

La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' School

Atkins Road, Lambeth, London, SW12 0AB

Inspection dates 25–26 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The work of this outstanding school is underpinned by an atmosphere of high expectations and care for the individual. The new headteacher has built well upon the high achievement evident when the school was previously inspected to raise students' GCSE and A-level attainment further.
- All groups of students make the same fast progress irrespective of their starting points or background.
- From their average skills in reading, writing and mathematics when they join the school, students make rapid progress and achieve outstandingly well. The GCSE results are high when compared with national averages.
- Achievement is exceptionally strong in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, art and religious education. In science, history and geography, students' progress is catching up quickly.
- Teaching is outstanding because teachers know students extremely well and personalise learning to individuals' needs and abilities. Marking is very good but occasionally teachers do not provide opportunities to follow up guidance offered.
- There is a relentless pursuit of excellence by the headteacher, senior leaders and governors. Leadership is outstanding at all levels and has established a climate where staff readily share expertise and monitor the impact of their work.
- Students, staff, and parents and carers are rightly proud of the school and students' achievements. Behaviour is outstanding and students work very conscientiously in lessons. Students from all backgrounds get along extremely harmoniously.
- The range of courses gives students choice and suits their needs very well.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress from starting points which are sometimes below average for the courses they study. Progress is outstanding for some, but the overall progress is not as strong as in the main school because teachers have not recently shared the most-effective teaching methods for this age group.
- The school uses the additional government pupil premium funding very effectively to support the wide range of students who need extra help, so that they make the same outstanding progress as others.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 45 lessons, of which eight were observed jointly with the headteacher and senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with school leaders, representatives of the governing body, staff and groups of students.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and attended an assembly. They scrutinised students' work, progress data, evaluation and development documents, information about how the school cares for and protects students and staff, and records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of 76 responses to the online Parent View survey submitted prior to and during the inspection, together with questionnaires completed by 50 staff.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Cliff Mainey

Additional Inspector

Samuel Ofori-Keyereh

Additional Inspector

Avtar Sherri

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' School is an average-sized secondary school which holds specialist status in mathematics and science.
- At over nine tenths, the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is high. The large majority are of Black African, Black Caribbean or White European backgrounds, with other heritages represented in smaller numbers.
- Over a half of the students have a first language other than English. A few students are at an early stage of speaking English.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families) has doubled over the last two years, and at around two in five, is above the national average. There are currently no students of service families in the school.
- One in eight students is disabled or has special educational needs supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, which is high. The proportion supported through school action, at over one in ten, is in line with the national average.
- The majority of students come from outside Lambeth and have considerable journeys to travel to school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school works in collaboration with other schools locally, known as the South London 6 (SL6), to broaden the range of courses for sixth-form study. A few male students join the school sixth form each year.
- Each year, the school uses alternative providers, including a local pupil referral unit, for a very few students who require specialist provision and support.
- The leadership of the school has changed since the previous inspection, including that of the headteacher, who took up his post just over a year ago.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in the sixth form in keeping with that in the main school, by
 - identifying and disseminating the most-effective teaching approaches for students at this level
 - increasing the emphasis on developing students' study skills so that they achieve more from their independent learning away from lessons.
- Increase the impact of teachers' marking by making sure that students have more opportunities to respond to the written advice they are given.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students thrive and respond to school's high expectations, so that students from diverse backgrounds achieve extremely well. Their progress is monitored regularly and personalised support is put in place if a student is not making rapid progress. All teachers promote the development of literacy and numeracy skills well, and weaker readers have very effective one-to-one support. Consequently, students use these skills confidently, which boosts achievement in other subjects.
- Students' GCSE attainment is high; their progress from their starting points in Year 7 has been in the top 5% of schools nationally when measured across a range of subjects. For the last two years, progress in mathematics and modern languages has been in the top 2%, and is above average in other subjects. The science and mathematics specialism has been used well to boost participation in these subjects, which traditionally have been less popular with girls at the school. Progress rates in science have improved considerably over the last two years, and are well above average. The school's tracking information shows that students in the school are on course to maintain and build upon this impressive record of achievement.
- All groups of students, regardless of their ability, including those who speak English as an additional language, make fast progress. Students whose attainment was lower than others on entry make particularly rapid progress. Similarly, students with special educational needs make fast progress because of the way each student is treated as an individual and receives personalised support. This results in the attainment of these groups being well above their peers nationally in terms of the average points they achieve in their best eight GCSE subjects.
- Early entry is used judiciously for more-able students to take GCSE English and mathematics, and care is taken to make sure that these students achieve as well as if they had taken the examinations later. Students who have already achieved the highest possible grades then have the opportunity to follow additional courses or pre-A-level study programmes.
- The school has highly effective links with those providers of alternative education programmes for a few students with specific needs. Their progress is monitored in line with all students in the school and provision amended where necessary, so that they make the same strong progress as other students.
- The school uses its pupil premium funding very effectively in a variety of ways, including additional individual tuition and specific financial support, for those pupils who are eligible. As a result, the progress of this group is a little faster than that of other students, enabling them to narrow the gap in their attainment on entry to the school. There is no difference in the attainment in English and mathematics between this group and other students.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and has improved steadily over the last two years. Although average when taken across all students, many students begin their AS-level programme with GCSE attainment below that of other students following these courses. The sixth form includes an above-average proportion of students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and in some cases this slows their overall progress. Consequently, a few students follow a three-year programme to A level. Standards are close to the national average and rising. Students' progress, including that of male students and those taking courses in other schools, is monitored closely as in the main school, and effective action taken so that there is no slippage in achievement against a student's targets. For some students whose attainment was below average when they began secondary education in Year 7, progress is well above average. The school's record in retaining students through the sixth form and enabling them to progress successfully to further education and universities of their choice is good.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching at the school is outstanding because, lesson by lesson across all subjects, it is rarely

less than good and frequently it is outstanding.

- Teachers know their students and their abilities very well because their progress is tracked and monitored regularly. They use this information to plan work which challenges students and is matched closely to their earlier achievements, so that all groups of students make rapid progress. Students who speak English as an additional language make particularly strong progress in English and their other subjects. This is because of the closely matched individual support they are given beyond lessons and teachers' understanding of how to build steadily on their existing knowledge to take learning forward quickly.
- Teachers' passion for their subject is infectious and has a positive effect on motivating students and ensuring that they remain engaged throughout the lesson. For example, in a history lesson, the teacher's intervention requiring students to imagine Philip of Spain entering the throne room of Elizabeth I, helped them to understand how the relationship between the two monarchs affected Tudor foreign policy. Teachers root learning in situations which students relate to and understand.
- Teachers promote the development of literacy and numeracy skills very well in other subjects, regularly extending vocabulary by exploring the meanings of words, and in the weekly spelling tests in form time. The reading skills of weaker readers are supported effectively through the use of catch-up funding used in Years 7 and 8 to provide one-to-one support by learning mentors. They give students very good opportunities to develop confidence and speaking skills by requiring them to make presentations about their ideas. In an English lesson, students' vocabulary was extended and they began to understand how language changes over time in role plays of how Shakespearian characters might insult one another.
- Teachers make good use of questioning to test students' understanding and give useful feedback. Marking is frequent but the excellent policy adopted by some which makes sure that students respond to the advice given has not been adopted more widely across the school.
- Teachers effectively use many of the approaches in the sixth form which are so successful in the main school. However, on occasion, time is not used to the best effect because students are carrying out work which could have been completed without help from the teachers. Opportunities are sometimes missed for students to discuss their ideas and deepen their understanding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students are highly engaged in their learning, and their attitudes and behaviour in lessons are exemplary. They make an exceptional contribution to their own learning. Because of their success against challenging targets, students constantly set their aims at higher levels.
- Students comment on improved behaviour since the introduction of the new policy focused on rewards rather than sanctions, and this improvement is reflected in a dramatic drop in fixed-term exclusions. In turn, this has released mentor time to support students' learning rather than on dealing with incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Parents and carers responding to the Parent View questionnaire are equally positive about behaviour in the school.
- Students use school facilities in a mature and responsible manner, for example lunching together in social groups and enjoying time together without the need for high levels of adult supervision. Students feel safe because bullying or harassment are extremely rare. They say that racist behaviour and discrimination are almost non-existent, and they have a very good understanding of how to deal with issues of safety, including e-safety. There are clear procedures which students understand to report concerns about problems inside and outside school.
- Students' enjoyment of school is reflected in high attendance. When asked how good they believed the school to be on a scale of one to ten, a group of students responded with scores between nine point nine and ten. Time in school before the start of the school day is used well for breakfast and use of the new library, which offers good access to computer facilities and adult support for learning.

- The school's house system has helped to build a strong community cohesion and a healthy competition that inspires aspiration and excellence. The school's celebration of diversity is exemplary, for example in the regular celebration of the independence days of the nations represented within the school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and senior leaders lead by example, creating a positive climate where staff and students work closely together with shared aims and expectations. The new headteacher, leadership team and governing body have reviewed and amended policy, and agreed with staff areas for improvement. The effectiveness of this approach is seen in a further raising of already high achievement. For example, a culture has developed where teachers go into one another's lessons to observe teaching. This approach has been embraced by teachers, who say that this has been a key factor in sharing their ideas and improving their teaching.
- Formal systems for monitoring teaching quality are embedded and challenging. The feedback from observations is clear and acted upon. For example, teachers are supported through mentoring and coaching programmes to develop their practice, and information gained from performance management informs the ongoing training programme for all teachers.
- The local authority gives light-touch support to this school because of its recognised strengths. Recently, this has included support for middle leaders to review departmental practice, and scrutiny of results and achievement data with senior leaders and governors.
- The school's focus goes well beyond academic achievement. Students' general knowledge is developed through weekly tests. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is planned for and promoted exceptionally well, for example through weekly general knowledge tests, leadership roles, wide participation in extra-curricular activities including art, music and sport, and regular retreats fostering students' spiritual development.
- The curriculum includes a number of pathways at Key Stage 4, and the careful use of setting and streaming in different subjects ensures closely matched challenge for all groups in lessons. More students are now following the English Baccalaureate range of subjects than has been the case in the past, which ensures that they have a strong academic basis for further study. As the number of schools in the SL6 collaboration increases, sixth-form students have an exceptionally broad range of courses from which to choose so that their interests and needs are met. The school takes reasonable steps to ensure the behaviour and safety of students when attending off-site provision.
- The vast majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school, as shown by the positive response to the online survey indicating that almost all would recommend it to others.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is of the same high quality as other aspects of school leadership. Governors know how achievement compares to that of other schools, for example, through the new national 'dashboard'. They receive comprehensive, detailed, accurate information from school leaders and are challenging in ensuring that any emerging weaknesses are addressed quickly. They understand the quality of teaching and ensure that teachers only move up the pay scale if targets are met. They have set a strategic overview about the spending of pupil premium funding and, as part of their monitoring of overall performance, assess its impact on those eligible. Spending has supported a range of provision, including small class sizes, student mentoring and financial assistance to make sure that those eligible are fully included in visits and school activities. Systems to safeguard students fully meet statutory requirements.

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	100637
Local authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	413361

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	940
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phyllis Dunipace
Headteacher	John Conway
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 June 2007
Telephone number	020 8673 5644
Fax number	020 8675 8577
Email address	schsec@laretraite.lambeth.sch.uk

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