

Sacred Heart High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100363
Local Authority	Hammersmith and Fulham
Inspection number	323264
Inspection date	14 January 2009
Reporting inspector	John Kennedy 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	796
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sister L Pratt
Headteacher	Dr C T Carpenter
Date of previous school inspection	25 January 2006
School address	212 Hammersmith Road Hammersmith London W6 7DG
Telephone number	020 8748 7600
Fax number	020 8748 0392

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: improvements since the last inspection, standards and achievement, teaching and learning, curriculum provision, academic guidance and aspects of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, lesson observations, a range of written documents including departmental self-reviews, and discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team and other staff. He also spoke with students and took into account the views of parents gathered through a questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated 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

Sacred Heart High School is a smaller than average, oversubscribed girls' Catholic school. Slightly less than a third of the students come from Hammersmith and its surrounding areas with the remainder coming from a wide geographical range of primary schools. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Students come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and about half come from minority ethnic backgrounds, much higher than the national average. Predominant proportions are from Irish, Polish, Philippine and Mediterranean European heritages. Black students of African, British, Caribbean and other origin account for 10% of the cohort. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is higher than average, while none is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of girls with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than average. The majority of these students have specific learning disabilities or behaviour, emotional and social needs.

The school was designated a Training School in 2004 and a Mathematics and Computing specialist school in 2005. It achieved Healthy School status in 2008. A new chair of governors was appointed from within the governing body in October 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Sacred Heart High School is an outstanding and fertile place of learning where students thrive academically, and in their personal and spiritual development. The hallmark of its success is its ability to improve on previously high achievements. This is because of exceptional leadership and management at all levels, excellence in teaching and curriculum provision, highly skilled staff and superb guidance and support for the students in their care. This judgement about the impact of the school is endorsed by the majority of parents, summed up by one who wrote, 'My daughter has developed into a motivated and passionate learner.'

Most students enter the school with above-average attainment. The school successfully builds on this through the quality of its provision. The girls contribute through their own motivation and hard work. Students reach standards that continue to improve year-on-year. In 2008, even though all the results have not yet been fully verified, almost every student reached nationally expected levels in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3, with high proportions achieving at the higher levels. Unvalidated data for 2008 GCSE examinations shows the proportion of students attaining five higher grade GCSEs increased to 97%, and 88% achieved these results when English and mathematics are included. Students gained A/A* grades which were well above average in 16 subjects. Achievement is excellent throughout the school, particularly in mathematics, one of the school's specialist subjects. Achievements in information and communication technology (ICT) also exceed the school's specialist targets. By the time they left in 2008, students' overall achievements, when compared to national rates, were among the top 3% nationally. There are no significant variations in the performance of any groups and some, such as students with a statement of special educational need, made particularly impressive progress. It is a mark of the school's high expectations that it wants to do even better, particularly in supporting students in achieving at the highest possible level in relation to their capabilities.

The school has successfully strengthened the curriculum since the last inspection, particularly by improving the quality of its provision for physical education (PE). This has proved popular with students and is referred to positively in the parental responses. Notwithstanding the constraints imposed by accommodation, the school has developed a highly effective and innovative partnership with a local fitness centre to increase provision at Key Stage 4 and provide additional activities such as yoga and street dance. This contributes to the very good awareness that the girls have of healthy lifestyles, which is reflected in the achievement of 'Healthy School' status in June 2008. A flexible and strongly personalised curriculum provides very good progression, support and challenge for students. It meets their aspirations well and underpins their high achievements. For instance, in the new Triple Science option all students achieved higher grades in each of the subjects with 94% achieving A*/A in biology and 100% in chemistry. Changes to the ICT curriculum, such as the introduction of Diploma in Digital Applications (DiDA) courses have resulted in improved percentages of students gaining accreditation.

Students achieve so well because of their own hard work and enthusiasm for learning, but also because of the excellent teaching and support they receive. Teachers are highly skilled in inspiring and instilling a love for learning. The proportion of teaching which is good or outstanding is exceptionally and consistently high. During a brief visit to lessons, the inspector observed a consistent pattern of purposeful learning that students clearly were enjoying. Behaviour is exemplary. Teachers know their students well and structure lessons with particular

emphasis on the quality of the learning for all. Students are helped to develop good habits for learning through self-assessment and reflecting on 'habits of mind' such as thinking flexibly, questioning and cooperative working. The school has rigorous systems in place to monitor, review and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Managers quickly identify if there is any variability in the usual high-quality lessons, and take relevant action, for instance, whether there could be sharper focus in written feedback to support independent learning, or if there is too much teacher input and students are not stretched sufficiently to move on to a higher level of thinking. In these instances, opportunities for students to hone their thinking and independent learning skills are lost.

