

Parliament Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100050
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	307287
Inspection dates	26–27 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Meena Wood HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1232
6th form	346
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr John Clark
Headteacher	Ms Susan Higgins
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2004
School address	Highgate Road London NW5 1RL
Telephone number	020 7485 7077
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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

Parliament Hill School is part of the La Swap Sixth Form Consortium, which comprises four schools. Parliament Hill School has a joint sixth form with William Ellis School within the consortium, and specialises in technology and information and communication technology (ICT). The school has been designated National Healthy Schools Status (2007), Leading Edge School, Eco Silver and Future Leaders and has Consultant Leader Status (2006).

There is a social and culturally diverse mix of students in the school. A high proportion of students are eligible for free school meals. Over half of students are from minority ethnic groups, with a significant number from bilingual families. Consequently, forty two languages are spoken with Bengali, Albanian and Arabic being the most dominant. A significant minority, some 189 students, are refugees or asylum seekers with considerable numbers of students not in school at the start of the year or not starting school in Year 7. However, there are few at an early stage of learning English. A high proportion are vulnerable students and have some form of learning difficulty or disability. The school's locality is associated with high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Parliament Hill School is a good school with a good sixth form. The school has successfully created a positive culture of learning that encourages students from diverse backgrounds to achieve their potential. Students make good progress in relation to their starting points and achieve above average standards by the time they leave the school in Year 11. A responsive pastoral system and a good breadth of extra curricular activities has resulted in good personal development and well-being for students. The school has developed a good academic and vocational curriculum that includes the specialist subjects. For instance, students have well-structured opportunities within the curriculum to develop their ICT skills. This enables students to make good progress in their studies during their time at the school. Students receive good advice and guidance on choosing their curriculum pathways in Year 9 and further progression options in Year 11.

Teaching and learning are good because teachers have good subject knowledge and work hard with students to help them achieve their potential. The school recognises that in some lessons teachers do not routinely check on the progress made by their students, and do not match the tasks that they set closely enough to students' different needs. Teachers' assertive classroom management ensures good behaviour in lessons, and the school is now prioritising the management of some noisy behaviour in corridors. The school has put in place sound strategies to improve attendance. Academic guidance is good with strengths in target setting and the quality of reporting to students and parents. However, the school recognises that day-to-day marking and assessment does not consistently provide precise advice to students on how to improve.

Learning support assistants in lessons are not always deployed effectively to help students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those in the early stages of learning English and these students do not consistently fulfil their potential across all subjects. Vulnerable students, including those who are designated as 'looked-after children', receive excellent support that helps them stay on course.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's strong leadership, clear vision and methodical direction have resulted in the school continuously improving achievement and standards for students. One parent reported, 'During the four years at Parliament Hill School, my daughter has blossomed into a confident, articulate, compassionate and well adjusted young adult.' The school's self-evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is good and this gives the school good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The La Swap Consortium ensures good quality provision. Nearly 80% of La Swap students are on GCE A/AS level courses and 22% on vocational courses. This is leading to improving standards and students achieve well. The schools collaborate effectively through the well-established partnership and joint management structures but, overall, strategic planning within the consortium lacks rigour.

The standards attained by Parliament Hill students are above average and their achievement is good. Nearly three quarters of students from Year 11 join the sixth form. Students on vocational courses perform well, but achievement by the most able students is only satisfactory.

Students' achievement in science is comparatively weak. All students benefit from a very wide choice of A Levels and an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. Academic support is good and students receive very thorough guidance on future careers and progression to higher education. Students enjoy school and believe there is a strong sense of community. They make a satisfactory contribution to the rest of the school and the local community. However, students' attendance is too low, and despite the adoption of a range of strategies intended to ensure regular attendance, has not improved sufficiently. In some lessons, too many students fail to complete homework. Teaching is good, with subject knowledge, a particular strength. Teachers are well prepared and enthusiastic. They are not sufficiently targeting work on individuals and groups and often the same tasks are set in classes for all students with a wide range of attainment. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, with a sharp and effective focus on raising standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards for all students through:
 - greater focus on matching activities to students' levels
 - providing clear advice to students on how to improve.
- Improve consistency and quality of learning support to enable students at early stages of learning English and those on School Action to make greater progress.
- Improve attendance, particularly in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students arrive in Year 7 with broadly average attainment. By the end of Year 11, owing to the good teaching they receive from the school, the majority make good progress. In the last three years, students' achievement in relation to their starting points has improved significantly and the school is now just outside the top 10 per cent nationally in relation to the progress made by students. This is largely due to the school's performance in English, where students' progress is well above average, whereas in mathematics students only make the expected progress. More able girls and those needing additional support make the progress expected of them. All minority ethnic groups including Bangladeshi and African students also make satisfactory progress.

About two thirds of the significant numbers of students who arrive in school as refugees and asylum seekers make the progress expected of them and attain the challenging targets set by the school. The school has recognised that it needs to develop systematic monitoring processes and targeted support that fully address their academic needs.

By Year 9 students attain standards at the national average and perform significantly better in English than in mathematics, where their results are below average. The school has put supportive intervention strategies in place, such as booster classes, and students currently in Year 9, and those in Year 11 taking GCSEs and equivalent vocational examinations, are predicted to attain higher standards. School data indicates that the school is on line to attain its challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy lessons, are well motivated and develop good relationships with teachers and other adults. Behaviour in lessons is good. However, at change over of lessons, behaviour in corridors is boisterous with a tiny minority of students acting in inappropriate ways. All students are clear about sanctions for any unacceptable behaviour. The number of students excluded was high in 2006-7, although it has reduced slightly this year through the recent provision of the 'exclusion room'. Students feel safe and say that adults are easily approachable if they have any concerns. Students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good. Despite the school's strenuous efforts to improve students' attendance, including a well attended Breakfast Club, this remains below the national average.

Students are happy to take on additional responsibilities and are democratically elected as members of the year and student councils by their peers. Students are also involved in informing the school development plan and in recruitment procedures for teaching staff. A group of students has worked enthusiastically with staff on developing the school's equality policy. Many take the initiative in raising money for charities and others have taken on the roles of 'peer mentors'. Students receive good opportunities to develop coaching skills, which they use with local primary school children.

Students actively work with visiting professional chefs, who encourage healthy eating and the importance of a nutritious diet, and there is good attendance at food-related competitions. All this is underpinned by a strong food technology curriculum. Many students take part in the wide range of after school sports and other extra curricular activities. Through good development of ICT and literacy skills, students are well prepared for work and further education and they express high levels of satisfaction with their work experiences and enterprise days.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers have a good command of their subjects and in the large majority of lessons they use a wide range of learning activities to engage students and help them make good progress. Relationships are positive, helping teachers and students to focus on learning. Students are very ready to ask questions and contribute ideas. Across a range of subjects, teachers encourage their students to explore and refine ideas through discussion before committing ideas to paper. Within some aspects of teaching there are inconsistencies of approach. For example, although reports to parents include helpful advice on how students could improve their work, day-to-day marking in students' books does not always do enough to identify points for improvement. Whilst in most lessons work is well matched to the needs of different groups of students, the approach to this is not consistent and at times not enough account is taken of their different starting points. In one outstanding Year 8 lesson on use of dramatic irony in an English literature text, an excellent choice of questions coupled with discussion through paired work, led to reflective and mature comments. As part of the school's specialist technology status, teachers

use interactive whiteboards, and this helps make teacher explanations more focused and easier to understand. Students spoke highly of the quality of teaching in a number of subjects, for example, English, art, ICT and history. However, they felt that some teaching in science and mathematics was not always of a similarly high quality. This closely mirrors the school's own evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Over the last two years the curriculum for 14 to 16 year old students has been improved significantly. An outstanding range of courses and pathways for students at all ability levels has contributed to improvements in both results and students' overall attitudes to learning. Students who wish to extend their learning can opt into triple sciences, double mathematics, an AS level course in ICT or an accelerated French programme at a partner school. Vocational courses have been extended and strong links with outside organisations offer good opportunities to students. For example, twelve students have followed a business and administration course with good outcomes.

The school recognises that the curriculum for younger students needs to be further developed to improve achievement and standards, especially in mathematics and science. The school has yet to fully develop the literacy, language and numeracy strategy across all subjects. There is a good understanding of what needs to be done and appropriate plans are in place for this year.

A good range of extra curricular and enrichment activities add to students' enjoyment and contribute well to their social and cultural development. Extra curricular activities are well attended, particularly by students in Year 7 and 8.

