

The London Oratory School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100365
Local Authority	Hammersmith and Fulham
Inspection number	323265
Inspection date	19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Carmen Rodney HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1383
Sixth form	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Very Reverend Ignatius Harrison
Headteacher	Mr David McFadden
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2006
School address	Seagrave Road London SW6 1RX
Telephone number	020 7385 0102
Fax number	020 7381 7676

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Introduction

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

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

- the progress of minority ethnic pupils, particularly those of Caribbean and African descent, and of those at the early stage of learning English
- the flexibility and relevance of the curriculum in meeting the needs of all pupils
- the behaviour of a small minority of boys, the support they receive, and the impact on outcomes.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headmaster and senior staff, as well as a range of heads of department, support staff, pupils, parents, and the chair of governors. Parts of lessons were observed; documents were analysed, including the school development and strategic plans, minutes of governors' meetings, whole-school and subject reviews, external reports and policies, as well as the parents' questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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

Founded in 1863 by the Fathers of the London Oratory, The London Oratory School is Roman Catholic and is much larger than most secondary schools. A very small proportion of pupils are girls, but they do not join the school until they enter the sixth form. Half of the pupils are of White British descent, with the remaining coming from a diverse range of cultural heritages, the largest single minority ethnic groups being drawn from other White backgrounds or African heritages. While the school's deprivation index is high, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportions with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or a statement of special educational needs are in line with the national averages. These learning needs or disabilities are mostly related to behaviour, dyslexia, autism, or physical or moderate learning needs. Although not a designated specialist school, The London Oratory offers a specialist music course to twenty musically gifted pupils each year, from seven-year-old boys in the Junior House to 18-year-olds in the sixth form.

The report uses the school's preferred choice of terms to describe year groups; therefore, pupils in the Junior House are referred to as juniors - for example J1 is equivalent to Year 3 - while those in the senior school are described as first form (Year 7) and so forth.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The London Oratory School provides an outstanding education in all areas of its provision. This first-class education is offered to pupils drawn from across London. The school gives outstanding value for money and these facts are widely recognised and applauded, first of all within the local community where parents seize the opportunity to send their sons to the Oratory, a school that is heavily oversubscribed with at least six applications for each place. Second, the academic community also acknowledges these facts, as the Oratory successfully helps all of its sixth-form pupils to enter university, with two thirds entering the most prestigious universities in the United Kingdom. Pupils, parents, staff, governors and past, present and future Oratorians are rightly proud of the school, which is an exceptional place to be.

Pupils enter the school, aged 7 or 11 through to the sixth form, with high ambitions to achieve well. The vast majority of pupils are highly motivated and in their work proudly exhibit the Oratory's strengths: its strategic direction and mission statement. As such, pupils preserve the core values which are enshrined in the Catholic ethos, and thereby ensure that the traditions and renowned high standards are sustained.

Standards are exceptionally high at the end of each key stage, and pupils' performance in external examinations is in the top 5% of schools nationally. Standards have been high since the last inspection, and pupils' achievement is ahead of similar high-achieving schools nationally. Pupils from minority ethnic groups exceed the expected standards for their respective groups, and this is particularly so for those of African and Caribbean descent. Similarly, pupils with specific learning needs make outstanding progress and also exceed the national average for their groups. Nevertheless, the school does not stand still. Leaders and managers recognise that although all pupils make outstandingly good progress, the concept of excellence, as part of the school's core values, is reinforced at all times. Consequently, steps are being taken to ensure that lower-attaining boys, the increasing number of statemented pupils, and those at the intermediate or advanced stage of mastering English as a second language, can strive to do their very best. Additionally, there is very good attention to ensuring that more pupils can obtain the highest grades, A*/A, in the GCSE examinations in all subjects.

Pupils' academic progress is outstanding, because the quality of provision is never less than excellent. Pupils of all abilities respond very well to the excellent quality of teaching with energy and creativity. Teachers know their subjects very well, providing a blend of scholarship and knowledge of pupils' learning needs. Pupils say that they learn very well because their teachers are '...creative and give help; they use different approaches, organise trips to broaden our horizons, and use debates, and do not stick to the course, but provide opportunities to ask questions and will give us answers'.

Since the last inspection, leaders have spread the benefits of good practice across the school. Teaching is therefore more adventurous, and there is greater use of information and communication technology. Teachers encourage intellectual enquiry by enabling pupils to explore their learning, as was observed in a physics lesson where fifth formers considered the use of radioactive materials. Similarly, in design and technology, junior boys, ably supported by sixth formers, confidently developed a design brief to construct a model vehicle.

The academic curriculum is outstanding and prepares pupils very well for the next stage of their education. The fast-track curriculum enables gifted and talented pupils to work at full stretch, and offers them the opportunity to begin advanced level courses very early. The boys

were explicit about the high value they place on the education they are receiving, and feel that the opportunities at the school would not be available to them elsewhere. Pupils take pleasure in pursuing the academic curriculum, but wish to have more flexibility in the choice of courses provided. Courses are enriched by the co-curricular provision, which is outstanding. For example, pupils can hone their skills in unusual sports such as fencing, take part in national and international trips, and listen to prominent visiting speakers.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding, and has improved further since the last inspection. The school places a very strong emphasis on the Every Child Matters agenda, which parents, staff and pupils regard as being central to the distinctive characteristics of the school. Safeguarding procedures are fully met. Pupils' progress is regularly and systematically monitored, with academic and pastoral staff, including the special needs department, working together to share and use information effectively with parents and pupils. The boys spoken to value the careers guidance, but indicated that they would wish to have more information when selecting their options in third and fifth form in preparation for higher education. The support services, internally and externally, are increasingly important to boys who will, as required, seek out the school chaplain, counsellor, nurse or learning support department without any stigma or fear.

Provision for personal development is outstanding and underpins the school's aims to produce leaders of tomorrow. Pupils were emphatic that despite the strong discipline, they like the parameters in which they are expected to operate because the '...good discipline keeps everyone in check and provides them with guidelines, which they can apply outside of school'. Exceptional attendance and excellent behaviour confirm pupils' personal enjoyment of attending school 195 days each academic year. They thrive in the environment which values their views, cultural heritages and foibles. The boys were very clear in their pronouncement that discrimination does not exist in the school, and as such, the roots of their religious conviction ensure that there is outstanding provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The vast majority of parents support the school. Their response to the questionnaire, and conversation with the lead inspector, indicated that the school has not failed their expectations. They view the ethos and discipline as major factors in the high achievement of their children. Parents say that their children are very happy and look forward to attending daily. They feel that communication has improved at all levels, and like the responsiveness of staff, from the receptionist to the senior leaders. Parents feel that the staff are listening increasingly to their views. They place a high value on their input to the strategic plan and enjoy the increasingly open dialogue and consultation with the staff.

The leadership and management of the school are exemplary. The headmaster has built on the strong foundations and, without disturbing the ethos or core values of the school, he has carefully and sensitively steered the staff through the complexities of change. For example, the pupils indicated that he regularly seeks their views and has increased their voice in the running of the school. The headmaster has the very able support of the senior staff, heads of department and housemasters, who have a very good understanding of the school's work. He leads a cohesive team, and together they apply the best value principles - compare, challenge, compete, consult - and there is increasing ownership of the changes. They ensure that the school runs smoothly, and make a strong contribution to the inclusive ethos in which every boy is known and nurtured. Community cohesion is outstanding and is embedded in the school's work, which recognises the importance of strong local and international links.

The capacity for progressive development is outstanding, as leaders and managers are committed to moving the school forward. For example, the new behaviour policy has had a significant impact on reducing exclusions and sustaining the interests of a very small number of pupils who are potentially at risk of exclusion. The senior staff are currently researching the relevance of introducing vocational courses into the curriculum. They have identified some shortcomings in their communication with parents and in the canteen facilities, which they have clear plans to address. Consultation is therefore central to the leadership team. A strong evidence base is used to identify priorities for improvement, as leaders consider their cost, processes and impact on the Oratory's core values, which are traditionally sharply focused on giving pupils the best. Governors are very well informed. They challenge the school's work and carry out their statutory duties well.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This outstanding sixth form makes an excellent contribution to the personal development and academic achievement of its pupils. Sixth formers relish the wealth of opportunities provided to develop their leadership skills or make a positive contribution to the school and wider community. For example, volunteering their services spreads from the school community to the immediate, wider and international community. Pupils' willingness to serve, know and understand others contributes to cultivating and moulding their positive attitudes, and fully reflects the principles of community cohesion as well as the foundations of the school's ethos.

The curriculum is well matched to the needs of pupils, and those on the advanced business course welcome increased curriculum choice in the lower sixth form. The curriculum is enhanced by a very full co-curricular programme, which plays a significant role in furthering pupils' academic understanding and broader interpersonal skills. The excellent teaching, when combined with the outstanding curriculum and highly structured care, guidance and support, ensures that both pupils and their teachers reach the challenging targets, which have continuously led to exceptionally high standards and outstanding achievement. Pupils also attribute their high level of attainment to the open-door policy, which provides immediate access to advice and support. As one pupil said, 'If ever there was a hint that I needed help or was experiencing doubt, I would know who to turn to.' The director of sixth form has a clear vision for sustained improvement and provides excellent leadership. Since the last inspection, rigorous tracking procedures have been put in place to ensure that all pupils are performing to the best of their ability.

What the school should do to improve further

The London Oratory is an exceptional school; its monitoring systems, continuous use of data and increasing consultation for improvement mean that the strategic plan already incorporates the next steps.

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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	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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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	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	1
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

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 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	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**

02 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The London Oratory School, London, SW6 1RX

Thank you all for contributing to the inspection report about your school. There is so much to say about your school that sifting through the evidence base provided exciting reading, but also presented difficulties about choosing some of your comments. A few are included in the report, as the inspection was largely about you.

The school is highly successful and its performance is in the top 5% of schools nationally. As a result of this remarkable achievement, the school successfully helps all its sixth-form pupils to enter university, with two thirds entering the most prestigious universities in the United Kingdom. You have much to boast about, so congratulations! This is indeed a tribute to you, your teachers, parents and governors and, above all, to the headmaster and senior staff, who have a clear vision of ensuring that you all achieve your best.

The school embraces a core values system which you and your parents like. The values of 'faith, knowledge and understanding, respect, individuality, tradition, and justice' have been used very well to prepare you for the future. A comment from a member of the sixth form captures your pride in and enjoyment of your school: 'It's just good fun - if I don't come in through illness, I'm gutted.' You were quite clear in articulating the headmaster's vision for the school: that it prepares you for life; gives you high goals and leadership qualities; and involves you in the parishes and wider community in England and abroad.

You achieve very well because you are well taught, highly motivated and are easily inspired to aim for the best. You clearly relish the opportunity to prove to your teachers that you can match or beat the challenges they present. Your maturity is impressive, as is your behaviour and your positive attitudes to learning. The school provides exceptionally good care so that you can receive guidance and support as required. You enjoy the co-curricular activities, particularly the sports, and even though you participate in many rugby matches, you are very keen that the school should consider further expansion of the sports programme.

The headmaster, senior staff and all managers and governors know the school very well and what they need to do to sustain the past, present and future success. You explained that the headmaster listens to you. We urge you to seize the moment and work with him and your teachers, parents and governors to maintain the high standards.

Yours faithfully

Carmen Rodney

Her Majesty's Inspector