

Chestnut Grove School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101054
Local Authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	307575
Inspection dates	12–13 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	853
6th form	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Bethell-Jones
Headteacher	Ms Margaret Peacock
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Chestnut Grove Balham London SW12 8JZ
Telephone number	020 8673 8737
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Age group	11–19
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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

Chestnut Grove School specialises in arts and modern foreign languages. It is a Foundation Arts College designated Visual Arts College. It has been a Training School since 2005, and has the Artsmark Gold. It has been recognised by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust as a highly performing specialist school. A high proportion of students are eligible for free school meals. Three quarters of students are from minority ethnic groups, with the vast majority from Black African or Black Caribbean backgrounds. A significant minority are refugees or asylum seekers. Consequently, over eighty languages are spoken in students' homes. A low proportion of students in school require English language support. A high proportion are vulnerable students and have some form of learning difficulty or disability.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Chestnut Grove School is an outstanding school. The school has very successfully created a cohesive and welcoming community for students from diverse backgrounds. The specialist arts status of the school has contributed to its creative and colourful cultural environment through highly imaginative displays of students' work. This stimulates students to develop greater self-esteem and higher aspirations. They are proud of their school, know that they are valued, and appreciate all that the school can offer them. One parent reported, 'I am very happy with Chestnut Grove and think what makes it work is the enthusiasm and dedication across all subjects!'

Students make outstanding progress in relation to their starting points and achieve average standards by the time they leave the school in Year 11. An excellent pastoral system has resulted in outstanding personal development and well-being for all students, good behaviour, and significant reductions in exclusions. The school has developed an outstanding and responsive academic and vocational curriculum that includes the specialist subjects. This motivates students to attend and enables them to make excellent progress in their studies during their time at the school. Through the school motto, 'We are a creative learning community', the specialist status has had a significant impact on the school in subjects such as performing arts and design and technology. Students have well-structured opportunities within the curriculum to develop their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and receive excellent 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 know their students well and work hard to help them achieve their potential. The school recognises that in some lessons there is an inconsistent checking of students' progress and matching of activities in lessons to students' levels. Learning support assistants are deployed effectively in lessons and students receive excellent learning support outside lessons that helps them fulfil their potential. Academic guidance is very good and all students work towards curricular targets, however, the school recognises that in some cases, not all students receive sufficiently precise guidance on their targets for improvement and is addressing this through greater monitoring and sharing of good practice.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The head teacher's leadership is inspirational to her staff. Her vision and clear direction for this inclusive school have successfully focused the highly committed managers and staff on raising achievement for all students. The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is good. The school has clearly addressed weaknesses from last inspection in achievement and standards, and this gives the school outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is good. Students enter the sixth form with average levels of attainment, except in vocational subjects where attainment is below average. A quarter of students join from other schools. In most subjects, by the time students reach Year 13 they have made good progress, and outstanding progress in art and English literature in GCE A2, where students reach high standards due to outstanding teaching. In 2007, however,

progress and standards were inadequate in business and ICT. Standards in GCE AS-level (Year 12) are below average. Effective systems of assessment and target setting contribute well to students' achievement in most subjects. The curriculum has a good choice of A-Level subjects, although there is currently little choice of Level 2 vocational subjects due to limited accommodation. Class sizes are small and, in some cases, this does not help students to maximise their learning experiences. Students receive good support in their UCAS applications to prepare them for entry to higher education, and sound guidance on choosing further education, training and employment options. The majority complete their two year sixth form courses at the school. Students play a significant part in the school community by helping younger students with reading, sports, and clubs. They take their responsibility as role models very seriously. Through consistently good leadership and management, the sixth form demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring the match of activities to students' ability levels and checking their progress in lessons.
- Raise standards further through ensuring all students receive sufficiently precise guidance on how to meet their targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students arrive in Year 7 with below national average attainment. By the end of Year 11, owing to the academic support they receive from the school and an excellent curriculum, the majority make outstanding progress. The school is in the top minority of schools with most improved achievement for its students. In 2007, standards reached in Year 9, were below national averages. Although the school has successfully raised the number of students who were successful in attaining 5 A*-C GCSEs, without English and mathematics, to national averages, it has not yet reached its target for 5 A*-C GCSEs with English and mathematics. Higher ability students and those of lower ability identified by the school as underachieving, receive timely and responsive interventions to help them achieve their potential. School data for students in the current academic year predicts significant improvements in standards in Year 9 and Year 11 for GCSEs and equivalent vocational examinations, so that the school is on line to attain its challenging targets. Students with learning difficulties make excellent progress in their work owing to well-paced individual support. Students who arrive in school as refugees and asylum seekers, make excellent progress in learning English and in adapting to British culture as the school has targeted very effective support that addresses both their pastoral and academic needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy school, and have very positive attitudes to learning. The majority of students attend regularly, are polite and welcoming, and value racial and cultural differences. Students feel safe, are clear about staying safe outside school and appreciate the importance of staying healthy. They take part in sports and other physical activities, and are aware of the implications of poor nutrition. Students are highly active in the local community. For instance, through

organising the annual arts festival and fundraising for building and equipping a school in the Gambia and their involvement in 'Freerice', an initiative that helps students improve their literacy skills at the same time as providing rice for the countries in the Developing World. In the wider community, students make an outstanding contribution through a range of fund raising activities related to the school's specialist subjects. Behaviour is good and exemplary in lessons with very few disruptions. However, in corridors, at change over of lessons, behaviour can be boisterous in some areas of the school. A minority of parents also raised this as a concern. A new initiative of paired reading with older students mentoring younger ones has been received with enthusiasm, as younger and older students see they are developing sound reading skills and gain great pleasure from these sessions. Students have responded exceptionally well to the school's outstanding initiatives to give them a significant voice and responsibility in the running of the school. Examples include student involvement on interview panels for staff, students forming part of the school's 'Transformation' Team and others working with local residents on the 'Ugly Wall Project' to discuss how the environment near the school could be improved. Students' moral, cultural and social development are outstanding and their spiritual development is good, reflected in the inclusive relationships and atmosphere of trust and mutual respect that prevail.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Teachers have supportive relationships with students and plan lessons well. In the best lessons, challenging and varied activities enable learners of all levels of ability to make outstanding progress, as in art and English literature. Students enjoy learning, are well motivated and take pride in working productively in groups. In Year 11, art students made outstanding progress in developing sketching and painting skills as a result of innovative planning that involved a trip to a studio. This inspired them to work independently and to think creatively about the environment. Good summary sessions in most lessons enable students to consolidate learning and understand what they have achieved. Most teachers use electronic whiteboards very well to enliven teaching and focus students' attention. In lessons, students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and make excellent progress. Gifted and talented students in some lessons have opportunities to undertake more challenging tasks, although not yet in all subjects. Teachers use a well-thought out 'traffic light' system to set targets for students and track progress. However, not all subjects evaluate progress against national levels regularly in lessons, and not all teachers use the data they have on their students' levels to plan activities. When given the opportunity, students enjoy the challenge of assessing themselves and their peers. Most teachers mark work constructively so students know the levels at which they are working and how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Imaginative curriculum planning ensures a close match to students' aspirations, interests and capability. The school has successfully piloted different approaches to developing the curriculum

for Years 7 to 9, and has introduced three pathways with GCSEs, applied GCSEs and BTECs in Years 10 and 11. These include applied art, business, sport, health and social care courses. The effective enterprise scheme, citizenship passport activities and additional curricular opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are very well attended. These help to prepare students well for their future economic well being. Education for personal and social education is well established through tutor time. The work related curriculum is focused through an effective work experience programme in Years 11 and 12, and the thoughtful work of the Connexions Personal Adviser in guiding students into appropriate work placements. The plasma screen in the school entrance projects excellent feedback from employers involved in the scheme. Students on linked college courses gain valuable work skills, and practical skills such as first aid. In health and social care, students' learning is enriched by regular work placements. An innovative 'Model Making Day' for Year 7 provides extended learning opportunities for pupils. The curriculum provides good additional learning opportunities for those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those new to learning English. There is a dynamic and diverse programme of extra curricular activities, including archery and a residential trip to an artists' haven in Cornwall. Enrichment has a dramatic impact on all students.

