

Canons High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102237
Local Authority	Harrow
Inspection number	286316
Inspection date	27 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	12–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	713
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms A Brightwell
Headteacher	Ms L Rowlands
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002
School address	Shaldon Road Edgware HA8 6AN
Telephone number	020 8951 5780
Fax number	020 8731 1460

Age group	12–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector

Description of the school

Canons High School, a specialist Technology College, enjoys a high level of ethnic diversity. Applications to Year 8 are mainly from local middle schools and include many more boys than girls. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is double the national figure as is the percentage of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Three quarters of the students, many more than expected nationally, have a home language other than English. Only a small number, however, are at the very early stages of learning English. The mobility of students is very high with around 40 per cent joining or leaving at other than the normal time. The headteacher has been in post for less than a year but staffing is otherwise very stable. From the next academic year, the school will form part of a local sixth form consortium. It has also achieved designation for a second specialism of vocational education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Canons High School provides a good quality of education. The overwhelming majority of parents and pupils agree that Canons is effective and that, 'It is a very happy school where pupils' behaviour is excellent.'

A real strength of the school is its happy, caring ethos where everyone is welcome and relationships at all levels are very positive. As a result of exceptional care, guidance and support, the pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils report that support for those experiencing personal difficulties is 'really good' as is that for those with learning difficulties or disabilities. Checks on pupils' academic progress are also rigorous. Pupils are very proud of their school, attend regularly, appear happy and enthusiastic and feel secure. They are keen to stay healthy, participate well in sports and have their say on many aspects of school life through the school council. They encourage each other to behave well and actively respond to the '4Rs' of the school's expectations, 'resilience, reflectiveness, resourcefulness, reciprocity'. Many make a difference to others through service within the school and through fundraising for a range of charities. Very effective personal and social education, good careers' advice, enterprise projects and the 'eco-warriors' initiative prepare pupils well for future education, training and working life.

Teaching and learning are good. For the first time, in 2006, the progress made by Year 11 placed the school in the top ten per cent of schools nationally. Overall, pupils reach average standards and achieve well from a below average starting point. The achievement of pupils at the end of Year 9, however, dropped significantly last year, particularly in science and mathematics where progress has been slower than in English over several years. This is recognised clearly by the school as an area for improvement as is a lack of challenge for some able pupils

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior team provide very able leadership that is enabling the school to continue to improve whilst managing the establishment of a sixth form. Governors support the school well and keep a watchful eye over its future development. Self-evaluation at senior level is rigorous and generally accurate. Middle managers are increasingly well involved in contributing to the school's understanding of its strengths as well as of areas where it needs further development. Their effectiveness in monitoring learning, however, is inconsistent and is reflected in the pupils' varying rates of success across the curriculum.

Since the last inspection, the school has sustained good teaching and learning. The curriculum has developed well and is outstanding. Plans to broaden even further the range of vocational pathways open to older pupils are well in hand. There is a very wide range of out-of-hours learning, particularly sport. Specialist status as a technology college has strengthened the links with feeder middle schools. Its impact is evident in improved resources and stimulating projects across subject areas. This is clear evidence of the school's strong capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in Years 8 and 9 so that progress is as good as that in older year groups.
- Match learning activities better to the needs of able pupils so that they make faster progress.
- Extend rapidly the capacity of some middle leaders to manage their responsibilities more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average and pupils achieve well overall by the end of Year 11. The 2006 GCSE cohort made particularly fast progress in Years 10 and 11 from a below average starting point. Despite exceeding challenging GCSE targets, pupils did not achieve equally well in all subject areas. Their progress in mathematics, for example, outstripped that in English. As a result, under half of the pupils gained five or more higher GCSE grades that included both English and mathematics. Information on the current Year 11 indicates that this proportion is likely to increase significantly in 2007. Particularly successful subjects include physical education, religious education, drama, textiles and food technology. The latter reflects the school's success as a technology college.

Whilst all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve at least satisfactorily, both boys and girls with below average starting points make significantly better than average progress throughout their time in the school. Those for whom English is an additional language also achieve very well as do some groups of Asian background. The school rightly recognises that the progress of more able boys and girls is less fast than that of other groups, partly because teaching does not always challenge able pupils enough.

There has been a steady rise in test results at the end of Year 9 over several years. In 2006, however, results in science did not match those of English and mathematics and fell well below the school's target. Pupils achieved significantly less well than expected. Generally, pupils make slower progress in Years 8 and 9 in mathematics and science than in English. The school has recently identified the grouping of pupils and underdeveloped technical language skills as barriers to learning and has plans in hand to remedy both issues.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of the pupils are outstanding. Pupils much enjoy coming to school, most attend regularly and are enthusiastic about, 'Canons being a good place to learn'. They give real assent to the school's efforts to 'build learning power'. Their spiritual, moral cultural and social development is also outstanding. Pupils are ready to engage in lively debates on spiritual as well as moral and social issues. Their cultural development is particularly strong and they value the many different traditions and customs of groups within the school community. Relationships throughout the school are harmonious and pupils engage confidently with teachers and visitors as well as with each other.

Pupils are very clear as to what is expected of them in lessons and as they move around the school. As a result, most behave exceptionally well. A small number of casual entrants with often difficult histories from other institutions accounts for the seemingly high number of exclusions. Pupils are confident that they are secure in school and are pleased that 'their police officer' helps make their neighbourhood safe. Pupils report that any bullying or racist incidents are dealt with effectively and that they can talk freely to their counsellor, peer listeners, or other adults as needed. Participation in physical activities is high with the Duke of Edinburgh Award, the cricket academy and basketball clear favourites. Pupils are actively involved in the choice of menus for the canteen and speak knowledgeably of healthy diets. Pupils from all year groups are very active in the school council. Others contribute to the school and wider community as prefects, sports helpers in the local middle schools and as mentors to underachieving pupils.

They also make valuable contributions to the wider community through fund raising for charities. Pupils consider they are well prepared for their future education or working life because of excellent personal guidance and because they learn to take responsibilities seriously and to show initiative in running school events.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Warm working relationships support learning in many classrooms. Pupils respond well to the calm, encouraging atmosphere that allows them to take risks in their thinking, to correct errors and misunderstandings and to explain their findings confidently. In a successful science lesson, for example, teaching involved pupils well through skilful and targeted questioning. As a result, they were able to draw on earlier learning and build up new knowledge and vocabulary. Despite many good features, however, the school recognises that to develop learning further, lesson planning must be more carefully focused on matching work to all pupils' needs. In particular, able pupils need greater challenge in all year groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and has improved since the last inspection. All statutory requirements for religious education, physical education and information and communications technology (ICT) are now met. There are an increasing number of opportunities for older pupils to follow vocational pathways and to participate in accelerated courses. Provision for personal, health, social and citizenship education is exceptional and supports pupils' personal development very well. In younger years there is a strong and helpful emphasis on improving pupils' literacy skills. Learning is enriched by a very wide range of out-of-hours activities, especially sport and music. Staff also provides many stimulating, worthwhile activities at lunchtimes. Excursions and visiting speakers contribute well to the school's efforts to widen the pupils' experiences and raise their aspirations while retaining positive links with their cultural heritages. Specialist technology status has had an impact on option choices for Year 10 and has encouraged helpful links with partner middle schools to help ensure a smooth transition to Year 8.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The caring ethos provided by the staff ensures pupils feel safe and well supported. Pupils report that problems are dealt with promptly and in a very 'helpful way.' They know who to turn to if need arises. Personal guidance as pupils move through the school draws very well on outside agencies when needed. Vulnerable pupils are supported exceptionally well by the very effective arrangements in place to keep them involved in school. Through the technology college, partnership with middle schools is strong and enables the early identification of need among the incoming Year 8 pupils. There are excellent induction procedures to settle the many pupils joining the school mid-term.

Systematic whole-school procedures regularly check pupils' academic progress. These are very thorough and there are robust initiatives to support students who are not achieving well enough. Academic mentoring and family learning contribute well to encouraging pupils to succeed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Some aspects are outstanding such as the strong culture of self-evaluation that pervades all areas of the school and which is particularly incisive at senior level. Leaders are ambitious for the pupils and the impact is evident in the outstanding personal development of many and in the rapid progress of pupils in older year groups. Staff aim for excellence in all aspects of school life. The very able leadership of the headteacher has sustained and nourished the senior team's sense of collective responsibility but has also ensured that senior managers have clear lines of accountability. The school clearly demonstrates that its capacity for further improvement is good.

Governance is good. Governors support the headteacher well and are increasingly able to challenge the school where necessary. Their involvement in developing future plans for the school, including the establishment of post-sixteen provision, is very effective. Professional development is taken seriously so that teachers and support staff have a real sense of commitment to school improvement. As a result, middle leaders share the senior team's vision of an inclusive school. Some, however, have yet to acquire the necessary skills to manage their areas of responsibility rigorously. This is reflected in pupils' varying rates of success across the curriculum and in the less fast progress of the most able pupils. The technology specialism is well led and has made strong progress since designation despite resistant materials and graphics making a less than expected contribution to examination outcomes.

The views of parents and pupils are sought very regularly and used to inform worthwhile changes. Aspects of the environment, for example, have been much improved at the request of the school council and they are rightly proud of their involvement in improving school meals and in recycling. Local residents also have a voice and report their improved perceptions of Canons through the school's attached police officer.

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
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

8 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Canons High School, Shaldon Road, Edgware, HA8 6AN

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly to Canons and for sharing your ideas and opinions with me. I very much enjoyed our conversations, particularly those with the members of the school council. I am sure you will want to know my findings.

You are rightly proud of Canons. You think it is a good school and I agree with you. Your very able headteacher and staff want the best for you and are determined that you will make the best possible progress over your time in the school. You make a very positive contribution to this ambition. Because you enjoy school, you behave very well and work hard. You make good progress and by Year 11 reach standards that match the national average. This is also because you are taught well. Most of you attend regularly though a few continue to take holidays in school time, and this hinders your learning.

You recognise that you are very well cared for. I am pleased that you feel comfortable with each other and with your teachers. You tell me there is always someone to go to when needed. You are also generous in welcoming the many newcomers to the school throughout the year. This is just one of the ways you take responsibilities seriously at Canons. Others of you are peer listeners and some are sports leaders in the middle schools.

When thinking about how Canons could be even better, your school agrees with me that you should make faster progress in Years 8 and 9 and that some of you who are very able should be encouraged to achieve more. In some subjects, your progress could be checked more effectively. For your part, you can help by continuing your very good co-operation with your teachers, by rising to the challenge of your new sixth form, and by remembering the 4Rs.

With very best wishes for your future success at Canons.

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector