

The Laurels

126 Atkins Road, London, SW12 0AN

Inspection dates	19–21 November 2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Every care has been taken to promote students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to keep them safe. Students' excellent character development is reflected in their outstanding behaviour and mature thinking.
- All students make good progress in most subjects as a result of good teaching, secure assessment and a well-planned curriculum. Students who have specific learning difficulties make the same good academic progress as their peers.
- Most students make excellent progress in English and mathematics, including those who have English as an additional language.
- The school leaders, staff and proprietors have worked tirelessly together to ensure that teaching is good and that all students achieve well. Very effective systems for assessing students' learning and tracking their progress have been established.
- The tutorial programme is highly successful in supporting students' academic progress and their personal development. Parents are treated as essential partners in their daughters' education. They are highly satisfied with the school's work.
- The school is well led and managed. The senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have a good capacity to further improve the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of outstanding teaching is not sufficiently high to enable students to make outstanding progress in most subjects.
- The curriculum and the resources to teach it are still developing. Their impact on students' progress has not been evaluated yet.
- Plans to further develop the school are not sufficiently detailed to help the staff and proprietors to check whether targets to raise standards have been met.
- The proprietors do not hold the school to account with sufficient rigour in all aspects of its work.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The school was given one day's notice of the inspection.
- The inspector observed nine part lessons. She examined students' work and the school's policy documents and records. She also looked at the school's measures to safeguard students and observed pupils at break times.
- The inspector held meetings with the students, staff, the headteacher and deputy headteacher. She also met with two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and she had a telephone conversation with the Chief Executive Officer.
- The inspector took into account 15 questionnaire responses from staff and 28 parental responses to Ofsted's Parent View website. She also took account of two written comments emailed by two parents during the inspection.
- At the request of the Department for Education, an application for a material change to increase the age range to 16 years and the number of pupils from 40 to 80 was considered.

Inspection team

Michèle Messaoudi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Laurels School is an independent day school for girls. It is located in the Clapham area of the London Borough of Lambeth. The school's ethos is founded on Catholic principles; its founding parents take inspiration from the teachings of St Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of The Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. The school welcomes pupils of all faiths.
- The school was registered in November 2013 to provide full-time secondary education for up to 40 girls aged from 11 to 14 years. At the time, it was partially housed in temporary accommodation pending completion of the refurbishment of the current premises. This is the school's first inspection.
- There are currently 29 students on roll, all of whom are aged between 11 and 14 years, and are taught in three classes. None of them has a statement of special educational needs. A very small minority of students have specific learning difficulties such as dyspraxia. Students come from diverse cultural heritages and three are at advanced stages of learning English as an additional language.
- The Laurels is one of four schools in London which are founded and owned by the PACT Educational Trust. The proprietors opened The Cedars, a boys' secondary school located in Croydon, in September 2013. The Laurels and The Cedars work in close partnerships with each other.
- The Board of Directors (Trustees) of PACT Educational Trust is the governing body of the school. The overall operational management is overseen by a Chief Executive Officer who chairs the executive committee.
- The school is currently led by a headteacher and a deputy headteacher, both of whom teach part time. There are currently no middle leaders.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school aims to 'develop the whole child, in close partnership with parents, through a deeply embedded character programme grounded in Catholic principles, which will enable each girl to fulfil her potential through acquiring virtues in a climate that balances freedom with responsibility'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help students to achieve outstandingly well by fully implementing existing plans to further develop the curriculum, resources and the skills of teachers.
- Further strengthen the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring that plans to bring about improvements are more detailed, so that the impact of the proposed steps to raise students' achievement can be measured with precision
 - implementing plans to develop the skills of the proprietors so that they can more rigorously hold the school to account in all aspects of its work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The senior leaders, staff, governors and proprietors have worked very closely together to establish a culture of high expectations and aspirations in a short time. Clear focus on providing good teaching and high quality pastoral care has resulted in students' good academic achievement and very high levels of well-being. The school achieves its aims very well.
- Character development, which is planned thoughtfully as a strand running through all areas of the curriculum, is central to the school's strong ethos. It successfully supports students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and promotes their outstanding behaviour.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is planned carefully to ensure that all students have equal access to its full breadth and are challenged to progress well in all subjects. Its breadth prepares students to take a minimum of 10 subjects at GCSE or IGCSE level. Its balance, coupled with rich programme of extra-curricular activities, provides students with a well-rounded education and prepares them well for life in modern Britain. It is adequately resourced.
- Links between different subject areas, including literacy and numeracy, are planned consistently. The great emphasis placed on developing students' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills serves all students well, particularly those for whom English is not their mother tongue.
- Students receive effective careers advice from Year 7 onwards, building on an audit of their skills, and their personal aptitudes and aspirations. Visits to careers events and from a wide range of professionals widen their horizons.
- Teaching is good as a result of an ambitious drive to pursue excellence and accurate monitoring of the quality of learning. The information gathered during monitoring activities is used very effectively to provide training that matches teachers' needs. Teachers feel well supported by the appraisal system and are extremely proud to be part of this developing new school. The senior leaders know exactly how to help teachers to develop their skills further.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust and students feel safe. Procedures and policies are overseen effectively by a compliance officer and a designated governor.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school's work. They particularly praise the quality of pastoral care, teaching, curriculum enrichment and partnerships between school and home. They have access to a wealth of information that includes what they are entitled to, as well as workshops and talks on different topics. They feel very well informed of their daughters' personal and academic progress through frequent meetings with their tutors.
- A broad range of links has been made in the wider community to enrich students' learning and bring different communities together.
- The school's good capacity for sustained improvement is reflected in the accuracy and timeliness of its self-review. For example, the senior leaders have promptly rectified initial weaknesses in the system which they had devised to assess students' learning without levels. The improved system enables them to track students' progress rigorously in every subject.
- Management plans identify the correct priorities for further development. However, they do not indicate with sufficient precision how targets are to be met and what the timescales for achieving each step are. Consequently, they do not enable the staff or proprietors to check the effectiveness of the proposed action with sufficient rigour as the school grows.
- The school has prepared well to extend the curriculum to Key Stage 4 students. The refurbished premises provide teaching accommodation that enables safe and effective learning. It is recommended that the school's request for a material change to admit up to 80 students aged from 11 to 16 years is approved.
- The premises are well maintained and there are plans to extend them in the future to provide a sixth form. The complaints policy is clearly written and meets requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The proprietors have ensured that all of the Independent School Standards are met. They gain an accurate picture of every step of the school's development through frequent meetings and half-termly reports compiled by the headteacher. They can demonstrate that they are very well informed about the quality of teaching and its impact on students' achievement, and would tackle any underperformance that might occur in the future. They support the headteacher in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers and managers and are developing appraisal systems to reward good teaching. An initial appraisal of the headteacher has prompted the need to widen the skills of the proprietors to improve their effectiveness.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. In and out of classrooms, students take pride in behaving like mature young ladies. They display very high levels of self-discipline and good manners. In lessons, they buzz with eagerness to learn and achieve highly, and they are consistently focused on their work.
- Attendance and punctuality are good. Students thoroughly enjoy school. Through the tutorial system, they regularly reflect on their ambitions, long-term goals and targets for personal and academic development. The tutors know each student very well, which creates high levels of well-being noted by parents, carers and students.
- Students are trusted to regulate each other if need be, and instances of low-level disruption are extremely rare. Students are generally diligent about doing their homework on time. There has been no need to apply serious sanctions.
- A clear understanding of what constitutes bullying in all its forms, and discrimination against specific categories of people, is shared by all students. They have approached equality issues in a historical context when learning about the Holocaust. Students visibly treat others as they would like to be treated and feel free from harassment.
- Students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected in their depth of thinking. Students learn to develop moral virtues, such as fortitude and honesty, through a wide range of activities and targets set for each virtue. They fully understand that this helps to refine and strengthen their character, and to prepare them to become responsible citizens. This appreciation is extended by female visitors to the school who act as excellent role models and speak about the qualities that have enabled them to succeed in life.
- Students take their roles as members of the student council very seriously and are very proud to serve their school community. They practise democracy through the election and the work of the student council. Planned visits to the Houses of Parliament give them a practical insight into law making and the British political system.
- Students have numerous opportunities to contribute to the wider community. For example, they campaign and raise funds for charity. They participate in educational projects that bring diverse communities together and give them first-hand experiences of the cultural, social and religious diversity that exists in modern Britain.
- Through philosophy, students learn to listen to, and respect, others' views and beliefs, and to debate issues in a balanced way.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Procedures for safeguarding students in all circumstances are robust. The staff are supported very effectively in this work by extensive training and clearly written policies and procedures that are implemented consistently. The school has rigorous vetting procedures for staff, proprietors and volunteers. All the required checks are recorded in a detailed single central register.
- Safety education is planned carefully in parallel with the character development programme and with the support of specialist agencies. For example, students learn how to keep safe when using the internet. They also have considered how the use of social media leads to superficial human relationships. Parents, carers, staff and students have full confidence in the school's ability to keep students safe and happy.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall. The teaching of English and mathematics is particularly strong. Teachers have very high expectations of students' achievement, behaviour and presentation of work. They know their students well and how to meet their needs effectively. They are well qualified for the subjects they teach and impart knowledge in sufficient depth to enable all students to make good or better progress. They benefit from a regular cycle of feedback from senior leaders and students, and well-targeted training that helps them to further develop their skills. They work closely with their partner school to moderate the accuracy of their assessments.
- Effective strategies, for example to involve students effectively in the assessment of their learning, are well established. In lessons, students can measure the progress they make against specific success criteria. Students also gain a clear picture of how well they are doing through constructive comments in teachers' marking. They generally respond to teachers' marking and so extend or consolidate their learning in the process. Students are also helped to achieve the next step in their learning through the