The school's specialist status as a Training School and its subject specialisms contribute to the development and retention of highly skilled staff. The school provides first-rate and some innovative professional opportunities to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. For instance, the use of ICT enables teachers to use the Teaching and Learning Observatory to observe the practice of others and consequently reflect on and improve their own. The most recent review of the impact of specialist subjects shows that local partnership schools positively value the links with and outreach from Sacred Heart, and the benefits this has for their own staff and students.

The school's deep-rooted Catholic ethos and the staff's exceptional pastoral and academic care and guidance strongly contribute to the outstanding spiritual, social, moral, cultural and personal development of the students. The girls enjoy coming to school and this can be seen in higher than average attendance rates. Students develop quickly into mature, articulate and well-rounded young people who are exceptionally well prepared for life beyond school. They make an outstanding contribution, not only to the school but also to the local and wider community. For instance, the work of peer mentors through 'Get sorted' helps students feel supported, knowing that they can easily turn to someone other than a teacher if they need help. Some students are trained to be 'leading learners' and their observations of learning are used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school has a comprehensive strategy for promoting community cohesion. Its impact can be seen in the way the girls value and respect all strands of diversity, their participation in local initiatives such as the youth parliament and the supportive links they have developed with different places worldwide. Students are involved in the Sacred Heart TV and this enables them to share experiences from the wider community with their peers in school.

The school has rigorous procedures in place to safeguard students and the curriculum supports very well their excellent understanding of how to adopt safe practices. The school has an extremely effective system in place for targeting, monitoring and tracking individual performance (IPM). The girls and their parents value this greatly. It enables staff, parents and the girls themselves to keep a watchful eye on progress. Students spoke about how they value the fact that 'nothing is left to chance'. Staff use IPM well to target and discuss support with students when required, but also to celebrate their success when they have achieved or exceeded their goals. Inclusion is a strong feature of the school's ethos. Consequently, the staff take every step they can to ensure that students can access learning irrespective of any barrier that may exist because of personal circumstances, difficulties or disabilities. An example of this is the success they have shown in developing a virtual learning environment to enable remote access to learning. The school is looking at ways to develop this further through enabling two-way communication. On the day of the inspection, some of the students were attending an exhibition on how they could use mobile technology to support independent learning.

The school's strengths would not have been possible without excellent leadership and management at all levels, and the highly effective support and critical challenge of the governing body. A visionary and inspirational headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. She is supported by a strong, forward-thinking and energetic senior leadership team, highly competent middle managers and high calibre staff at all levels. In many instances, such as in the use of ICT, the school is at the cutting edge of best practice. At the same time, the school believes that it can be even more innovative in developing digital technology to enhance independent learning. Resources are used well at every level and, when set alongside outcomes, Sacred Heart provides outstanding value for money. The school has rigorous systems in place for internal and external review and this enables staff to have a secure and accurate understanding of strengths, and rates of progress against challenging targets. The school responds well when any areas of relative weakness are identified. For instance, the school has been successful in developing its new library provision with the appointment of staff due to start the week following the inspection. The headteacher's comment, that 'The best does not happen by accident', underpins the school's sharp focus on continuous and planned improvement. Leaders and managers have been successful in setting this within a climate of care and support for staff and students alike. Given its history of accomplishments to date, the improvements made since the last inspection, and the quality of provision at every level, the school has an outstanding capacity for continued improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on existing strong practice through teaching and the use of resources to develop students' skills and opportunities for more independent 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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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
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**

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sacred Heart High School, London, W6 7DG

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school. Yours is an outstanding school.

Your excellent achievements are not just the result of excellent teaching but your own hard work and determination. I visited some of your lessons briefly and saw impeccable behaviour and your enjoyment of learning. This is one of the reasons why your attendance is so high. The school has made a number of very good changes to the curriculum. You told me that you are pleased about the increased opportunities in Years 10 and 11 to take part in PE and activities such as yoga. I was impressed with the many ways you make a positive difference to the lives of others in school and beyond it. I was very interested to hear about the impact of peer mentors and the 'leading learners' who help the school identify and share with teachers what makes for good learning. This helps the school be more effective as a Training School for teachers.

The quality of individual care and attention that your teachers and other staff pay you is first class. They work hard with you to track your progress through IPMs. I know that this has been helpful for them and for you in making sure you get the right kind of support and in good time. It also helps identify when you have reached or exceeded your goals. You value the fact that the school helps you celebrate this. Your headteacher, governors and staff at all levels are highly skilled. They have been instrumental in helping the school go from success to success every year.

I was impressed with how creative the school is in working with you to find new and better ways ICT can be used, such as through virtual learning environments and using mobile technology to improve ways of learning. Teachers and other staff work hard to help you develop good learning habits and the skills to be reflective and independent learners. This is another reason why most of you achieve the kind of results you do. The school knows that it can continue to develop ways to improve these learning skills both inside and outside the classroom. I agree and I have asked the school to make that a particular focus between now and the next inspection.

Congratulations for helping make your school the outstanding place it is. I wish you every success for your futures.

Yours faithfully

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector