receive very good quality training and support. Despite building work on the site, precautions are stringent. The governors’ review of safeguarding conducted in September 2011 is extremely thorough.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
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	2

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Sixth form

The key leaders of the sixth form push forward change and improvement well. They have an accurate and considered view of the success of the sixth form and a clear vision for future improvement, for instance the need for further curriculum change to meet the needs of learners. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems enable leaders to intervene and improve provision readily and the systems and routines that exist are responsive to students' needs. Commercial systems to track student progress are used well and thorough analysis of subject performance takes place. Retention rates in different subjects are analysed and, as a result, positive intervention takes place.

Student aspirations are high and students are fully aware of the need to act responsibly. The arrangements to keep student safe are secure and attendance is monitored regularly. Sixth formers are seen as positive role models by younger students.

The academic progress of students in the sixth form is good resulting in above average attainment. Some of the most successful subjects are very popular resulting in large classes. Teaching observed in the sixth form was good. The best of the lessons were personalised, focused on skills and knowledge, and allowed students to develop confidence. Teaching and assessment methods were strong, allowing rigorous and probing questioning and the reshaping of tasks. This type of lesson led to a high degree of motivation from students with clear examples of students taking responsibility for their learning. In the minority of lessons where teaching and learning were only satisfactory the same weaknesses as reported in the main school were present.

Students keenly involve themselves in charity and public events. In lessons they are keen to engage and take full use of the opportunities on offer. The curriculum in the sixth form is good. There is a wide range of courses that cover the full ability breadth, from traditional courses to more applied courses as well as level 2 provision. The curriculum offer continues to evolve with new courses being added as the need arises, for instance a recent addition of BTEC sport. Transition arrangements from Year 11 into the sixth form are strong with extensive opportunities for students to find out about what is on offer. The school also provides impartial advice about other providers, for example the timing of open days. Boys who join the sixth form are very happy with opportunities for integration.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
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

A small minority of parents or carers responded to the questionnaire. Of those that did, the large majority were highly supportive of the school and what it offers. A typical comment was, 'This is my third child who progressed from Year 7 to Sixth form. I am happy with how they progressed and achieved whilst at Blackfen. The support offered by the school has been strong'. A very small minority of parents and carers raised concerns regarding a range of issues. Inspectors explored each of these, but generally agreed with the large majority of parents and carers who completed the questionnaires and who were highly supportive of the school. Two areas, while still representing a very small minority of parents, concerned 14% and 11% of parents respectively. These were 'the school helps my child to develop a healthy lifestyle' and 'the school helps me to support my child's learning'. In both these areas, inspectors found that the school could do better and these areas have been addressed in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Blackfen School for Girls 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 115 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,331 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	36	63	55	8	7	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	43	37	70	61	0	0	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	45	39	57	50	6	5	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	31	64	56	6	5	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	27	23	73	63	6	5	2	2
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	32	28	63	55	11	10	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	12	74	64	15	13	1	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)	25	22	68	59	2	2	3	3
The school meets my child’s particular needs	30	26	72	63	5	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	23	71	62	10	9	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	16	74	64	5	4	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	33	29	71	62	6	5	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	41	36	64	56	3	3	3	3

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



25 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Blackfen School for Girls, Sidcup, DA15 9NU

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. Thank you for taking part in the inspection by talking to us about your work, your life in school and all you do. Some of you completed questionnaires which were very helpful to us in discovering your views. We believe your school is a good one and agree with the student who told an inspector, 'I like the vibe of school. Teachers are happy to see you'.

The school has a strong recent record of improvement. The large majority of you are making good progress. Teaching is good. You clearly enjoy being at school. You are very well cared for, supported and guided. You told us that you really appreciate the valuable guidance and individual support you receive, especially when making choices for Years 10 and 12. The relationships between students and with your teachers are very positive, as is your behaviour. The headteacher and other leaders have worked hard to improve the school and its examination results, which in 2011 were above average and showed students making better progress than in similar schools.

While we judged your school to be good, the leaders of the school are keen for it to be even better. Although the large majority of lessons are good and sometimes outstanding we know that there are some that are not as good. We have asked the school to continue the improvement in teaching and in particular to always check what you know and understand during lessons so that teachers can ensure that all students make consistently good progress with less need for interventions. We have also asked the school to help you develop your skills in literacy, numeracy and information technology across all your subjects. Finally, we discovered that the school has been less successful than many at convincing you to lead healthier lifestyles. Fewer of you smoking and more participation in physical activity are a couple of ways for you to show improvement in this area.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

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