setting of specific and measurable targets.

- Where the teaching is outstanding, rather than good, it is consistently focused on deepening individual students' understanding. Teachers frequently check on students' learning and show students how to improve their work through instant verbal feedback. Teachers listen very carefully to students when they work in pairs or in groups. They intervene swiftly, support and extend individuals' understanding, and maintain a high level of challenge for all. They also analyse students' written responses promptly to provide targeted academic guidance. In such cases, students attain very high standards and make exceptional progress.
- Students' speaking, listening and thinking skills are developed very effectively through brisk question-and-answer sessions and group work. Judicious grouping for different activities ensures that the most able students are stretched. It also helps students who learn English as an additional language to make rapid progress in English.
- Teachers generally promote students' reading and writing skills effectively in all subjects, albeit not to the same highest standards. The school recognises this and has recently appointed the English teacher to lead the development of literacy in all subjects.
- Teachers have prepared schemes of work that clearly indicate how students are to progress in their knowledge and skills, and how different students are to be supported and extended. The curriculum is monitored closely by the senior leaders. There are plans to evaluate its impact on students' progress and review the schemes of work by the end of this academic year. Homework is planned as an essential learning strategy and given regularly to consolidate or extend students' learning.
- Resources are sufficient to support students' learning effectively and the school has plans to build up resources as it grows. Students practise their information and communication technology (ICT) skills by using laptops regularly in all subjects.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- All students achieve well in many subjects and make good progress overall in relation to their starting points. There are no significant gaps in the achievement of different groups of students. Students learning English as an additional language and those who have specific learning difficulties make the same good overall progress as their peers.
- Most students make excellent progress in English and mathematics and most attain very high standards as a result of very strong teaching in these two subjects. Their rapid progress is also the result of consistent opportunities to apply their literacy and mathematical skills in other subjects. For example, students have consistently used bar charts and graphs to present their findings in science.
- Timetabled reading sessions encourage students to read a broad range of books, including English classics. Students learn to analyse what they have read and argue a point in all subjects. They are given regular opportunities to write at length to develop their ideas in most subjects.
- Students have achieved well in ICT, where they have learnt to create a persuasive podcast. This term, they have won all their netball matches against local schools. Students have won a number of awards in art, singing and reading competitions, and in mathematics challenges. They have achieved distinctions and merits in their drama examinations.
- The most able students achieve extremely well because they are challenged to excel and are fast-tracked to begin GCSE courses early in their strongest subjects. Assessment records show that these students attain the highest standards in most subjects.
- Students who learn English as an additional language make rapid progress in their speaking and listening skills owing, for example, to the frequency of question-and-answer sessions and of group work in lessons. They also benefit from additional English lessons aimed at preparing them for the Cambridge First Certificate.
- The very few students who have specific learning difficulties, such as dyspraxia, make the same good progress as their peers. This is because teachers use very effective strategies to remove their barriers to learning in different subjects and build their self-confidence.
- The school provides enrichment activities to extend the skills of students who are gifted and talented. For example, budding writers hone their writing skills by producing journalistic reports that are posted on the BBC website. Students' acting skills are showcased in termly school productions.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

Unique reference number	140356
Inspection number	447224
DfE registration number	208/6003

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Day secondary school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–14 years
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	29
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	PACT Educational Trust
Chair	Ella Leonard
Headteacher	Linda Sanders
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Annual fees (day pupils)	£12,060
Telephone number	020 8674 4229
Email address	administration@thelaurelsschool.org.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