Specialist school status has brought benefits to the school as a whole. For example, there is innovative work on the school's managed learning environment, where Year 9 students and their parents can watch video clips of Year 10 to help them decide on their subject options.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Students with more complex social, and emotional and behavioural needs are strongly supported through well- integrated team work. In addition, considerable specialist help is readily available for those who are vulnerable or at risk through the inclusion team, which has robust links with several agencies. Communication with parents is strong through the school-nurse, home-school liaison mentor and lead learning mentor. As a result, some previously disaffected students, at risk of dropping out of education, have chosen to progress to further education at 16. The school has worked successfully with local Bangladeshi community groups to better support parents' understanding and expectations of school systems and is planning the recruitment of a home liaison worker in relation to Somali and other Black African students. This has been identified as necessary for these students, to overcome the challenges of their personal circumstances, and to reduce the number of exclusions, that are disproportionately higher than for other groups. Academic guidance is good. There are strengths in target setting and the quality of reporting. The school rightly recognises the need for greater

consistency of subject assessment practice and marking. Year 9 and Year 11 are given good guidance on subject and post 16 options.

The quality of support provided to students with learning difficulties and disabilities and to the small but growing group of students at early stages of learning English is inconsistent, as learning support assistants are not involved sufficiently in the planning of students' learning. Furthermore, details of those students receiving English language support are not shared with subject leaders and there is an insufficiently coherent and comprehensive induction programme for new arrivals. The school has recognised this and is currently reviewing its systems and resources to help address the weakness.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Through the good leadership, energy and drive of the headteacher, there is a clear ethos of continuous improvement shared by managers and staff. Managers set challenging targets and produce detailed department action plans. Updated information on students' achievement and standards is used well by year team leaders to identify underachieving individuals and groups. There is a strong strategic commitment to developing inclusive provision for the most vulnerable students, especially those with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. As a result, the school has recently appointed a lead learning mentor to promote greater behavioural support for these students and through the national initiative 'Building schools for the future: strategy for change', has planned for a student and family well-being centre.

The school's self-evaluation is highly analytical, although, there is some inconsistency in the quality of the departmental self-evaluations. The school knows itself very well, and establishes the right priorities, through recognising its strengths and the barriers to improvements. The school has rightly prioritised behaviour management, raising attendance and developing a coherent and co-ordinated strategy for raising aspirations. In addressing weaknesses from last inspection, relating to the below average attendance, the school has put in place a range of strategies that include student rewards as incentives and the involvement of parents. Although this is proving to be a challenge, nevertheless the systematic whole school approach to promoting attendance has been recognised nationally as an example of good practice.

Quality assurance systems are effective. The school has recently established a sound lesson observation system and this has led to better identification of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, including assessment processes.

Good communications exist with local communities and local further education institutions. Consequently, in collaboration with education partners the school has successfully developed the 14-19 diploma in hospitality and catering. The school provides good value for money through the use of specialist funds and provision of viable class sizes in the sixth form. Governors have a good understanding of the school's priorities and support the school well through the role of 'critical friend' and through linking up with individual subject departments.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	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

16 April 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Parliament Hill School, London, NW5 1RL

Following our recent visit to inspect your school, I am now writing to let you know about our findings. We would like to thank you for your contributions to the inspection. Thank you in particular to those who gave up time to talk to us. It was a pleasure meeting with you and listening to you talk about your best pieces of work that you presented to us in small groups. We enjoyed sitting in on your lessons, and observed that the majority of you are hard working, well behaved and respectful, and enjoy coming to school. However, we observed that a small number of you are noisy and do not act appropriately in corridors between lessons. We know the school is working to ensure that you are as well behaved at change of lessons as you are during your lessons.

Your school is a good school. You informed us that you feel safe in the school, and benefit from the excellent choice of courses, as well as the wide range of extra curricular activities the school has to offer such as sports and food competitions. You have made good progress in your studies through your own hard work and the support you receive from the school. The teaching we saw was good because your teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully to help you. In these lessons, we were impressed by your keen attitudes to learning. One student in particular, who arrived in Britain three years ago and joined your school in Year 9 with very little English, especially impressed us by her determination and hard work in completing 11 GCSEs with good grades and progressing to four A level courses. The leadership and management of your school is good and you are continually encouraged to achieve your potential.

We have asked the school to help you to improve your results even more, through planning activities in lessons that more often meet your learning needs and through more precise marking of your work, so that you get good advice on how to improve. In addition, for those of you who are learning English language skills and are newly arrived in the school, we have asked the school to give you a better induction and to support you better in your lessons. All students in the school can contribute to their education by attending punctually and regularly, and behaving better around the school. This will help all of you achieve the good results, both you and your parents desire. We hope that you will do well and, with the help of the school, realise your future ambitions.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector