

St Philomena's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103013
Local Authority	Sutton
Inspection number	308199
Inspection date	12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Wellham 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	1187
6th form	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Mary Howard
Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2005
School address	Pound Street Carshalton SM5 3PS
Telephone number	020 8642 2025
Fax number	020 8643 7925

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following aspects: achievement of students across the school and the sixth form, teaching and learning, aspects of curriculum innovation and leadership and management. The inspectors gathered evidence from an analysis of data about students' achievements provided by the school, observation of parts of lessons, parents' questionnaires, and discussions with senior staff, subject leaders and students. The inspectors did not investigate other aspects of the school's work in detail, but found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These judgements have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

St. Philomena's is a large 11 to 18 Catholic comprehensive school for girls. About half of the students live in the borough of Sutton and the remainder come from neighbouring London boroughs. Approximately one third of students are from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of students with English as an additional language is well below the national average. A small number of students receive specialist support for statements of special educational needs or additional help for a wide range of learning needs. The school has had technology specialist status since 1997 and gained a dual specialism with languages in 2006. It was awarded the Healthy Schools Award in May 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Philomena's is an exceptional school. It is successful, very popular and has a deservedly good reputation. The Catholic ethos underpins the friendly, purposeful environment and reflects the school's core mission of 'Learning through rigour and care'. It is highly effective in providing an inclusive and challenging education where every child is supported and encouraged to do as well as they can. Students have excellent attitudes to learning. Parents are supportive and the overwhelming majority who responded to the parental questionnaire during the inspection recorded their confidence in the school. One parent reflected this by commenting that '...the school fosters a 'can do' approach in girls and inspires ambition'.

Achievement and standards are outstanding. Students begin school with above average levels of attainment although there is a range of abilities across the school. Standards are well above average at Key Stage 3 and students achieve excellent examination results at GCSE and A Level. Students make outstanding progress overall relative to their starting points including those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

St Philomena's is rightly proud of the exceptional level of care it provides. Care, guidance and support are exemplary. As a result, students' personal development and spiritual, moral and cultural development are outstanding. Students enjoy coming to school and feel very secure and comfortable with each other and with their teachers. Students attend school regularly and their excellent behaviour creates an extremely positive learning environment. The school provides very clear guidance on behaviour and incidences of anti-social behaviour, bullying or racism are rare. Students have an excellent understanding of the need to stay healthy and currently over 800 girls participate in one or more of the 75 activities offered by the school or external providers. Links built up as part of specialist school status have created broad opportunities for learners in all key stages to work in the wider community.

The school council plays an active role in representing students' views and helps them develop a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Students make a significant contribution to the community. For example, they regularly devote considerable time and effort to raising high sums of money in response to charity appeals. The school is highly effective in developing the personal and social qualities and self-confidence that students need to transfer to further or higher education or the world of work.

Teaching and learning are outstanding overall. Learners make excellent progress because teachers have high expectations and focus on improving learning; they plan work very thoroughly, assess progress carefully and provide excellent guidance on what students need to do to improve. Students are well motivated, eager to participate and enjoy learning. They respond very well to the wide-ranging support provided for learning outside lessons through clubs, study sessions and mentoring.

The outstanding curriculum is constantly reviewed and updated in response to students' personal learning needs. Year 7 students are following a 'Challenge Curriculum' which successfully promotes the students' independent learning skills. There are opportunities for students at Key Stage 3 to take English in two years and students at Key Stage 4 follow a differentiated curriculum matched to their levels of ability. Students who benefit from additional support receive extra lesson time for literacy and numeracy. Gifted and talented learners in English enter GCSE a year early allowing them to take an AS in English in Year 11. Specialist status has enhanced the curriculum significantly by expanding information and communication technology

(ICT) resources and training throughout the school. It has enabled the school to invest in new technologies, particularly interactive whiteboards and provide excellent facilities in the newly completed learning resource centre. The introduction of a managed learning environment is specifically aimed at addressing the changing needs of learners. Comprehensive programmes in citizenship, careers, personal, social and health education support students' academic and personal development very well. There is thorough guidance on option choices and pathways for Years 9, 10 and 11. There are very effective whole-school tracking systems to monitor students' progress regularly and to intervene to support any students doing less well than they should. Students are aware of their learning targets and know how well they are doing in their efforts to reach them.

The outstanding leadership and management of the school are very effective in leading improvement and promoting high quality care and education. The energetic and dynamic headteacher leads an able and committed senior leadership team. Leadership is actively distributed through innovative 'change teams' involving staff at all levels in decision making across all areas of the school's work. Monitoring of learning and teaching is rigorous and focused on disseminating good practice within and across subjects. Self-evaluation is a collaborative process and accurately identifies key areas for development and innovation. This underpins the school's outstanding capacity for improvement. The governing body are supportive of the school. They provide an appropriate level of a challenge to ensure that areas of success are maintained and challenging targets are set.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form provides an outstanding education overall. A high proportion of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form wishing to continue their education as part of the school's positive learning environment. Students' aspirations are high and the majority proceed to university or further education. The sixth form offers a broad, largely academic curriculum that responds to the needs and demands of parents and students. A wide range of subjects is offered to AS and A2, and BTEC courses are offered in health and social care and business. Students enter the sixth form with very good results at GCSE and go on to achieve high standards in examinations. In 2005 and 2006, students made satisfactory progress relative to their starting points. There has been rapid improvement in 2007 with many students doing exceptionally well. There is some inconsistency in the teaching and learning and variation in achievement between subjects so progress is good rather than outstanding. The school has identified this as an area for improvement. Students are set challenging targets. Very few fail to complete their courses due to the effective monitoring procedures and the extensive support given. Students report that they value the good quality of teaching and the excellent relationships they have with their teachers. They receive regular and detailed feedback on their progress and they are clear about what they need to do to improve. The facilities provided in the learning resource centre and dedicated subject study areas for sixth formers contribute very well to their high standards of achievement. Sixth formers provide excellent role models for younger students and nearly all participate in opportunities for leadership. They make a significant contribution to the school and wider community. The appointment of a new director of sixth form in September 2007 as a member of the senior leadership team has improved strategic leadership and management, which is now outstanding. This underpins the excellent capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve the consistency of teaching and learning in the sixth form so that students can achieve their full potential in all subjects.

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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?	1	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
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	

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?	1	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	1
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	1
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

20 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of St Philomena's School, Carshalton, SM5 3PS

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed hearing your views and visiting some of your lessons. We think St Philomena's is an outstanding school. You achieve very high results in examinations and make excellent progress. We were very impressed with your behaviour and the respect you show each other and your teachers. You clearly enjoy school. You have opportunities to study many different subjects and to take part in a wide range of exciting activities. The efforts you make to raise money for the many charities you support are superb. Well done! You receive excellent care, support and guidance from the staff. All these things combine to help you to make outstanding progress during your time in the school both academically and personally. The headteacher and staff lead your school exceptionally well. They make sure that you are continually encouraged to have high expectations of yourselves and others. The school encourages you all to contribute to the school and the wider community and to develop the self-confidence you will need to transfer to higher or further education or the world of work.

The sixth form is an important part of the school and is led very well by the director of sixth form and his team. The sixth formers set an excellent example for younger students to follow and contribute well to the life of the school. They work hard to achieve outstanding examination results. In the past there was some inconsistency in the teaching and learning in the sixth form and not all students did as well as they could in some subjects. There has been a rapid improvement recently and we have asked the school to make sure that this continues in the future.

We wish you all at St Philomena's a very successful future.

Anne Wellham

Her Majesty's Inspector