

La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100059
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	307291
Inspection date	18 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1225
6th form	335
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sister Margaret O'Reilly
Headteacher	Sister Teresa Finn
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2004
School address	Highgate Road London NW5 1RP
Telephone number	020 7428 4600
Fax number	020 7267 7647

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- How effectively are leaders at all levels ensuring that girls make maximum progress?
- What impact does teaching have on achievement and the progress pupils make?
- What are leaders and managers doing to ensure maximum impact of the school's specialist status?

Evidence was gathered from the analysis of school documentation, observation of lessons, conversations with learners and discussions with teachers and senior staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not inspected in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School is a very popular, heavily over-subscribed and larger than average secondary school. The proportion of girls with learning difficulties is below average. The percentage of girls from minority ethnic groups is higher than average. A third of these speak English as an additional language. The proportion entitled to free school meals is slightly above average but there is a pattern of increase. The school has specialist school status in science and has been awarded Investors in People, Healthy School Status, International School Award and has received the Financial Management Standards in Schools (FMSIS).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

La Sainte Union is a good school with many outstanding features. The tireless and dedicated work of the headteacher, along with her highly competent and committed senior management team, has ensured that pupils have reached high standards in national tests and in GCSE examinations over a number of years. Provisional results for 2007 show a further rise in the percentage of pupils gaining 5 A* - C at GCSE and results in national tests in Year 9 showed a marked gain in the percentages of pupils reaching the higher levels of attainment. 'A' level results are good and improving. Subject leaders and heads of year are highly capable and monitor the work of their areas thoroughly. The quality of departmental documentation is exemplary and identifies clearly what the strengths and areas for improvement are, and what actions are in place to raise achievement. Leaders and managers at all levels have excellent capacity to improve further. Parents and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the school and praise it highly for its work. One parent quite simply states that 'the school is wonderful'. Another writes, 'I feel my daughter has matured and blossomed since joining La Sainte Union. Her strengths have been encouraged ...' Governors are a highly skilled and loyal group of people who work hard to support the school in its work. They are able to successfully work as a critical friend because they are knowledgeable about all aspects of their job and participate fully in the process of school self-evaluation.

Pupils enter the school with above average attainment and make good progress overall. There are some pockets of excellent progress. For example, in English at Key Stages 3 and 4, in mathematics in Years 10 and 11, across biology, physics and chemistry and in Italian. However, progress is not even across subjects. In 2007, pupils made less progress in some other areas, for example in some of the other modern languages and information and communication technology (ICT). Lower attaining pupils do not always achieve as well as they could in single and applied science and child development. However, the school is aware of the situation and has already put mechanisms into place to improve in these areas.

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is outstanding and is promoted successfully through the curriculum, assemblies and through the high expectations that are characteristic of the work of the school. Behaviour is exemplary and the pupils show a genuine concern for others both within and outside the school community. Their links with a 'sister school' in Tanzania is particularly worthy of note and has nurtured pupils' understanding of their wider responsibilities. The school council is effective and pupils feel that they have a real 'voice' which is listened to and acted upon by staff. As a result of pupil's suggestions, a new summer uniform is due for implementation next summer. They have also had an influence on what is available in the school canteen by monitoring its nutritional content. Pupils have presented their findings to staff on such themes as 'anti bullying' and 'healthy schools'. 'Social justice' and 'eco' committees raise awareness amongst the whole school community about issues affecting them. The excellent 'peer mentoring scheme' ensures that younger pupils always have someone they can turn to if they have any problems.

Teaching and learning are good overall, with many outstanding elements, but the quality is not consistent across all subjects. Sometimes teaching lacks pace and is not pitched correctly to challenge and engage all pupils fully in their learning. However, there is some excellent teaching that inspires and motivates extremely well. Music is super! In an exceptional session of singing, progress was outstanding and a group of Year 7 girls sang their hearts out and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The inspector was thrilled to see so many happy, beaming

faces! The standard of the singing was very high. Teachers make learning interesting by organising enjoyable activities such as 'role play' and quizzes. A well-chosen animation brought to life a difficult concept in science. The interactive whiteboard was used effectively to demonstrate to Year 10 girls how bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics which resulted in clear understanding of and a discussion about natural selection. Teachers' high quality questioning skills were seen at work in English and mathematics. Pupils' books are regularly marked and many comments refer to the learning outcomes for pupils. This is because target setting is now well established along with whole school tutor review days to ensure ownership of learning outcomes. Academic guidance for pupils is outstanding. Systems are in place which enables all staff to track the progress of different groups of pupils. As a result, there has been successful implementation of initiatives and programmes designed to give extra help which have targeted underachievement. Pupils are given clear and helpful guidance at various stages of their school career which enables them to make informed choices about the next steps in their learning. Parents are also well informed and involved at all stages of their child's education. Pastoral support and care are outstanding and inspection evidence agrees with the words of this parent, 'It is a very caring school with good boundaries which start you off in life.' Those pupils with emotional difficulties are extremely well supported, as are other groups of vulnerable pupils.

