

Catford High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100742
Local Authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	323334
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	788
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Alethea Dougall
Headteacher	Mr Bob Ellis
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Bellingham Road London SE6 2PS
Telephone number	020 8697 8911
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Catford High School is a business and enterprise college serving a culturally diverse community. It was previously a girls' school and admitted boys to Year 7 for the first time in September 2006. Currently, therefore, there are boys and girls in Years 7, 8 and 9 but only girls in Years 10 and 11. A higher proportion of students join the school after the start of Year 7 than is usual. Many of these students come from outside the United Kingdom and fifty languages are spoken by students. Some arrive as asylum seekers or refugees. About half of the students speak English as an additional language. A quarter of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many of these have dyslexia or social and emotional difficulties. The school has a progress unit for twelve children with moderate learning difficulties. The school is part of a federation of four schools, including an academy for sixth form students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Catford High is a good school. It has continued to improve since the last inspection and has some outstanding features. The school has dealt successfully with significant challenges during the last three years. From being a girls' school it has become co-educational; it is still in the throes of major building works that have inevitably disrupted classrooms and playgrounds; it has experienced a change of leadership with the appointment of a new headteacher and several new members of the senior leadership team. The governing body and leadership team have worked very effectively to ensure a smooth transition in all of these areas. Parents are very supportive of the new headteacher. The school's dedicated staff have responded with enthusiasm and a real confidence that they can rise to any challenge.

Teachers' optimism and belief is based on their experience over the past year. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in the midst of so many changes, there was a dip in the standards achieved by students in 2007. The decline was quickly reversed in 2008, so that Year 11 students gained the school's best ever results. Outstanding care, guidance and support ensure that underachieving students are quickly identified and given extra help. Support is particularly effective in Years 10 and 11, because the school has identified this as the immediate priority. Students enter the school with well below average standards but achieve well. By the end of Year 11 they reach standards that are just below the national average. Excellent self-evaluation has now identified the need to improve standards in Years 7 to 9, especially for boys, who start school with exceptionally low attainment. With support from London Challenge, the school has clear plans to help these students to reach challenging targets, but they are yet to be fully implemented. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. Teachers know their students well and have high expectations of them. They use assessment well to plan challenging lessons but miss opportunities to enable students to evaluate how well they are achieving in lessons.

Effective intervention has also ensured that students' attendance has improved. Poor attendance clearly had a negative effect on examination results in 2007 but it has since improved significantly, as students have responded to many incentives and rewards. The large majority of students now enjoy coming to school. They are excited about the imminent completion of the new buildings. They feel safe in school and in the local neighbourhood. This is partly because students themselves make an excellent contribution to the community. Student council members have worked with community police to identify trouble spots. They proudly say, 'No matter what the problem is, we always seem to come up with a solution.' This is one sign of the school's good contribution to community cohesion. Students from different ethnic groups interact well, understand differences in cultures and beliefs and achieve equally well. The school's specialist status has improved the curriculum and helps students to develop a good understanding of the world of work, business and finance.

The school's track record of good improvement, good leadership and management, and forthcoming move to new accommodation, means that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement plans to raise standards and achievement in Years 7 to 9.
- Ensure teachers consistently enable students to evaluate how they can improve their work in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students achieve well. They enter the school with standards that are well below the national average. In recent years, students' attainment on entry has been exceptionally low. Despite this, the school has been successful in enabling students to achieve well in nearly all years. Until 2007 there was a steadily rising trend in examination results. There was a significant dip in standards in 2007, when results in national tests in Year 9 and GCSE were well below average. However, teachers have responded very well to the challenge of quickly reversing this decline. Results in 2008 improved significantly and students gained some of the school's best ever GCSE results. Almost a third of students gained five or more grades A* to C, including English and mathematics and overall standards were just below the national average. Students did particularly well in information and communication technology (ICT), art, French, sociology and history. This represents good achievement and current Year 11 students are on track to gain even better results. Standards also improved in Year 9, to the level that had previously been reached in 2006.

Current standards in Year 9 are lower than last year, because these students' attainment on entry to the school was exceptionally low. Students are making good progress but boys are currently reaching lower standards than girls. However, the school continues to set challenging targets. It has identified ways in which it can provide extra support to ensure that these students also achieve well. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the very good range of support that the school provides. Students from different ethnic groups make equally good progress because teachers monitor their progress carefully and use extra support from the local authority effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school actively promotes healthy lifestyles and encourages students to adopt these. Students show confidence in explaining their understanding of a variety of health and personal safety issues, covering alcohol and drugs education, sexual health and dietary awareness. Despite the lack of play and recreation areas while new accommodation is being built, students behave well and think of each other's safety. Those with social and emotional difficulties respond well to support for anger management and courses in social and emotional aspects of learning. There is little bullying and students trust teachers to deal effectively with any that occurs. The school is an orderly community and students develop tolerance and a good understanding of each other's cultures.

Students enjoy participating and learning through activities that support their good spiritual, cultural, social and moral development. In particular, their contribution to the community is outstanding. Members of the student council represent all students very effectively and rightly feel that they have a real voice in decision-making. They explained that the toilets are much improved because students agreed to keep them clean. They have organised 'green wardens' and all students are now committed to keeping the school clean and litter-free. Students willingly take on responsibilities as prefects, peer supporters to younger students and library assistants. Some represent the school on the Catford police youth panel and have helped to make the local community a safer place to live.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are well established and teachers are aware of their strengths and areas for development. They recognise that good relationships between teachers and students are a key factor in enabling students to learn well. Teachers use praise effectively to reward and encourage students so that they behave well, are attentive and want to learn. Teachers have high aspirations for their students. They often use their own good subject knowledge to challenge students to think carefully, through skilful questioning in class discussions. Consequently, students develop confidence in expressing their opinions and respond sensitively to each other's ideas.

Teachers plan a good variety of activities in lessons, to maintain students' interest and a good pace of learning. They usually pitch work at the right level to challenge students at different levels of attainment. They are beginning to make effective use of technology, although some teachers do not use interactive whiteboards very imaginatively. Teachers use support staff effectively, involving them in lesson plans so that they can encourage students of all abilities to learn. Teachers share clear objectives with students but do not always revisit them at the end of lessons. Teachers therefore miss some opportunities to enable students to evaluate their own work and that of their classmates. In particular, students do not always recognise precisely what they need to do to reach a higher GCSE grade or National Curriculum level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad range of suitable courses for all students. Older students are very complimentary about the choices they have when they move from Year 9 to Year 10 and one teacher rightly said, 'Whatever you come in with, there's something for you.' Students also say they are pleased with the frequent opportunities to go on visits and excursions. One of them said, 'You don't just go to have fun, you go to work and learn - but you do have fun as well!' Students respond well to the good range of extra curricular opportunities that the school provides. A successful link with the local theatre for a forthcoming performance of 'Macbeth' is one example of recent innovations.

The school has effective links with Lewisham College, the Crossways Federation and the North Downham Training Project to improve what it offers. These links have supported the development of good work-related courses for all students who can benefit from them, including those with high attainment. In addition, the school provides academically challenging courses, such as triple science, and is exploring the possibility of introducing diplomas in the near future. Teachers provide a lot of encouragement to students to consider the relevance of their subjects to future employment, arranging talks and visits to emphasise this. The school's specialist status has improved provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT. Provision for ICT has significantly improved since the last inspection. As a result, students develop good skills to support their future economic well-being.

Senior staff have a clear idea of what they need to do to improve the curriculum further. They are rightly considering the needs of boys so that courses will appeal to them as much as girls, especially when the first group of boys moves into Year 10 next year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Robust child protection procedures are in place and statutory checks on staff are managed efficiently. A secure perimeter around the school during its re-development has meant that students feel safe and secure. Students respond well to encouragement to liaise with community policing in the interests of wider neighbourhood safety. Provision for careers education is good and students speak very highly of the support they receive when making their choices. The school's regular enterprise initiatives support many students to have high aspirations. A sample of Year 11 students talked realistically about their potential to have careers in accountancy, architecture, medicine and sports science.

The 'Genesis' project ensures staff have a substantial prior knowledge of students' needs. Consequently, students make a smooth transition to their new secondary school. Specific support in 'Access' and 'Progress' groups is available to vulnerable students to support their social and emotional development and confidence in learning. Similarly, support for students with English as an additional language is very well coordinated with good identification of needs to support progression.

There is very good academic guidance and the school has developed systems for tracking student achievement that are a growing strength. Targets are regularly shared with students and parents are kept informed by half-termly reports. When students are identified as underachieving, intervention is usually swift and effective. The Black Pupils Achievement Programme and White Pupils Achievement Project have proved successful in preventing underachievement among these ethnic groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders and managers at all levels have responded impressively to recent challenges. The new headteacher has already established a clear vision for the future of the school. The recently expanded senior leadership team say that they want to help young people to transform their lives for the better. They are working effectively because, as they say, 'There's a real clarity about what we're trying to do.' All teachers clearly share a belief that they can help students to build on their current achievements.

The school's procedures for self-evaluation are outstanding. They have enabled teachers to identify areas where students were underachieving. As a result, they have implemented well-focussed interventions that have had a positive effect in raising standards over the last year. They receive very good support from a dedicated, well-informed governing body and the local authority. This has enabled the transition to co-educational provision to be managed smoothly and the disruption caused by the gradual move to new buildings to be kept to a minimum. In particular, planning for the appointment of the new headteacher was careful and systematic, enabling a very smooth transition of leadership. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion and ensures that all students have equal opportunities to achieve as well as they can. A key priority of the school's development plan is to raise the status of the school in the eyes of the local community, so that more parents choose to send their children to the local school.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	2
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	2
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?	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
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**

08 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Catford High School, London, SE6 2PS

The inspection team really enjoyed visiting your school recently and we would like to thank you for your warm welcome. You expressed your views very well. We agree with you that your school is a good place to learn. We were particularly impressed with how well you get on with each other and your teachers - especially as you have so little space to play while the new classrooms are being built. Our main finding is that Catford High provides you with a good quality of education.

These are the best things about the school.

- You receive excellent care, guidance and support from staff that help you to develop well, personally and socially.
- You make good progress with your work and achieve well.
- You support each other and the local community extremely well.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.

To make your school even better we have asked staff to:

- carry out plans to support some students in Years 7 to 9 so that they can reach higher standards and challenging targets
- help you to work out more exactly how well you have done in lessons and how you can improve further.

Thank you again for your help. I hope you continue to work hard, do well and make the most of the good opportunities that the school provides for you. Enjoy the new buildings when they are ready!

Yours sincerely

William Robson

Lead Inspector