

St Catherine's Catholic School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101478
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	323465
Inspection date	29 January 2009
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson 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)	1050
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tanya Gladwin
Headteacher	Mrs Patricia Slonecki
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2006
School address	Watling Street Bexleyheath DA6 7QJ
Telephone number	01322 556 333
Fax number	01322 555 919

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Introduction

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

Inspectors investigated the following issues in detail: whether all students are achieving what they are capable of, particularly in the school's specialist areas; the reasons for the difference in judgements made in the school's own self-evaluation relating to teaching and learning and standards achieved; and the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records. Other evidence included the scrutiny of curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school's work, interviews with staff, and parental questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included in the report.

Description of the school

St Catherine's Catholic School for Girls is an average sized comprehensive school that takes students from parishes across a wide area. The majority of students are White British, although around 40%, much higher than the national average, are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average but fewer students than average have a statement of special educational need. Attainment on entry is average. The school achieved specialist status in the Media Arts in September 2005. It holds the Healthy School, Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark Investors in People and Basic Skills quality awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The exceptional care, guidance and support provided for all students add significantly to their outstanding personal development and well-being. This caring and supportive environment and the strong Catholic ethos in the school allow the majority of students to thrive and attain GCSE results that are exceptionally high. The school strives to meet the needs and interests of students from a range of different backgrounds and makes a significant contribution to promoting community cohesion. Students comment favourably about the improvements the new headteacher has made. Parents' overwhelming support is summed up by one parent who commented that, 'St Catherine's has been the perfect place for my daughter, she has flourished both personally and academically'.

Results in GCSE examinations have been exceptionally high for the past three years. In 2008, 88% of students attained five A* to C grades and 99% attained five GCSE passes. Most notably, 75% of students attained five A* to C grades including English and mathematics, helping them to secure their future economic well-being. Results in a number of subjects are exceptionally high, as is the proportion of students attaining A* and A grades in religious education, English literature, French, history and physical education (PE). Students attain less well in information and communication technology (ICT) although this improved this year. The majority of students make exceptional progress in mathematics. Those that find learning difficult achieve exceptionally well due to the good quality care and support they receive from a highly effective learning support team. However, overall achievement is good rather than outstanding because, at times, not all students do as well as expected in some subjects. A small minority of students did not achieve what they were capable of in English language this year and a combination of staffing issues and some ineffective teaching led to a small proportion of students achieving below expectations in dance, drama and music.

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, are outstanding. Christian values permeate all aspects of school life. Assemblies have a strong spiritual dimension and all students value the weekly support and guidance offered by the chaplain and other staff. They feel valued, safe and free from bullying. Students know who to turn to if they have concerns. Their enjoyment of school is shown by their regular attendance. A small minority of parents commented on the poor behaviour of some students in lessons, but inspectors did not see any poor behaviour and found behaviour to be outstanding. Most students respond well to the new system of rewards, and exclusions have reduced dramatically. They display high levels of aspiration and self-motivation and almost all of them are eager to do well. Many students engage in a range of enrichment activities, including additional study on Saturday mornings. Students eat sensibly and participate in regular PE lessons. They adopt responsibility as young leaders and prefects. School councillors ensure that the views of students are shared with staff. The reading support given to Year 7 students by older student-mentors is exemplary. All students help to raise funds for local, national and global charities. The school uses its specialist media facilities to promote good links with other local schools and groups in the local community.

Lesson observations carried out jointly by inspectors and senior staff found that lessons vary from satisfactory to outstanding, but overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. The most effective teachers make learning active and enjoyable by encouraging students to work together and talk about their learning. Staff share their good practice with others, which helps to raise achievement across departments. Assessment is used effectively to gauge how well

students are progressing and identify those in need of additional help. The progress centre provides those at risk of underachieving with good support and an ideal place to catch up with their work. However, lesson quality is variable. When teaching fails to inspire or interest students, they become passive learners and make only satisfactory progress. A number of teachers use ICT with confidence, but not all lessons include opportunities for students to use computers and whiteboards.

A good curriculum meets all statutory requirements and includes an expanded range of vocational awards. Specialist status has helped to raise overall standards and add further curricular opportunities for students to use media to aid their learning in a range of subjects. Media studies are a strength of the school and although not all specialist targets were met this year, results in GCSE and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) media studies were exceptionally high. Time allocated to PE is less than the recommended two hours per week, which limits opportunities to maintain an active, healthy lifestyle. To compensate for this, additional physical activity takes place during tutorials but this is of variable quality. Citizenship days include work-related learning, and students comment that the guidance they receive in careers lessons and meetings is good. Year leaders and personal learning coordinators work collaboratively to monitor individual students' progress and well-being and to ensure that most meet the challenging targets set for them.

The quality of leadership and management is good. The new headteacher's inspirational leadership has ensured that staff and governors share her vision for the school. Ably supported by her senior leaders, she is building a wider leadership team by empowering subject and pastoral leaders to take a greater responsibility for securing improvements to students' learning. They have fully embraced this responsibility, and capacity to make further improvements is good. However, these arrangements are relatively new and need more time to become fully established. Subject leadership in some areas is ineffective. A regular cycle of rigorous monitoring by senior and middle leaders is helping to identify what is working well and what needs improving. Self-evaluation is good. Effective governance provides support and challenge for senior leaders and most of the issues raised in the previous inspection have been resolved. They ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and that value for money is good. The school works well in partnership with other schools and agencies to ensure that it can provide a range of extended services to its local community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in drama and music.
- Add greater consistency to teaching and learning by continuing to share good practice and by fully evaluating its impact in those subjects where students attain less well than in other areas.
- Ensure that the new roles of leaders and managers become firmly embedded so that all central leaders play a full role in raising achievement and standards.

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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	1
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	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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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?	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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**

11 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Catherine's Catholic School for Girls, Bexleyheath, DA6 7QJ

Recently another inspector and I visited your school and found it to be a good school. Your input was vital in helping us to make this judgement, so thank you for allowing us to join you in lessons, talk with you and look at some of your work. We also spent time with some of your teachers and governors, and read many parental questionnaires.

You told us that your school is a safe, stimulating and enjoyable place to be. I was particularly impressed with the care, guidance and support provided for you and the commitment of your teachers to ensure that you all achieve well and enjoy your time at school. I thoroughly enjoyed talking with you during lessons and at lunchtime; you represented your school very well indeed. We found your behaviour to be outstanding and noted that you respond well to the new rewards system. Results in this year's GCSE examinations were exceptionally high. However, there is some room for improvement in some subjects. In order to help you achieve your very best in all subjects we have asked senior leaders to make three improvements:

- raise standards in drama and music
- make all lessons good or better by encouraging your teachers to share good practice and see what impact this has on your learning in all of your subjects
- ensure that all leaders and managers play a full role in raising achievement and standards.

Your school is led very well by Mrs Slonecki. You can help her to make St Catherine's an even better school than it already is by sharing your views on what further improvements can be made with your school council representatives and asking them to let senior staff know your views.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector