

The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101941
Local Authority	Ealing
Inspection number	323556
Inspection date	11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Anne Wellham HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1366
Sixth form	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Ballard
Headteacher	Ms Chris Sydenham
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Queen's Drive Acton London W3 0HW
Telephone number	020 8752 1525
Fax number	020 8993 6632

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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 in detail: achievement; personal development and well-being; the curriculum; guidance and support; and aspects of the school's self-evaluation. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; curriculum and planning documents; observation of the school at work; discussions with staff, governors and students; and the parents' questionnaires.

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

The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls is a large comprehensive school serving a culturally and socially diverse community. Over three quarters of the students are from minority ethnic groups, mostly of Indian, Pakistani, Arabic and Black Caribbean or African heritage. Two thirds of students have English as an additional language, with few at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. Most of these students have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social needs. The school has specialist status in Science and Mathematics. It has received a number of awards including the Healthy School Award and the Cultural Diversity Quality Standard gold award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Ellen Wilkinson School provides a good education for the girls in its care. The atmosphere in the school is a strong reflection of a commitment to raise the aspirations of all students. Parents and students recognise the quality of the support and attention given to individuals, a strength of the school summed up by comments such as 'The school recognises each individual's worth and dignity', and 'Even with so many pupils, staff are able to offer real insight into my daughter's learning and personality'.

Students come to the school from a wide range of social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding, because cultural diversity is recognised and celebrated through strong community links, an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities and extensive enrichment programmes. A flexible and personalised curriculum and a strong inclusive ethos contribute markedly to the students' impressive spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. Staff and students are committed to developing their understanding of the many different cultures, languages and faiths in the school. This contributes to the excellent relationships that exist at all levels and the clear sense of community. The vast majority of students enjoy coming to school, behave well and feel safe, because they receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Students report that bullying and racism are very rare and always dealt with promptly. One student summed up the response of a group of students in Year 11 by stating, 'I don't think anyone in the school would tolerate it.' Students have an excellent understanding of the need to sustain a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy the freshness and variety of the food on offer at lunchtime, and a high proportion enjoy attending the wide range of sporting activities and clubs on offer.

The curriculum is outstanding. It is carefully constructed to be flexible enough to meet students' individual interests, providing sufficient challenge for the most able and talented, and targeted intervention for those students with additional learning needs. There is a strong emphasis on preparing students for the world of work through a successful programme of enterprise education, and there are extensive opportunities to take responsibility within the school and in the community. An exceptionally broad range of links with external partners boost students' learning, while strongly promoting their confidence and self-esteem. Specialist status in Science and Mathematics has enabled the school to extend the curriculum by offering GCSE courses in vocational applied science, health and social care, separate sciences and statistics. These courses are popular and successful. Partnership and out-reach work with primary and secondary schools, and extended community initiatives, make a major contribution to the enjoyment and relevance of students' learning.

Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average. They achieve examination results that are above the national average at all key stages, which represents good progress overall. A high proportion of students attain the highest grades of A* or A at GCSE, and A or B at A level. However there are variations in achievement between subjects. Students achieve less well in mathematics than in English and science, and make significantly less progress in mathematics between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. There was some improvement in 2008, and students made progress that was broadly satisfactory. The school has correctly identified this as an area for improvement. The substantial numbers of students who speak English as an additional language make good progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and looked after children, make outstanding progress because support for them is well planned and effectively managed.

Teaching and learning are good. Students make good progress, because teachers and staff who support learning encourage them to have high expectations about their achievement. As a result students are well motivated, eager to participate and enjoy learning. Students respond well to teaching when it is relevant to their interests and experiences, and allows them to interact with each other. They make the most progress in lessons where teachers offer regular and meaningful feedback on their work, and clear guidance on how to improve.

Leadership and management are good. The dedicated headteacher maintains a clear focus on raising students' achievement and aspirations. A committed senior leadership team and some enthusiastic and able middle managers provide good support. Senior leaders have an accurate view of what the school does well and identify priorities for further development. Effective action has been taken to improve learning for those students requiring a greater level of challenge, and for those students with statements of educational needs. However, self-evaluation is not always focused sharply enough on students' progress overall. For example, there are thorough systems in place to set targets for students and to monitor their progress. These are used well to inform discussions between students and their teachers and tutors, but they are not used consistently well by subject leaders or senior leaders to evaluate achievement at all levels from a whole-school perspective. The governing body is very well informed and supportive. Strong links between governors and the senior leadership team, and with individual subjects, ensure that they provide a good level of challenge. The school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education and is highly valued by parents and students. Sixth formers are articulate, mature and confident, and are excellent role models for younger students. Their outstanding personal development and well-being are enriched by a full and varied range of extra-curricular activities, as well as opportunities to take on posts of responsibility within the school and the community. This contributes to students' enjoyment and achievement, and prepares them well for adult life. The sixth-form curriculum is very responsive to students' needs, and offers a broad range of subjects at AS and A2, and level 2 courses in business, health and social care, and travel and tourism. The proportion of students who complete their courses is particularly high. Examination results, and the percentage of students gaining A or B grades, are well above the national averages. Students make good progress relative to their starting points, although there is some variation in achievement in individual subjects from year to year. Students' aspirations are high and most students proceed to university. Students identify that a key strength is the high-quality advice and support that they get from their teachers and tutors. They value the good quality of teaching and the excellent relationships that exist. Regular and detailed feedback on their progress and the good marking of work tells them what they need to do to improve. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, and set a clear direction for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in mathematics.
- Ensure that self-evaluation is focused sharply on students' progress in their 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	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?	2	2
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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	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	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
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?	2	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	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	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**

24 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls, London, W3 0HW

Thank you all for the very warm, friendly and polite welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work, and visiting some of your lessons. We wish that we could have taken some time to relax in the lovely Japanese garden.

We think Ellen Wilkinson is a good school. It is a happy school, because you work hard and enjoy learning. You told us how much you like coming to school, and that you all get on well together. Bullying and racism are rare, because you understand and appreciate the many different cultures, languages and faiths in the school. You told us that there is always someone to go to for help and advice if you are having problems or need to talk things over. You have opportunities to study many different subjects, because the school makes sure that the curriculum meets your interests and needs. We were impressed by your enthusiasm and support for the wide range of clubs and activities that are on offer, and by all the things that you do in school and the community. All these things contribute to your excellent personal development and well-being. The sixth form is a very important part of the school, and the sixth-form students set an excellent example for younger students to follow.

You achieve excellent results in examinations and make good progress, because teachers encourage you to have high expectations and to achieve your best. You like lessons where there are lots of activities and chances to think for yourselves. You value the excellent support and advice from teachers, especially when you are shown how to improve your work.

Your dedicated headteacher and senior staff, helped by the governors, lead your school well. They are good at identifying ways in which it could improve. We agree that some of you could do better in mathematics. We have asked the school to make sure that this happens. We have also asked the school to make sure that all staff use the systems in place to check that you make the progress that you are capable of in all your subjects.

We wish you all at Ellen Wilkinson a happy and successful future.

Yours faithfully

Anne Wellham

Her Majesty's Inspector