

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 100282
LEA Hackney LEA
Inspection number 276285
Inspection dates 3 November 2005 to 4 November 2005
Reporting inspector Barry Jones AI

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

Type of school Comprehensive
School category Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils 11 to 19
Gender of pupils Girls
Number on roll 784
Appropriate authority The governing body
Date of previous inspection 27 March 2000
School address 6-16 Amhurst Park
Stamford Hill
London
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Telephone number 02088002158
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Chair of governors Mr Anthony Frall
Headteacher Mrs Jane Gray

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four inspectors.

Description of the school

Our Lady's is an inner city girls' school serving areas having high social deprivation. It is a Catholic school founded by Servite Sisters who are still the trustees. A small number of boys are admitted into the sixth form. The number of pupils at the school has increased by over 20% since the previous inspection. A very high percentage of the pupils have a minority ethnic heritage; over 50 languages are spoken but the majority are fluent in English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is less than normally found.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1 Outstanding

Grade 2 Good

Grade 3 Satisfactory

Grade 4 Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Our Lady's Convent high school is a good and improving school. The inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that its overall effectiveness is good. A strong feature is the way the compassionate values of the Servite Sisters permeate throughout the school and underpin a positive learning ethos. The new headteacher is providing good leadership. She has sensitively but resolutely built on the existing strengths of the established departmental system but has also tackled weaknesses such as inconsistencies in the quality of teacher assessments and risk assessments. She has introduced whole school structures and policies that are resulting in further improvements. There are closer links between the academic and pastoral system and this has contributed significantly to both the good progress made by girls in their studies and to their personal development. The school has a proven track record for providing a good quality of education, unfortunately this has led to some staff questioning this need for change. Girls behave well and their contribution to the community is outstanding. The curriculum is good and continues to be developed. Partnership with other agencies, including the diocese, are strong. The school has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. At that time there was a deficit budget but external funding and actions taken by the governing body means that there is now a surplus. This sound financial position and strong leadership means that capacity for further improvement is good. The school gives good value for money.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory although the school judges itself to be good. Recent strengthening of the management of the sixth form accompanied by several initiatives have not had sufficient impact yet for the inspectors to confirm the school's view. Therefore, the management is satisfactory but improving. This is demonstrated by the improvements in GCE A level results in 2005 so that they are now in line with national averages. Students' progress is satisfactory overall but there is considerable variation between subjects. The GCE A level results in 2005 reflected good progress by students in science subjects and psychology but mixed progress for vocational subjects. Pastoral care is sound but has only recently been linked to academic progress and there is insufficient use made of data to track how an individual student progresses through the sixth form. The new one-to-one tutor session with each student is proving to be effective. Personal development is satisfactory with a number of opportunities for students to take responsibilities such as reading partners for younger pupils and helping to organise assemblies. However, in lessons students do not always participate well. This is particularly the case when there is overuse of dictated notes.

Grade: 3

What the school should do to improve further

* Involve sixth formers more actively in their learning and evaluate the response as part of a programme of monitoring of teaching quality* Improve the accuracy of teacher assessments.* Implement the agreed plan for health and safety and ensure they are rigorously implemented.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average but, by age 14, the standards attained in the Key Stage 3 tests are above the national average. The progress made by the girls is significantly greater than the average nationally and this is maintained in Key Stage 4. Consequently, GCSE results are also significantly above the national average and show year-on-year improvement. There are a wide range of ethnic groups but none of these underachieve. This is attributable to the good teaching but also to the culture in the school which ensures that no group falls behind. In 2004, lower attaining girls made good progress and rather better than the most able girls. There is still too much variation between subjects. For instance, in 2005 the GCSE results in French and Spanish are good while PE results are unsatisfactory. The school responds well to these situations. Modern foreign languages teachers are being used to disseminate good practice in ICT while a review of the PE results has identified the need to provide better advice to pupils in year 9 when they are selecting their options. The school sets and meets challenging targets.

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This reflects the school's values of compassion, service, community and holistic approach based on the work of the Servite Sisters. Pupils comment on the positive sense of community in the school, one saying: 'We all look out for each other.' Spiritual development is particularly strong as a result of thought-provoking assemblies and the work of the religious education department. Pupils enjoy their education. This is reflected in their good attendance, positive attitudes and good behaviour. Pupils are friendly and courteous and work well together as pairs and in small groups when asked to do so. They move around the building responsibly, coping sensibly with the narrow corridors and staircases. Pupils comment that they feel safe in the school and that all are friendly to one another. They are aware of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and, through the school council, have been responsible for the introduction of healthy products in the school dining hall. Their physical development is satisfactory but is constrained by the lack of facilities. Pupils and students take responsibilities within the school and make an outstanding contribution to the local community. They organise numerous charitable events to raise funds for a wide range of causes and support many others, both within, and outside the

school. Pupils successfully develop workplace and other key skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being.

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and objectives are shared with pupils. Activities in lessons provide appropriate challenge and teachers adapt their methods to match the pupils' needs. Teachers know their pupils well and have cultivated good relationships which means there is a positive learning climate in classrooms and pupils are well motivated and enjoy learning. Classes are managed well. Pupils are encouraged to learn independently and are well supported. Teachers and teaching assistants are very aware of the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities and use assessment well to ensure that these pupils also make good progress. Particular strengths in teaching are evident in modern foreign languages in which the good pace of lessons, high expectations and diversity of teaching methods ensure that standards are good. Marking is done conscientiously but in some subjects does not give pupils sufficient guidance on how they might improve. In the sixth form, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. While there are some of the strengths found in the lower years, a more limited range of strategies is used by teachers.

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Curriculum and other activities

The school has a good curriculum which caters well for the differing needs of its pupils. In Key Stage 4, pupils choose from a wide range of GCSE courses. All are prepared well for the world of work by a well-structured and varied programme of work-related learning and Year 10 pupils benefit from two weeks work experience which they value. The school is also developing vocational courses. The curriculum and the pupils' personal development are well supported by a programme of visits which includes an 'eco-adventure week' for Year 8 pupils. Further enrichment is provided by several visits abroad and by a wide range of clubs and competitions. Provision for modern foreign languages is very good, with seven languages being offered including Chinese. The provision for citizenship is satisfactory. In the sixth form, the school provides a satisfactory curriculum. Students are given sound guidance on their options although vocational courses are relatively few. Classes for some A Level courses are exceptionally large.

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support

Pupils are cared for well. A recently introduced pastoral system supports pupils' academic and personal progress and enables all groups of pupils to achieve well. This includes regular academic reviews during the year which ensure pupils are aware what is expected of them. A programme of personal, social and moral education, including citizenship and work-related learning activities, contributes substantially to the quality of pupils' development. Pupils appreciate the quality of careers guidance in helping them choose appropriate courses both within and beyond the school as well as other career choices. Most pupils feel they have someone to talk with should they feel the need to discuss personal matters. Care, guidance and support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is strong and contributes well to the academic and personal progress they make. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are now satisfactory following recent improvements. Prior to this, risk assessments were rigorously carried out within departments but less systematically for other parts of the school.

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good and have successfully raised achievement and promoted a good quality of education for pupils. Leadership by the headteacher is good. She is successfully promoting a whole school approach to issues such as assessment which leads to greater consistency. This draws on the best practice from strong departments but which have previously acted independently and developed different practices. In consultation with staff, she has reviewed the senior management structure and roles and responsibilities are now much clearer. The work is not yet complete. For instance, all heads of departments monitor the work of their departments. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teacher assessments at Key Stage 3 which have been unchallenged in the past and only some heads of department monitor the quality of teaching in the sixth form. Departments are increasingly held to account and the school uses data well to inform its decision-making. The school evaluates itself well including making use of external, independent consultants. The school acts decisively on feedback from parents and the school council makes valued contributions to inform decision-making. There is a strong governing body which acts as a critical friend to the school. A key issue in the previous inspection was to resolve the deficit and achieve a balanced budget. The governors have taken decisive action and their actions have increased the number of pupils on roll and led to an expansion of the sixth form. Helped by an increase in external funding, this means that the school now has a surplus. The expansion of the school has inevitably meant that new building has been needed on the existing site. The school is cramped and there are too few social areas available to the pupils. This also adversely affects provision for music and PE particularly. However, the school makes best use of its resources and value for money is good.

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
Overall effectiveness		
How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
Achievement and standards		
How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	
¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.		
Personal development and well-being		
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	
The quality of provision		
How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3
Leadership and management		
How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy		
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily		Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise		Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse		Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health		Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe		
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements		Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place		Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism		Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them		Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution		
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships		Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them		Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community		Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being		
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills		Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams		Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form		Yes
Education for all learners aged 14-19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy		Yes

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I write to thank you for your help when we inspected your school. We spoke to some of you in small groups while others we were able to meet in classrooms and around the school. You were always most courteous and polite. Members of the school council were able to talk well about their involvement and the matters that are important to you. There is a welcoming atmosphere to visitors such as us.

We are impressed by your school and it is well led. It is a good school and pupils achieve well at GCSE level. There are also some good achievements at GCE A level too but less consistently so. In all key stages, results are improving year-on-year. The teachers also ensure that there are opportunities for you to develop well as young adults. The cramped school buildings do restrict your PE activities and the playground is very congested at lunch and break times. However, despite this you behave well and respect each other. As one of you said 'We look after one another.'

The school is constantly trying to improve further. We agree with the school that sixth form students should be encouraged to participate more actively in lessons and that there needs to be more consistency and accuracy when teachers make assessments through the school.

Many thanks. It was a pleasure to visit your school.

Barry Jones, Lead Inspector

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