The school's specialist status in 'Science with Mathematics' contributes very well to raising standards, to the curriculum and to the academic guidance given to pupils. It also enhances the personal development of pupils and has strengthened partnership links with various organisations and other schools. The mathematics department organises activities that greatly enhance pupil's economic well-being such as 'Year 9 Finance Day' and the running of the school bank in league with one of the high street banks. It contributes very well to a whole school curricular approach. For example, there has been a drama workshop with a mathematical focus, video conferencing, an 'Architecture and mathematics' event and a careers day involving a multi-national company. Pupils have also benefited from an 'International Data Handling project' that involved exchanging and interpreting information with a school in Qatar. Visits and visitors play a major role in enriching the lives of pupils at La Sainte Union and the science department have been extremely pro-active in providing numerous exciting activities for a wide variety of pupils and especially those with gifts and talents. Year 10 pupils had the opportunity to participate in the 'Radiography Roadshow', Year 7 had a weekly 'Science Club' and all pupils have benefited from external speakers and Year 8 pupils obtained awards for various projects they had developed and presented. Beyond mathematics and science, there is an excellent curriculum with a wide range of extra curricular clubs and enrichment programmes that offer pupils many opportunities to participate in sport and to be creative. For example, a group of girls attended the unveiling of their 'Banners' in the local vicinity. They had attended a six week after school project on Photography and Adobe Photoshop. The PE department ensured that Year 9 enjoyed a day at an outdoor centre in the Hertfordshire countryside. They took part in a range of adventure and problem solving activities aimed at encouraging teamwork skills. The 'Sports Leaders Awards' are very popular amongst the pupils and contribute very well towards their personal development, giving them the chance to take on responsibility. The girls are proud to have won competitions in football and have also done well in trampolining and basketball.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good because students benefit from being part of a very large consortium that provides a very broad curriculum choice. Students are extremely positive about this and particularly praise the extent of the vocational courses available. Extra curricular activities and enrichment are excellent. There is rigorous tracking of student progress every six weeks so that those struggling with the demands of sixth form life can be helped to settle in and adapt well. Academic guidance is excellent and as a result, students are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education or career. Overall, standards are above average and achievement is good, but this varies too much between subjects. Teaching is good overall and students benefit from teachers whose subject knowledge is excellent. However, teaching in the sixth form is sometimes overly teacher directed and students are given insufficient opportunity to learn independently and collaboratively. This is compounded by too little time being given over to private study, which causes some difficulties in striking a good 'work-life balance'. Students also felt that the transition from Year 11 to 12 could be improved. Boys, who join the school in the sixth form, felt that more could be done to integrate them socially at the start of their education at La Sainte Union. However, both sixth formers and those girls in Years 7 to 11 commented very favourably about the role sixth formers play in the whole school and within the curriculum. This has a positive impact on the personal development of the whole school population. They act as mentors to younger pupils and they also run clubs for them and help them with their work. There is an effective student 'voice', which is prevalent in a number of committees. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good and there are lots of initiatives to improve standards. However, these have yet to impact fully across the curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in order that girls make even better progress.
- Raise standards in the sixth form by ensuring that students have ample opportunity for independent and collaborative learning.

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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
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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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	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	1	

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?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

1 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School, London, NW5 1RP

Thank you very much for being so welcoming to us last week when we inspected your school. We were impressed by the polite, courteous behaviour we encountered as we moved around the school site.

I was so pleased when your headteacher encouraged me to visit a Year 7 singing session. What a treat! I was delighted to see so many of you enjoying yourselves and putting everything into what you were singing. It was very high quality. You told us about all the extra curricular clubs you are involved in and the visits to various places that help you to learn even better. Your school's specialist status certainly helps you to excel in mathematics and science. However, these are not the only areas of excellence! Your school offers you exceptional care, guidance and support which helps you all to become caring and responsible young people. You reach high standards in national tests and GCSEs. The leadership and management of your school are outstanding. Your headteacher and her senior and middle managers do a great job and all want you to achieve as much as possible. Your teachers teach you well and make lessons interesting and relevant. This is why we think that yours is a good school with many outstanding features.

However, even in a good school like yours, there are things that can be done to make it even better. We have asked that your headteacher makes sure that teaching continues to improve so that you all make even better progress than you do already. Secondly, we have asked that sixth formers are given more chances to learn independently of the teacher, to work together and be given sufficient time to do this.

I hope that you all continue to work hard and I wish you all the best for the future.

Kind regards

Glynis Bradley-Peat

Lead Inspector