

Central Foundation Girls School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100975
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	323387
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1401
Sixth form	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Cruse
Headteacher	Dr Anne Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 March 2006
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, students and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents, including governing body minutes, school and faculty development plans and records relating to vulnerable students. In addition, inspectors considered the responses on the 68 parental questionnaires which were returned.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress of students in mathematics and science
- the effectiveness of teaching in challenging all learners, including higher attaining students and students with learning difficulties
- the use of assessment in setting challenging targets and in ensuring they are met
- the effectiveness of leadership at all levels in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school in order to promote improvement.

Information about the school

Central Foundation Girls' School is a large, oversubscribed school. It is on a split site, with Years 7 to 10 on one site and Years 11 to 13 on another.

A very high proportion of students are from minority ethnic heritages; the predominant group is of Bangladeshi heritage with a smaller proportion of students of White British, African and Caribbean heritage. There are also a small number of Travellers of Irish heritage. Nearly three quarters of students speak English as an additional language; this is well above average. A greater than expected number of students leave or join the school at times other than normally expected. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very high.

The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The predominant learning difficulties include behavioural, emotional and social problems, and speech, language and communication difficulties, including dyslexia. A small number of students have physical disabilities.

The school is a performing arts specialist college and has a second specialism in humanities. It is also a training school and has won several awards, including the International School award, the ICT mark (information and communication technology) and Quality in Study Support.

Since the last inspection the school has experienced considerable turbulence in staffing, including changes in leadership at middle and senior levels.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The headteacher's thoughtful and considered vision has contributed to the drive for improvement that is evident at many levels in this school. Systems to check the work of the school are now strong and support the school's capacity to improve further. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance and the areas for development across the school. A large number of senior and middle leaders are relatively new to the school. They are knowledgeable but have not yet had time to embed the systems that have been set up.

Students' achievement and the quality of teaching they experience are satisfactory overall. In many of the lessons observed, students made good progress because teachers structure learning well to engage them in meaningful activities. However, in a significant proportion of lessons, students' progress is no better than satisfactory because teachers' expectations are not high enough and they do not always plan and deliver lessons which take into account students' prior learning or match teaching to students' current needs. This is particularly the case for higher ability and gifted and talented students.

Many staff know their students well and are mindful of the potential barriers to achievement. They are committed to improving the life chances of students, particularly vulnerable students, and this is evident in the good provision and outcomes for many, but not for all. Senior leaders' assessment of the quality of teaching and learning is accurate and this informs actions to improve it further. Although the trend of improvement is not fully evident in standards, senior and middle leaders have addressed key issues that resulted in a fall in standards last year, for example, through increased rigour in monitoring subjects.

New subject leaders in mathematics and science are aware of where the weaknesses in the past have hindered progress and are addressing these. Teachers are working collaboratively to improve schemes of work and closer attention is being paid to entering students for the appropriate level of examination. Support is also being provided for inexperienced teachers through joint planning and teaching. Subject leaders are focused on ensuring teachers use data to challenge students and raise expectations. An example of this was seen in a lower-ability science lesson where, as a result of good teaching and high expectations, students were aiming for higher standards than previously. Students value the support teachers that teachers provide for them and report that teachers are motivated and dedicated and listen to them.

The school's specialism in the performing arts contributes much to students' enjoyment of school. They enthusiastically take part in the many performances put on for the school and local community. Although targets were not met in the specialist subjects last year, standards are improving and some very good examples of students' work and teaching were seen in these subjects. Across the well planned curriculum, provision for literacy is strong but a coherent numeracy strategy has yet to be developed.

In line with its second specialism, a significant strength of the school is its work in promoting community cohesion. This is founded on a detailed understanding of the needs of students and the local community. The school has the confidence to handle sensitive issues with authority. Examples of innovative practice include providing training for parents enabling them to access employment, and curriculum-based work with senior citizens in order to promote links between young and older people. Staff are in the process of training students as 'Community Cohesion Champions' who will be in a position to inform senior leaders of emerging issues and mediate between students.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards by improving the quality of teaching and learning, in particular by:
 - developing consistency in the quality of teaching within and across subjects, particularly in mathematics and science
 - ensuring assessment data are used to plan lessons that challenge all learners, particularly the higher-attaining and the gifted and talented students
 - developing the effectiveness of teacher/student dialogue in lessons in order to check the understanding of all students and ensure they are clear about how to improve
 - planning strategically to minimise the impact of turbulence in staffing.
- Develop numeracy across the curriculum.
- Ensure that senior and middle leaders embed the systems that have been set up to promote improvement consistently and rigorously by:
 - ensuring robustness in holding middle leaders to account for the quality of standards in their areas
 - developing rigour in monitoring all aspects of the work of the school to ensure school improvement plans are implemented.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3

Students' achievement is satisfactory. The teaching they experience is inconsistent,

and so therefore is their learning. Where learning was good students were engaged actively in lessons, worked diligently and purposefully and made good progress. However, in some lessons understanding of their work is not always promoted through explanations and the use of resources. Higher-attaining students, particularly in mathematics, are not always stretched suitably. Often in lessons students' behaviour is exemplary. They have good attitudes, are confident and keen to learn. They support each other very well in discussions and collaborative activities. However, on occasions when teaching is not engaging, their standards of behaviour slip.

Given their starting points, all groups of students make at least satisfactory progress. However, there are differences in the standards some students attain. Senior staff have rightly targeted specific activities to raise the standards attained by White British girls in particular.

The provision for vulnerable groups in Year 7 is of a very high level. They are taught in a setting similar to the one they experienced in primary school. This is ensuring they make good progress in lessons and are able to access the curriculum. The progress of other students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the progress of all students.

Students join the school with average standards. In 2008, standards were below average, particularly so in mathematics and science. The proportion of students attaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics fell and was significantly below average. This was as a result of considerable turbulence in staffing in key departments but also due to some students being entered for an inappropriate level of examinations and an unsuitable ICT course. These issues have been addressed and students' learning in lessons and tracking data indicate that progress is now satisfactory and the standards students are attaining are broadly average.

The school's specialism has a considerable impact on students' good achievement in English and citizenship but also in developing them as confident citizens, mindful of their responsibilities. Many girls report that diversity is a strength of the school. As one told inspectors, they have 'many opportunities to experience other cultures and meet new people'. They value highly their school community and enthusiastically take part in the many opportunities on offer. This included sharing with staff their research findings on the need for increased challenge for Year 7 students. The cultural development of the girls, underpinned by valuable extra-curricular and enrichment activities, is excellent. The school celebrates Traveller History Month. It also has meaningful exchange visits, such as to South Africa, which resulted in a jointly produced cookery book and video conferencing with an Iraqi school. Students participate actively in an extensive range of fundraising activities.

There is an active student council and many students report its effectiveness in taking forward issues that concern them. Students have the opportunity to take part in innovative practice, such as supporting the training of teachers through observing teachers, providing feedback and then jointly planning lessons. The quality of their observations is high. Opportunities such as these increase the confidence of students and raise their aspirations. Senior leaders are mindful to target students who may

not otherwise be engaged in such activities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

The majority of teaching is informed by good subject knowledge. In many lessons students work with diligence, and good relationships between students and staff were seen. In the best lessons:

- teachers use a wide range of resources to enhance students' understanding, including good use of interactive whiteboards to bring learning to life
- a range of learning styles is fostered, including group work and paired work
- teachers make effective use of students' own work to exemplify how to attain the highest standards.

There is a good focus in many lessons on developing literacy and technical vocabulary. However, teachers do not always check that all students have understood or use key vocabulary. Inspectors saw very good examples of written feedback to students which provided them with specific guidance on how to improve their work but practice within and across subjects is inconsistent.

Some teachers plan well for students who are learning English as an additional language or have learning difficulties, for example, by supporting them through questioning in lessons and well thought-out seating plans. However, too often teaching does not fully cater for the needs of these students in lessons. In addition, planning does not always translate into practice and students are not targeted to ensure their active participation in lessons. While good teaching was observed so was weaker teaching. This was exemplified by:

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

- a slow pace of learning
- weak management of behaviour, and
- insufficient account taken of students' prior skills.

Senior leaders recognised that in the past teachers' expectation of students were not high enough. This year challenging targets have been set centrally. These are reviewed regularly and, combined with work in departments to identify precisely the areas where students' learning is weaker, are helping to raise standards. Students know their targets and through this process know what they need to do to improve. However, this work is not yet embedded in all teachers' practice.

The curriculum, enhanced substantially by a range of enrichment activities, offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses designed to meet the needs of the students. Regular review ensures provision is responsive to their needs. A significant outcome of this is the very high number of students who stay in further education or training beyond school leaving age. The performing arts have suffered from turbulence in staffing but this has settled and both the range of courses and their take-up have increased.

Senior leaders are proactive in raising aspirations. Examples of this include visits to Cambridge University for disaffected students and those potentially the first in their families to attend university. Furthermore, there are programmes to encourage girls into science and engineering courses, such as the 'Girls' geek dinner'.

Senior leaders have built up considerable experiences in working with a range of partners and as such they are strategic in responding to the differing needs of the students. An example of this is the positive relationships built with the Traveller community which has resulted in increased attendance of students and parents' involvement in school life. The multi-agency support panel meetings provide an extensive range of carefully targeted support for vulnerable or at-risk students. These are having a positive impact on students' self-esteem, behaviour and, consequently, their achievement. Anger management courses, mentoring and targeted use of internal exclusion have resulted in a reduction in exclusions. The use of tutor time to develop students further is not yet fully effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and her senior team are successfully raising teachers' expectations of students' capabilities. This is supported by regular opportunities for staff to take part in professional development activities. Line management of departments has been strengthened and middle leaders are held accountable for the quality of standards in their area. Last year this process was not as robust. The school

development plan is clear and well focused; however, its implementation is not yet consistent. Support staff feel integrated into the life of the school and attend training with teachers.

Equality of opportunity and promoting cohesive communities are at the heart of the school's work. The extensive range of work to develop cohesion within the school and in the local community is outstanding. The promotion of equalities is evident in the work to support vulnerable students, in the strong voice students feel they have in the school, and in the extensive range of partnerships, including with parents, that are in place to promote the well-being of students. The impact on educational outcomes for all students has yet to be fully seen.

Governors are well informed and make good use of the committee structure to support and challenge the school in a robust and effective manner. At the time of the inspection, systems to keep students safe were strong and met all government guidelines.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students make good progress in the sixth form across a range of courses and retention rates are high. Students' progress is outstanding in business studies, politics, psychology and religious studies. There is some variation in subjects such as mathematics and science but tracking data show progress in these subjects is improving. Lessons in the sixth form are exemplified by good pace and a high level of challenge for all, as well as opportunities for students to learn independently. In a few lessons, teachers do not ensure the more reticent students are engaged fully in class dialogue.

There are strong systems to provide academic guidance to students and these aid their good progress. The systems include one-to-one reviews with tutors and subject teachers. Students feel these are very important in guiding them in improving their work. As in the main school, the curriculum offer is broad and provides students with a wide range of appropriate courses; as a result, student numbers in the sixth form are steadily increasing.

The outstanding opportunities students have in the main school to contribute to their communities continue into the sixth form. For example, students have led workshops on developing student voice for other schools and have been involved in training teachers new to the profession.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Fewer than 5% of parents responded to the parental questionnaire and of these the majority were positive about the work of the school in ensuring positive outcomes for their daughters. A few parents felt that the school takes account of their suggestions only occasionally and would like better communication with the school.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



2 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Central Foundation Girls School, London, E3 2AT

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.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory quality of education. Strong aspects of the school's work are the care and support provided for you as well as the many opportunities you have to take part in school life and extra-curricular activities. The work you do in your school and local communities is excellent. We were particularly impressed with your involvement in the training of teachers, for example, through the Challenge project and Co-constructers in Learning project. You told us how much you enjoyed the performing arts. In many lessons your behaviour is excellent; however, on occasions this standard falls and impacts on your learning. Your teachers have good subject knowledge and they use a wide range of activities to support your learning. However, we found in some lessons you are not challenged enough and the work set is sometimes too easy. The quality of education in the sixth form is good.

While the progress you make in some subjects is good, overall it is satisfactory. Senior leaders know the school well and what needs to be done to improve. We have asked them to raise standards and ensure that they are rigorous in checking that the improvements needed are implemented fully.

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

Yours faithfully

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector

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