

Maria Fidelis Roman Catholic Convent School FCJ

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100055
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	285713
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	879
6th form	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Modesto Tondelli
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Williams
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2002
School address	34 Phoenix Road London NW1 1TA
Telephone number	020 7387 3856
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Maria Fidelis school is a smaller than average, multi-cultural, Roman Catholic school. Almost a third of the students are eligible for free school meals, this is over twice the national average. Over three quarters of the students are from minority ethnic heritage. Approximately half the students speak English as an additional language, of these 60 students are at an early stage of English language acquisition.

Approximately a fifth of the students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is similar to the national average. More students than usual join or leave the school at times other than normally expected.

A Section 48 inspection was carried out at the same time.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Maria Fidelis Convent School is an improving school that is providing its students with a satisfactory standard of education. The headteacher has a clear vision and commitment to improving the life chances of students.

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because processes for monitoring and evaluation have improved. They have put in place appropriate actions which are beginning to have a positive impact. This can be seen in the significantly improved GCSE results students achieved last year. Students speak positively about the behaviour charter and told inspectors that behaviour has improved. Further evidence is seen in the reduction in the number of students excluded from schools. However, the school still has important areas to improve, in particular, the sixth form. Capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

The quality of teaching, although satisfactory overall, is variable. There is some good practice, particularly at Key Stage 4. Teachers use good questioning and interesting learning activities to extend students' knowledge and understanding. However, in some lessons teaching does not challenge students' thinking and expectations of students are not high enough. Senior leaders are increasingly active in developing the capacity of all staff to improve teaching and learning. They are holding middle leaders to account and are supporting them in analysing strengths and weaknesses in their areas. There is evidence of good practice in middle leaders; however this is not yet consistent.

Standards at the end of Year 11 are in line with national average. Senior leaders have put in place more rigorous tracking systems and are now targeting students more carefully. This is helping to ensure that many students are making good progress. However, the school recognises that a significant minority of students are not making the same good progress. Progress overall is satisfactory.

The curriculum is satisfactory, senior leaders have broadened the vocational offer. Students who will benefit from additional support receive extra literacy lessons. Students at the end of Year 9 achieve good standards in information and communication technology (ICT). However, senior leaders have not been rigorous in assessing the progress of students in ICT in Key Stage 4.

Relationships between students, and between staff and students, are good. Students have a positive attitude to learning and their behaviour is good. Students benefit from a range of visits and trips. However, extra curricular activities are limited and opportunities for all students to contribute to their community are not well developed.

There is now a more stable staff and senior leadership team. However, difficulties in recruiting staff impacts on the learning of students. For example, this problem means that in mathematics, between Years 7 and 9, students do not make as much progress as they do in Years 10 and 11.

The school building is in need of modernisation, it places restrictions on the opportunities students have. For example, due to limited space students do not receive the recommended 2 hours of physical activity per week.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is inadequate. Although inspection evidence shows progress currently in the sixth form is satisfactory, last year progress was below expectation. Standards are below average.

Inspectors found teaching and learning in the sixth form to be satisfactory. However, leadership of the sixth form has suffered turbulence in the number of staff who have changed roles. There has also been lack of consistency in the line management of the sixth form. This has meant that key issues have not been addressed at pertinent times, for example, action to improve attendance started only this year. Furthermore, although tracking of students' progress is now improved, it is still not as good as systems lower in the school. The lack of clarity in roles, in addition to a lack of rigorous monitoring systems, impacted on students' achievement last year. Senior leaders recognise this and have put in place plans to improve the effectiveness of leadership in the sixth form, however these plans have yet to have an impact.

The curriculum is inadequate and does not meet the needs of all students. Progression pathways are available in some subjects, for example, Health and Social Care; however the school is aware that this is an area for further development. A number of courses do not provide good value for money as cohort sizes are very small. In addition, admission procedures need further refinement as some students are not well matched to the advance level courses they embark on. There is a limited range of enrichment activities. Opportunities to link with external partners and the local community are not developed to enhance students' well-being.

Students play a role in the community although their leadership role in school needs to be further developed. The support students receive, academic and pastoral, is now satisfactory. Systems to monitor students' attendance and their progress have improved.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure leadership is strategic in driving improvements in standards and the curriculum for the sixth form.
- Develop monitoring and evaluation at all levels so that its impact is consistent and rigorous.
- Enhance the opportunities for students to contribute to their community.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Attainment on entry is in line with the national average for students at Key Stage 4. However, evidence indicates that attainment on entry is slightly below average for students in Key Stage 3. By the end of Year 9 standards are below average. This represents satisfactory progress. Students make better progress in English and science than they do in mathematics. This is partly a result of difficulties in recruiting mathematics teachers.

Standards are improving. They rose significantly at the end of Year 11 in 2006 and are now in line with national average. Students make good progress in mathematics and English. Progress

overall is satisfactory because although many students make good progress, there is a small but significant number of students who do not make as much progress as can be expected of them. The school has introduced better systems to identify these students and support them. There is little difference in progress of different ethnic groups. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development has some good features and is satisfactory overall. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good; cultural development is satisfactory. The school's values are very clear to students and they respond well to them including the daily emphasis on prayer, thought and reflection. Students have a good sense of right and wrong. They show concern for less fortunate people beyond the school through fund raising and community projects.

