

Our Lady's Convent High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100282
Local Authority	Hackney
Inspection number	323255
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	763
Sixth form	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Anthony Frall
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Gray
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2005
School address	6-16 Amhurst Park Stamford Hill London N16 5AF
Telephone number	020 8800 2158
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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

Our Lady's Convent School is a smaller than average school, in which the majority of students are Roman Catholics.

Nearly 90% of the students are from minority ethnic heritages. Predominant groups are of African, Caribbean, White British, and other White heritages. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average, but few are at an early level of English language acquisition. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly lower than average. Their difficulties are mostly in the areas of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Over a quarter of students are eligible for free school meals. This is above average.

The school has a specialism in languages since September 1999. It also has an intermediate level International School Award.

The sixth form provision is shared across three local schools. One of these was inspected at the same time as Our Lady's Convent School. There are a small number of boys in the sixth form.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Our Lady's is a good school. Students thrive in this caring and supportive environment, which is underpinned by the shared values of the Catholic faith. Students enthusiastically report that the best thing about the school is the quality of education it provides. This is echoed by a parent's comment which sums up the view of many, 'I am very happy with my child's progress at Our Lady's and am satisfied that she is getting a good quality of education'.

There is a very strong sense of community, which enables students to feel safe. They report bullying is rare and, where it does occur, students are confident it will be dealt with well. Students value the opportunities the school provides for them.

Students enter the school with average standards and, by the time they leave Key Stage 4, they attain above average standards. Standards in languages, the school's specialism, are well above the national average. Students' progress is good because teaching is good. Students appreciate the generous way that teachers give up their time to support them, and feel they can approach anyone for help, 'not just your own teacher'.

The impact of the language specialism is strong across the school. It has broadened students' understanding of other cultures and students appreciate the wide range of international trips available. Projects such as eTwinning with a school in Italy give students an opportunity to reflect on their own culture and their locality, as well as experience and interact with people from other cultures. This, combined with a strong community spirit in the school and regular charity work, promotes good community cohesion. Care and support are strengths of the work of the school staff. Good partnerships with external organisations further aid in promoting positive outcomes for students. One student reported, 'Before, I was difficult but now, with support, I have improved.' It is to the credit of staff that students are able to make such statements. Exclusions are below the national average and continue to reduce.

Students are confident, mature and articulate, although a few are reticent in taking active part in discussions in lessons. The school is successful in developing well-balanced, well-educated young people. A small minority of parents expressed concerns that there were not more opportunities for students and parents to share their views. However, students feel that their views are well represented through their school council, although they would like to see meetings held more frequently. As part of a project with a university, a small Year 8 student team undertakes research on issues identified by the school council. The team's role is developing further to become more active in school improvement.

The headteacher has been effective in establishing a culture that challenges middle leaders to be accountable for progress in their areas. She has also ensured that there is now a strategic focus on developing teaching and learning to raise standards further. Middle leaders speak positively about this focus, which is helping to develop more innovative practice and to share this across the work of the school. Self-evaluation is accurate. Senior leaders know the school well and take appropriate action to address areas of concern. This stands the school in good stead to improve further. Senior leaders recognise that there is inconsistency in practice in the work of middle leaders. Data are used increasingly effectively. However, their use is not systematic, and not all teachers use data well enough to ensure that teaching is closely matched to the needs of all learners.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The popular sixth form is growing in size, and provides a good education for students. Attainment on entry is slightly below average, as some students leave at the end of Year 11 to continue their education in other institutions. Standards have continued to improve over time, with notable improvements evident at the end of Year 13 in 2008. Although average overall, standards are among the highest in the local authority. Students make good progress and their achievement compares well with students of similar prior attainment nationally.

Strong leadership of the sixth form has resulted in good progress since the last inspection in improving the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum, the monitoring of progress and student guidance. These are all good and are leading to improved outcomes. However, there is a lack of clarity in how students' progress is monitored overall. Students feel well supported, find their teachers very approachable, and enjoy their lessons. They appreciate the range of subject options on offer and the effort the school makes to accommodate their needs.

A collaborative partnership with neighbouring schools has enabled a wider curriculum to be offered to students. There are good arrangements to monitor provision across the partnership, including regular meetings to review students' progress and monitor attendance. A common reporting timeline also ensures parents are kept well informed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that data is used effectively to drive up standards at all levels.
- Develop the practice of middle leaders, so that all are equally effective in monitoring and evaluating in their areas in order to promote improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with standards that are average. By the end of Year 9 they attain above average standards in English and average standards in mathematics and science. In 2008 the proportion of students attaining higher levels increased. During Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress in English and mathematics, and good progress in science, because students are given very specific guidance on what they need to do to improve.

By the end of Year 11, the standards that students reach are above average in the majority of subjects. This has been the case for a number of years. The proportion of students getting five good GCSE passes is above average, as is the proportion who attain these passes when English and mathematics are included. This represents good progress for students, including those learning English as an additional language during their time in school.

The progress of students with learning difficulties is also good. However, there are a small number of these students whose progress is less consistent. The school recognises this and has taken action to address it, including a review of leadership and provision of this area.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy coming to school. This is evident in their confident and welcoming manner and in their good attendance. They talk about the school being 'caring' and having 'interesting'

lessons. Relationships between staff and students are good, and are built on mutual respect. Students value the individual attention that their teachers give them, and say that this helps them to learn well. The majority of students are well behaved in class and around the school, although a small number of parents disagree that behaviour is good. The various elements of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good, because of good provision. Aided by an effective citizenship programme, this produces the school's harmonious, diverse community. While spiritual development is particularly strong, students would welcome more opportunities to interact with those of other faiths. Students have a good knowledge of how to be healthy and how to stay safe. Students are justifiably proud of their charity work, which includes weekly fundraising organised by the students themselves. Responsibility starts early, with each year group having its own prefects. Students' positive attitudes, combined with their good literacy, numeracy and computing skills, prepare them well for their future lives after school. Opportunities to work as part of teams, undertaking different roles and making decisions in lessons and in the wider life of the school, further develop their skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have very good subject knowledge, and very positive relationships between students and teachers are apparent. Teachers have good questioning skills, and create a supportive learning environment in which students also feel comfortable asking questions. However, not all teachers ensure that their good questioning elicits extended responses from students or encourages them to use subject-specific vocabulary. In the very best lessons, teachers ensure that all students participate, have very high expectations, and skilfully structure learning so that students make excellent progress. However, in a few lessons learning is no better than satisfactory because teachers overly lead lessons and do not demand the active participation of students. As a result, students become disengaged and progress slows.

Systems to monitor and improve teaching and learning in a systematic fashion across the school are relatively new. Although this was done previously, subject leaders were not fully involved in the process. These systems are bringing about greater consistency in how the quality of teaching and learning is monitored, and allow senior leaders to have a strategic overview of where strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie. A new teaching and learning forum has been set up, which is helping to develop teachers' practice and enthuse teachers about being more innovative in their teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets the needs of the majority of students. The school's specialist status as a Language College is reflected in the rich provision for modern foreign languages, which includes Mandarin. Through imaginative use of additional staff, there are opportunities for some students to study a fourth language outside the formal curriculum time. The school's specialism has also helped to develop cross-curricular working through collaborations such as teaching and learning geography in French. Although somewhat restricted in the provision for physical activities because of limited space, the school provides a good range of sporting activities for students to take part in, including mountain biking and

kayaking, in addition to netball and football. However, sports clubs for older students are fewer in number.

There is good provision for information and communication technology with suitable accreditation. However, provision for those not studying for an examination in this subject is not mapped, and consequently the school cannot ensure that they are getting their full entitlement. The curriculum is further enhanced by a wide range of clubs and trips, including visits to China, Barcelona, and the NASA space programme in the USA. Retreats provide all students with opportunities for spiritual reflection.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are highly committed to the care and welfare of students, and the school has an effective pastoral system in place. There are secure arrangements to ensure the safety of students, and government guidelines are met. The school pays very good attention to health and safety, through regular risk assessments. Support for vulnerable students is excellent, and it is a credit to the school that the students themselves are involved in their evaluation. An example of its effectiveness is the substantial reduction in exclusions. Although academic guidance is good overall, there are inconsistencies in the use of data and of assessment strategies, with the result that students do not always know how to improve their work. Good examples of the use of tutor time were seen, where students were involved in discussions led by teachers in a thoughtful, insightful manner. However, teachers' practice is variable, and opportunities to use this time for students' personal development are not fully utilised. There are effective partnerships with primary schools to ensure a smooth transition of students when they join school. Quite a number of students have mentors from the business world, who are helping to widen their horizons with regard to the world of work. There is a good careers education and guidance programme. An increasing number of Year 11 students choose to stay in the sixth form.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is effectively led and managed. The headteacher has successfully constructed a cohesive senior team, which is supporting her in creating a common sense of purpose and systems for developing the school further. There is a clear focus on raising standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of all students. Monitoring of the work of the school is now more robust, and there are emerging strengths among middle leaders. All staff are involved in the school's self-evaluation processes, which are helping senior and middle leaders in understanding strengths and areas requiring development. The school has now developed good processes for tracking students' progress, but the information captured is not always used fully by leaders and teachers to set challenging targets in order to raise achievement of all students.

Governors are supportive of the school and are very well informed on how the school is performing overall. They hold leaders to account, and have a good understanding of the school's priorities and what it needs to do to improve further.

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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?	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	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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 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

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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Our Lady's Convent High School, London, N16 5AF

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you very much for the very warm welcome you gave us. We valued the discussions we had with you, and I would like to take this opportunity to share our findings.

Many of you told us the best thing about your school is the quality of education that it provides for you. We agree: yours is a good school. As a result of good teaching, and your own positive attitudes, you make good progress. You join the school with standards that are average, and by the time you finish Year 11 you attain standards that are above average. Your behaviour is good, as is your attendance; this is important. You develop into mature, confident young people. We were impressed by how well you get on with each other. Many of you, and your parents, told us how much you valued the support of all staff, particularly your teachers.

The school provides you with many clubs, activities and visits. This enables you to reflect on your own culture, as well as develop an understanding of other cultures. Some of you told us that you would like more sports activities for older students.

Your headteacher provides good leadership. Senior staff in the school know the school well and what needs to be done to make the school even better. We have asked them to ensure that better use of information, about how well you have been learning, is made in their planning so that you attain even higher standards. We have also asked senior leaders to make sure that all middle leaders are as skilled as the best in your school in checking and improving the work of staff in their areas. We know you will be involved in improving your school further through the student council and the student research teams. These are important areas, which need your contribution.

I wish you and your school continued success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty's Inspector