

# Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School

147 Central Hill, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 1RS

**Inspection dates** 14–15 November 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- This is a good and rapidly improving school.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have a clear vision and steadfast commitment to making sure that students have high aspirations and achieve their goals.
- The school has a strong tradition as an inclusive, caring community where students feel safe.
- Academic achievement has improved well since the previous inspection and GCSE results have been above average for the last three years. Consequently, students are prepared well for the next stage of their lives.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally well promoted, reflected in students' strong contribution to the wider community.
- Most students behave with consideration and respect. They are keen to achieve academically and respond well to the additional support and help teachers give them beyond lessons.
- The sixth form is good. Students value the broad and flexible curriculum which meets their needs and interests very well. They achieve well and gain the qualifications required for further study or the world of work.
- Teaching is good and improving. Teachers are keen to make it better, and training is planned well to address any weak practice.
- Leaders and governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. The improvements achieved since the previous inspection show the effectiveness of the actions they take and the capacity to build further on this success.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- A small amount of teaching requires improvement as it does not involve students enough in doing things for themselves or give the most-able students enough challenge.
- Often because students are discussing their work together, they do not respond quickly enough when their teachers ask for silence to review learning or set a new task.
- The school has not fully implemented its plans to share the most effective approaches to teaching more widely.
- Students' progress is not monitored as effectively in the sixth form as in the main school to make sure that students are given timely support to address any difficulties they may have.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 lessons, some of which were joint observations with members of the senior leadership group.
- Meetings were held with four student groups, including a sixth form group, school leaders and staff, as well as with representatives of the governing body and from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a range of documents, including those that show how the school checks on how well it is doing, plans for future development and students’ progress data. They scrutinised students’ work, information about how the school cares for and protects students, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and minutes of recent governing body meetings.
- The inspection team took account of 11 responses to the online Parent View survey, and the school’s own parental surveys as well as the views of parents and carers who wrote to the inspection team.
- The views of staff were gained through discussions and 60 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jacqueline Jones

Additional Inspector

Kanwaljit Singh

Additional Inspector

Susan Willman

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School is a Roman Catholic school within the Diocese of Southwark. It is similar in size to other secondary schools nationally.
- About nine tenths of students are from minority ethnic groups, with the predominant groups being from Black African, Black Caribbean and a variety of Asian backgrounds. Over a quarter of students speak English as an additional language which is a higher proportion than in most schools.
- 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, those who are looked after by the local authority and children of service families) is above average.
- Around one in eight students in Years 7 and 8 benefits from the nationally funded catch-up programme.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below that found in most schools, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school does not use any alternative off-site provision.
- The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing and uses early GCSE entry in mathematics and religious education.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good and more is outstanding to help students to achieve even more in lessons, by:
  - setting work which challenges the most-able students from the start of the lesson
  - making sure that all students listen carefully when activities are changed during the lesson
  - giving students more opportunities to be actively involved in tasks so that they develop the resilience to take more responsibility for their own learning by doing things for themselves
  - using monitoring information more consistently in the sixth form to ensure that any possible underachievement is picked up and addressed at the earliest possible stage
  - giving teachers more opportunities to observe the most effective practice already in place in the school.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well overall. Their attainment across a range of subjects has been above that found nationally since 2011, showing the good progress they make. Since then, from below average starting points when they joined the school, almost three quarters of students have achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics. This is above the national average.
- In some aspects, students' achievement is outstanding. For example, in mathematics, progress was exceptionally high in both 2011 and 2012. The 2013 mathematics results are similar to those of previous years but there is no national comparison available yet.
- However, students' achievement has not been consistent across all their subjects. While still good, achievement in modern languages and humanities has not been as strong as in English mathematics and science. The action taken by the school is improving this situation so that, in 2013, results improved over previous years.
- Work in students' books and the school's tracking information confirms that students continue to make consistently good progress through the school to meet their challenging targets.
- The school's strategic approach to improving students' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum is effectively contributing to rising attainment in all subjects. Students read fluently when required to do so in lessons. For example, Year 10 students showed their capabilities when sight-reading a Shakespeare play. Students have good computer skills as all students follow a course leading to a qualification until the end of Year 11, an impact of the school's specialism.
- The additional funding to boost the literacy and numeracy performance of lower-attaining students in Years 7 and 8 is focused well to address the differing needs of those who are eligible for support. Consequently, they are meeting or exceeding the targets set to reduce the gaps in their knowledge and skills.
- The school effectively supports students eligible for pupil premium funding in a range of ways to meet their individual needs. Although there is a gap of around half a GCSE grade in English and mathematics between this group and their peers, this is less than found nationally where, in 2012, the gap was over a grade in both.
- Students' above average attainment in English, mathematics and science shows that the school's approach to entering students for some examinations early has motivated them to achieve the highest possible grades. While some students take examinations again if they have not achieved their potential, others have the opportunity to take additional courses in statistics and critical thinking. Students thoroughly enjoy these subjects and the short study of new courses helps to prepare them well for sixth form study.
- In the sixth form, students make good progress from their starting points. Many begin with below average attainment. The broad range of academic and vocational courses and the flexibility to follow a three-year sixth form programme suits students well. Attainment at A and AS level is broadly average, while in vocational and applied courses it is above average. Year-on-year, there is an increasing number of students applying for and achieving university places because of the impact of programmes to raise aspirations. This has allayed the fears of some students from families where there has not been a history of further or higher education.
- Disabled students, those who have special educational needs, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language all do well, which reflects the school's commitment to ensuring equality for all students. Students' individual needs are identified and known well by teachers and those experiencing any difficulty have additional focused support through, for example, mentoring or small-group work.

**The quality of teaching****is good**

- The school rightly judges that teaching is good, and there is a continuing focus on how this can be improved to accelerate students' learning further. For example, teachers have recently broadened their skills in helping students to reflect on how to improve their learning by sharing their views on effective questioning and assessment.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well to give information in an interesting way which students understand, such as using well-chosen video clips to stimulate students' thinking. Teachers' modelling of what is expected, often focused on examination expectations, means that students are clear about what they need to do to successfully meet their targets within the lesson and longer term.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are supported well by teaching assistants who explain tasks again when necessary and question students to strengthen their understanding and enable them to do things for themselves. Specialist programmes also improve identified difficulties effectively.
- Additionally, students of all abilities benefit from the wide range of other activities which give extra help and support beyond lessons. Students, particularly those in the sixth form, value this support and the time given to them as individuals when there is anything they do not understand.
- In a few lessons, however, teaching requires improvement. This is mainly because not enough attention has been given in teachers' planning to make sure that the most-able students are challenged from the beginning of the lesson. Consequently, they sometimes waste time doing work that they have already mastered before being given new or additional work which further extends their learning. Although still good, this has resulted in the most-able students making slightly less progress than others in the school.
- In some lessons, including those where students make good progress, they spend much of their time passively responding to a series of short tasks set by the teacher rather than being actively involved in researching ideas and doing things for themselves. In these instances students are not encouraged to think for themselves enough to develop resilience and confidence in their own abilities. By contrast, in a sixth form psychology lesson where students were considering research into day care for young children, students deepened their understanding of the issues concerned by exploring their ideas in a formal debate which challenged them to apply their knowledge and respond quickly to one another's ideas.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils****are good**

- Most students behave well around the school and are polite to adults. At times, they are boisterous and loud, particularly in areas of congestion such as on narrow staircases. However, in a recent attitudinal survey, students reported that they feel safe around the school and parents and carers were positive in questions relating to discrimination and pupils feeling safe at school.
- Students know how to stay safe in a variety of situations, including when using the internet. They know who to talk to if they have concerns.
- In lessons, behaviour is good and teachers often encourage students to share their learning by discussing ideas in pairs or small groups. Occasionally, students' enthusiasm for discussion means that they are reluctant to stop talking about what they are doing to listen to the teacher when new tasks are being explained, so that the pace of the lesson is temporarily slowed.
- Students from a wide range of different backgrounds work well together and are supportive of each other. The strong school focus on students' spiritual and moral development ensures that they are taught about right from wrong. Consequently, there is little bullying and racist behaviour. Although a very few students said that incidents are not always dealt with effectively, they also reported that there is not much bullying. They understand the difference between bullying and friendship difficulties.

- The school deals robustly with discriminatory and derogatory language. Students know that any form of harassment is unacceptable and that sanctions such as exclusion are designed to support the well-being of all. The school is developing its approaches to behaviour management and has introduced more rewards to recognise good effort and behaviour. Exclusions, mainly for verbal threats and offensive language, have been reduced in the last three years and are in line with the national average and much lower than for equivalent ethnic groups nationally.
- Attendance is average. The school effectively uses a variety of strategies and works closely with the local authority to improve the attendance of a minority of students who do not attend regularly.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors monitor the school's work closely. They have a secure understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and effectively focus their efforts on where improvement is most needed.
- The school has an accurate overview of teaching through a robust programme of observations and performance management. Senior leaders use this information well to target support to bring about improvement. However, the observations carried out with senior leaders show that teachers have not had enough opportunities to share practice between departments and to learn from one another.
- Senior and middle leaders work together to track the progress of individuals and groups of students regularly. This information is used well to pick up and help any who are not making the expected progress at an early stage. This has contributed well to raising students' achievements, particularly in the main school. Although classes are small and teachers know students and their needs well, the tracking processes are not used as regularly in the sixth form to ensure the most timely interventions for any students experiencing difficulties.
- Safeguarding meets requirements. Staff are trained and aware of child-protection procedures. Staff within the school ensure that those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are given good levels of support and additional external help is used when needed.
- The curriculum is very broad, giving students a wide range of academic and work-related courses and qualifications. It is flexibly organised to enable students to take additional courses to meet particular interests, for example in lunchtime or after-school lessons. Students have good quality advice and guidance about the options available to them in the future. For example, during the inspection, Key Stage 4 students attended a workshop about university offers organised to provide information and raise aspirations.
- A range of clubs and enrichment activities promotes students' social and cultural development very well, as does a wealth of international links which broaden students' understanding of global issues.
- The school has worked closely with the local authority, which gives light touch support in recognition of the school's continuing good performance. Effective support has been provided for aspects of school improvement, including monitoring and self-evaluation, the current development of the behaviour management policy and governor training.

### ■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors have an accurate strategic understanding of the school's work, drawn from personal visits and review of examination and progress information. They know about the quality of teaching and how the school performs in relation to schools nationally, and hold senior leaders to account for continuing improvements. Finances are managed well and spending reviewed in terms of the impact it has on students' achievement, such as the pupil premium funding. Governors are also knowledgeable about the link between teachers' pay and students' achievement and commissioned external support to introduce a new policy.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131280
<b>Local authority</b>	Croydon
<b>Inspection number</b>	429635

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Girls
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	758
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	183
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John Finnin
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sister Bernadette
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1–2 April 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8670 6917
<b>Fax number</b>	020 8761 4455
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@virgofidelis.org.uk



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