A strength of the school is the good relationships in this diverse community. Students respect each other's viewpoints and backgrounds. The cultural diversity evident in the school is celebrated in special events but is less in evidence across the everyday curriculum. Students have good attitudes to learning, they are appreciative of the education and support they receive. Their enjoyment is reflected in their good behaviour and much improved attendance, which is now satisfactory in the main school. However, attendance in the sixth form is poor.

Students feel safe in school and behave safely. They are confident that if bullying occurs the school will act swiftly to deal with it. They have a satisfactory understanding of how to live healthily. The views of students are collected in surveys and reflected through the school council but opportunities for them to influence the work of the school are limited and capable of much further development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that teaching overall is satisfactory. Most teachers display good subject knowledge which gives them confidence in the delivery of their material. They plan conscientiously and set clear objectives which are communicated to students. Teachers manage behaviour effectively. Many lessons show good pace and variety; students respond well to the challenge to work in pairs, groups or independently. However, in some lessons teaching is undemanding and students are not challenged. They become disinterested when tasks are not well matched to their needs and do not make as much progress as they could.

Students are assessed regularly and action is taken to ensure that they stay 'on target'. Assessment information is being increasingly used to assist further planning so that work is tailored to students' needs. This needs to become more consistent across all subjects and teachers. During the inspection some students, but by no means all, could say at what level they were working and what they needed to do to improve. Opportunities to use ICT to support

students' learning are not always utilised. The libraries, with limited access for students in Years 7 to 9, are not used as well as they should be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The school curriculum is satisfactory. The time allocation has now been extended to 25 hours to ensure the coverage of all subject areas. In Key Stage 3, students receive a broad and balanced curriculum. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities and students who are learning English as an additional language are well supported through the intervention strategies. The provision for gifted and talented students is satisfactory. There is a limited range of after school activities and clubs for students.

At Key Stage 4, the curriculum has been designed to meet the varying needs of the students. A wide range of GCSEs are available along with some vocational courses. Clear pathways for progression have been designed around Health and Social Care and science. Students have opportunities to learn about the world of work through planned activities across the curriculum. The school has used one day events to raise the profile of enterprise education. The school does not meet its statutory requirements in reporting ICT at Key Stage 4. Senior leaders have planned to increase the curriculum offer in the sixth form. However, sixth form students are not always well matched to courses and support for underperforming students has not made use of the resources offered by the local community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school places an emphasis on ensuring that all students, irrespective of their ability or background, feel valued. Year 7 students say that they have been able to settle in quickly. Students value the work of the recently appointed Student Support Officers. Statutory arrangements for child protection and the safeguarding of students are robust. A linked police officer in school four days per week adds to the students' sense of feeling safe and secure. Regular meetings to discuss the progress of vulnerable students ensure that no-one 'slips through the net', despite the higher than normal levels of mobility in the student population.

Students whose first language is not English receive support out of lessons but less attention is paid to supporting these students in mainstream classes. Students are informed about future options and career pathways as they move up the school. Students are increasingly being given opportunities to reflect on their progress and set targets for improvement. However, this process is not yet consistent throughout the school and some targets are insufficiently challenging.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 4

The leadership and management of the school is satisfactory with some good features. The headteacher has set a clear direction for the school, staff and governors have united around

achieving it. Working closely with the leadership team, she has acted decisively and successfully to ensure a stable learning environment through strategies to improve behaviour and attendance. There has been effective attention to governor training so that governors have an improving understanding of the school. They are supportive and are increasingly developing the skills to challenge the school about its performance. There is a strong and shared focus on raising achievement; the impact of this is seen in the much improved GCSE results.

There has been extensive training to improve the skills of staff in evaluation and help middle leaders to understand their accountability for standards. Some are now very skilled in this. Senior leaders recognises that there is more to do in making the monitoring of teaching and learning more rigorous and ensuring that all managers are equally skilled in evaluation.

There have been many changes in the leadership of the sixth form, hence improvements evident elsewhere in the school have not embedded in the sixth form. The majority of parents have a positive view of the school. However, some parents felt that the school does not take as much account of their views as they would like.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Maria Fidelis Roman Catholic Convent School FCJ, London, NW1 1TA

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for the friendly and helpful way you welcomed us. We valued the discussions we had with many of you and are grateful for the way you shared your views about the school. In return, I want to tell you our findings.

We judged that Maria Fidelis School is an improving school, which is providing a satisfactory standard of education. We were pleased to see how well you get on with each other and with your teachers. We found your behaviour to be good, you told us you enjoyed school and felt safe. We think overall you are making satisfactory progress. We were impressed with the significant increase in the recent GCSE results.

We were concerned about the sixth form, we found that there have been too many changes in the leadership which has meant that the school has not always been able to identify when students needed support or were not doing as well as they should be. We found that sometimes students in the sixth form were not on the courses that suited them best.

To improve further we have suggested that the school:

- ensures senior leaders work effectively to improve the standards and the curriculum in the sixth form;
- makes sure that the way everyone checks how well the school is doing is rigorous;
- enhances the opportunities for you to be able to contribute to your school and local community.

We found that your school and your teachers are working hard to make sure you achieve and the school continues to improve. We wish you and your school every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi Her Majesty's Inspector