The choice of visual arts as specialist subject has had a positive impact on students' motivation and personal development. Innovative developments include a gallery area opened by a respected artist, and a more applied approach to art using a community potter for ceramics. The English department has worked successfully with an artist in residence, using stained glass window techniques to illustrate a story being read by Year 7. A member of staff with a national role in creative arts commented, 'I see clear evidence of creativity having an excellent impact across the curriculum'. The visual arts curriculum has helped to bridge the many cultures, countries and social backgrounds represented at the school, and the school has exceeded its Arts College and national targets.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school has good systems to promote student's personal, social and academic development. New students settle quickly and happily into school, irrespective of which time of the year they arrive. Students with more complex social, and emotional and behavioural needs are well supported as a result of the good relationships with staff. The school works extremely well with partner primary schools to ensure that new students settle quickly and happily into Year 7. It provides exceptionally well for vulnerable children who are happy and settled at school. The very small amount of bullying that does occur is dealt with very well and students have complete confidence that the school will resolve problems swiftly and effectively. Effective steps have been taken to reduce the number of exclusions.

Arrangements for protecting and safeguarding students are robust and secure and links with outside agencies are excellent and ensure that not only students but their families also receive the fastest possible help. Academic guidance is very good. Most students interviewed could explain their target grades and most knew what they needed to do to improve their work. The school rightly recognises the need for greater consistency of subject assessment practice.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Through the excellent leadership, energy and drive of the headteacher, there is a strong ethos of continuous improvement shared by managers and staff. Since the last inspection the school has very successfully addressed the weaknesses in achievement and standards. Managers set challenging and aspirational targets and produce detailed department action plans. Updated information on students' achievement and standards is used well to identify underachieving individuals and groups. The school's self-evaluation is well focused and is highly analytical of the work the school has done in relation to its specialist status. The school knows itself very well, and establishes the right priorities, recognising its strengths and the barriers to improvements, but has not been sufficiently self critical in relation to some areas of development for teaching and learning. Performance management is sound and support for new teachers very good. This has been especially critical, as, owing to staff's personal circumstances, the school has had an unusually high turn over of staff in the last year.

Quality assurance systems are effective. The school recognises through its own rigorous internal review process, that internal lesson observations lack consistency, with insufficient focus on matching activities to the levels of all students and to assessment procedures. In response to this the school is extending ways of sharing the very good and outstanding practice developed from its specialist status across the curriculum and implementing cross curricular links between the specialist and core subjects. The school's work on inclusion for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, has been recognised London-wide and the department is successfully spear heading successful training initiatives in other schools. Students' attendance is monitored rigorously, has steadily improved and is now satisfactory. This displays the school's commitment to inclusion and students' increasing enthusiasm for attending school. However, a small number of students who take extended term-time holidays affect the rate of attendance. Good communications exist with parents and the local communities, reflected in the high levels of attendance at parents' evenings and social activities. The school provides excellent value for money through the use of specialist funds and good financial management. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's priorities and support the school well through the role of 'critical friend'. The school's contribution to community cohesion is strong through partnerships with local businesses, artists and international projects. All students feel part of an inclusive learning environment through the sound opportunities they have to achieve their potential.

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	2
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	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	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	1	
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	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

25 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Chestnut Grove School, London, SW12 8JZ

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 your lessons, and observed that the majority of you are hard working, well behaved and respectful, and enjoy coming to school.

Your school is an outstanding school. You informed us that you feel safe in the school, and benefit from the excellent choice of courses, including the arts and creative studies, as well as the wide range of extra curricular activities the school has to offer such as sports, residential trips and reading buddies. You have made outstanding 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 know you very well and plan lessons very carefully to help you. In these lessons, we were very impressed by your motivation and keen attitudes to learning especially those of you who attend additional revision lessons at lunchtimes, after school and during holidays. The leadership and management of your school is excellent and you are continually encouraged you to achieve your potential.

We have asked the school to help you to improve your results even more, through planning activities that meet your levels and curricular targets, through greater checking of your learning in all lessons and through making sure that you all know what you need to do to improve your grades. You can help by attending punctually and regularly and asking your parents to work with the school in not taking you out of lessons during term time, as this will not help you achieve the good results both you and your parents desire.

We hope that all of you will do well and with the help of the school, realise your future ambitions.

Yours sincerely,

Meena Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector