

The Palmer Catholic Academy

Aldborough Road South, Ilford, London, IG3 8EU

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leaders and managers are resolute in driving improvement forward. The headteacher tells students regularly how important it is for them to prepare well for their future.
- Teaching is typically good and occasionally outstanding.
- Most students make at least good progress and some make outstanding progress and get very high GCSE results.
- Students make outstanding progress in mathematics. They enjoy challenging work in mathematics lessons. Mathematics is a flagship department. It sets high standards for teaching and as a result, students' learning flourishes.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the academy. Students say it has improved over time.
- Students feel safe and understand the dangers of cyber bullying. They know how to use the internet safely.
- Student's spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is well developed. Students respect the diversity of the academy.
- The governing body has a good understanding of the academy's strengths and it supports leaders in dealing with weaker teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching in some subjects is of mixed quality and does not enable every student to excel.
- Some students do not push themselves hard enough during lessons, despite good teaching.
- The sixth form is good and is not yet outstanding because the progress made by students on the AS-level courses should be stronger.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 45 lessons including five which were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also made several shorter visits to lessons to monitor students' behaviour.
- Meetings were held with a foundation governor and the Chair of the Governing Body, senior and middle leaders, a representative from the local authority and students.
- The inspection team scrutinised the academy's information about students' progress, records about behaviour and attendance and reviewed evaluation and development planning.
- The 54 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were reviewed by inspectors.
- Views expressed in 63 staff questionnaires were analysed.

Inspection team

Joanna Beckford-Hall, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Vivian Venn	Additional inspector
Peter Stumpf	Additional inspector
Noureddin Khassal	Additional inspector
Jalil Shaikh	Additional inspector
Clare Gillies	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Palmer Catholic Academy converted to become an academy on 1 September 2012. When its predecessor school, The Canon Palmer Catholic School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- The academy is a larger than the average-sized secondary school and 309 students attend the sixth form.
- The proportion of disabled students and students who have special educational needs is below that found nationally. The proportions of students supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are all below those found nationally.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for additional government funding, known as pupil premium, is in line with that found nationally.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well above that found nationally.
- Over 80% of students are from minority ethnic groups.
- The academy exceeds the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan lesson activities that are more closely matched to students' ability to help them make good or better progress in every subject
 - raise their expectations of what students can achieve, especially the more able students
 - check students' understanding regularly to challenge their thinking skills and deepen their subject knowledge
 - provide detailed written feedback to students so they understand what they need to improve.
- Improve middle leaders' ability to sift information about the progress of different student groups so they can challenge teachers about any gaps in students' learning, especially in the sixth form.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- From Years 7 to 11, students make excellent progress in English and mathematics. The proportion of students who make outstanding progress in mathematics has risen for the last three years and is very impressive. Many students told inspectors that they really enjoy mathematics lessons because they become engrossed by challenging problem-solving activities.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress. For a few students progress in mathematics is outstanding.
- Black Caribbean, Black African and Pakistani students are attaining higher standards than in previous years. Gaps in achievement are closing quickly.
- The pupil premium, additional government funding, is used appropriately to provide good in-lesson support for students eligible for free school meals and students who are in care. Consequently, these students often do better than similar students nationally. Their progress is outstanding in mathematics and is improving strongly and securely in English.
- Students' reading, writing and speaking skills are good in most subjects. Students appreciate the chance to use mathematics in other subjects and do so confidently.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. More students are getting top grades at A level so that they can go to university.
- Senior leaders know that students make better progress in the main school than in the sixth form. This is because teaching varies across AS-level courses. In some sixth form lessons teachers do not expect enough and students do not get the support they need to develop critical thinking skills.
- The very large majority of parents who responded to questions on Parent View are pleased with the progress of their children at the academy.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching at the academy is typically good. Some is outstanding. In most lessons the teachers' relationships with students are good, leading to purposeful debate and questioning which develops students' good subject knowledge.
- In the good and better lessons teachers are clear about what they expect of students, they use quick-fire questioning to test students' understanding and encourage students to present opposing views.
- Most teachers encourage students to achieve their very best by quickly checking students' understanding, and then challenging them to think more deeply. These positives do not feature in lessons that require improvement.
- In outstanding lessons in history, psychology and mathematics students were absorbed in learning and rose to the challenges they were given.
- 'Words of the week' in each department help teachers and students use specialist subject vocabulary and most students are securing good basic literacy skills. Students have excellent mathematical knowledge; this is a major strength of the academy's work.
- A small amount of teaching requires improvement. In these lessons teachers talk for too long and do not help more-able students to move on to harder work quickly enough. Teachers do not readily adapt their lessons to give less able students enough time to improve their work. Consequently these students do not make the progress should.
- In a few classes seen by inspectors in Years 7, 11 and 12 teachers did not always give brighter students a selection of harder tasks to get their teeth into while others took their time to finish.
- Written feedback to students about their work and how to improve it is excellent in mathematics, history and in some science teaching, but is not of a high enough quality throughout the academy. Some students do not use the feedback from teachers as a

springboard to discuss their work in more detail and review their targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Students know why good behaviour helps them to learn well in lessons. Misbehaviour is rare and occurs usually because teaching is not inspiring so students lose interest in the lesson.
- Students have a good understanding of the dangers of social networking sites and how to stay safe on the internet. Assemblies, tutorials and briefings for parents provide good quality advice about cyber bullying, how to prevent it and how to report it.
- Students feel safe. Bullying is rare at the academy because students respect and celebrate the diversity of the school; everyone feels included.
- The care students receive from the chaplaincy, heads of year, learning mentors and form tutors is good. This helps students to deal with personal problems and difficulties in lessons so that they do not fall behind. A student commented that 'There is a general good feeling around the school; if something's not right, the school will try to make it work for you.' This typifies students' views that staff listen to their suggestions and quickly deal with concerns they have.
- Students' attendance is well above average and punctuality is mostly good. Leaders and staff work well in teams to help any student who may be at risk of falling below the target for attendance.
- The number of exclusions is low. Leaders monitor reasons for exclusions and discuss how to help students who are at risk of underperforming. Occasionally the progress of students in the inclusion room is not good enough. This is because students are not kept on track with their work and are not always encouraged to strive to do well.
- The overwhelming majority of responses to Parent View show that parents consider behaviour is good at the academy.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher displays quiet and firm leadership of this good academy. He works closely with his colleagues to help them develop their own capacity to speed up improvements. Teachers' targets are linked tightly to students' achievement. Only staff who meet or exceed their targets are considered for promotion.
 - The combination of good challenge and support from the governing body, the headteacher's ambitious vision for improvement and robust systems to manage and set targets for teachers, means staff morale is high. The overwhelming majority of staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed their strong support for how well the academy is led and managed.
 - A few support staff are less pleased with how their training needs are being met. Training for these staff is not planned as well as the good development opportunities offered to teachers.
 - Senior and middle leaders regularly undertake lesson observations and look carefully at students' work to judge teaching. The percentage of teaching judged outstanding by leaders is over generous. Where practice is weaker too much emphasis is placed on watching what the teacher does rather than judging the impact of their work on the progress of different groups of students.
 - Some middle leaders do not use data well enough to find out about the progress of different groups, particularly for sixth form students.
 - Training is planned well and helping teachers to improve their work. Leaders and managers have identified development issues and have put into place well-focused plans to bring all teaching up to the level of the best.
 - Students in Key Stages 4 and 5 have a good choice of subjects to study. This supports good achievement. The subjects on offer meet students' interests. A small minority of students choose
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to study work-related courses such as health and social care.

- Senior leaders are too positive about some areas of the academy's work. The academy development plan is rightly focused on making more teaching outstanding and eradicating the small amount of teaching that is less than good.
- Senior leaders are concerned about students' progress on some AS-level courses. Leadership of the sixth form has not been strong enough in holding teachers to account for their planning and speeding up students' progress. The academy's response to this is gathering pace. Increased teaching hours, training to help teachers improve learning, and a review of how to help students develop research and thinking skills are starting to support better progress for some students.
- The spiritual life of the academy is the cornerstone for the beliefs and values that bring together students and staff of different cultures, beliefs and ethnicities. The academy successfully promotes equal opportunities and the diversity of the school population helps everyone feel included.
- Procedures for securing the safety of students on site at the academy and in meeting statutory safeguarding requirements are in place.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body monitors closely the behaviour and safety of students and considers views of parents through surveys and meetings with parents. Governors observe lessons, talk to students and check that students' well-being and progress are being promoted. Governors hold senior leaders to account for students' achievement by asking tough questions of leaders.
 - Governors make sure that the pupil premium funding is used with consideration of students' needs. This is a key reason why the gap is closing for these students. Governors are asking forthright questions about the help students are given to start and quickly benefit from the sixth form. The Chair of the Governing Body successfully guides fellow governors to ask the right kinds of questions about the teaching at the academy and analyse the relationship between the teaching and students' achievement in different key stages and subjects, and about the performance of staff.

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	137088
Local authority	Redbridge
Inspection number	395648

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,257
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	309
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fr M O'Connor
Headteacher	Mr F Maguire
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2007
Telephone number	020 85903808
Fax number	020 85975119
Email address	office@thepalmercatholicacademy.org

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