

Gunnersbury Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102545
Local Authority	Hounslow
Inspection number	323655
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Cathie Munt 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1230
Sixth form	317
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Derek Bourn
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Burke (Acting headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2005
School address	The Ride Boston Manor Road Brentford TW8 9LB
Telephone number	020 8568 7281
Fax number	020 8569 7946

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This large voluntary aided Catholic school for boys aged 11 to 18 admits girls to the sixth form. It is heavily oversubscribed in the main school and in the sixth form. Students come from over 40 feeder primary schools and many travel great distances each day. Students come from a very wide range of ethnic backgrounds and over 50 languages are spoken, although very few students are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The school has specialist status in two areas. It was awarded science specialist status in 2003 and 'Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning' in April 2008. Following the illness and recent death of the headteacher, one of the deputy headteachers is acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Gunnersbury provides an outstanding education. Staff and governors have worked assiduously to build on the excellent practice identified in the last inspection report. The desire to be excellent is evident in every aspect of the school's work, with no room for complacency. Staff, rightly, are held in very high regard by the students and their parents. Students flourish in a supportive but challenging climate that encourages them to give of their best academically and personally. One parent summed up the general view when she wrote, 'Gunnersbury is an outstanding school that has provided a first-class education for my son'.

Leadership and management are exemplary and middle managers support their departments extremely well. The acting headteacher and the senior team have provided outstanding guidance and stability during the absence and recent death of the much-respected headteacher. This has ensured that the school has continued to promote improvement.

Students are very positive about the extremely well-led sixth form. They respond exceptionally well to the trust placed upon them by the school and by the clear structure for learning. Achievement and standards are outstanding and students mainly gain entry to their first choice of university. Effective links with two local Catholic schools extend course choices but, rightly, further A-level and vocational courses are planned to ensure that all sixth form students have access to fully tailored courses. Leaders recognise the need to develop further the use of technologies such as the Virtual Learning Environment programme being piloted in the science department.

In the main school, standards are high across all subjects and achievement is outstanding because of excellent teaching and robust monitoring of students' progress. Students' diligence and mature attitudes enable learning to take place without constraint. One teacher said, 'The pupils expect good lessons and the teachers expect high standards'. The school continually exceeds the rigorous targets it sets itself. Well-planned support has improved the students' literacy skills and has had a positive impact on this year's mock examination results. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers provide stimulating and challenging lessons, setting tasks that extend students' learning. Consequently, examination and test results at the end of Years 9 and 11 are consistently above local and national averages. However, the school is determined to further increase the proportion of boys who attain the highest GCSE grades.

An ever-developing curriculum ensures that the school fulfils legal requirements and meets students' needs very well. A wide range of subjects is available and additional classes mean that most students can pursue an individualised course in Key Stage 4. The school has gained national recognition for its environmental work. The strong Catholic ethos contributes to students' personal development and well-being, which are excellent. Attendance is above average, and behaviour throughout the school is exceptional. Preparation for later life is outstanding. Boys accept responsibilities willingly and acquit themselves with honour. An extensive range of clubs and activities promote excellent all-round development. Parents and carers expressed a very high level of support for all that the school does to develop and encourage their children. They valued the openness of communication and many commented positively on the excellent care, guidance and support that the school provides. The impressively knowledgeable governing body has an excellent understanding of the school's strengths. Governors provide support and challenge in equal measure. Superb teamwork means that Gunnersbury continues to go from strength to strength.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The excellent leader and his committed staff robustly monitor and evaluate all activities that take place within the sixth form and within the partner schools of the consortium. There is an unremitting focus on raising standards and developing an individualised and flexible curriculum. Teaching is a strength and is outstanding in certain areas, for example in French. Staff demonstrate outstanding capacity to make further improvements to student achievement. Consequently, achievement and standards at A-level are outstanding and results in Year 12 and achievement in vocational courses continue to improve. The value added to students' achievement from their starting points is extremely high.

Skilled tutors and mentors support and enhance personal skills such as independent learning. Students contribute positively to the life of the school, providing exemplary role models and supporting younger students most effectively through their work as prefects. They contribute to the community in many ways, for example working with special needs children at the Log Cabin and through environmental improvement activities. In personal and social education and religious education studies, students discuss and explore social, moral, spiritual and cultural issues maturely.

Outstanding care, welfare and guidance feature strongly. Teachers have very high expectations of students. Consequently, students have high expectations of themselves. This is shown through the exceptionally high rates of attendance and conscientious approach to their studies. Heads of Year, form tutors and mentors provide individual support, and the excellent tracking system helps to identify where intervention is required. Connexion Services provide very good and practical support regarding future careers. 'The one thing about the sixth form is that the staff really care', said one student, while a Year 12 girl said, 'I'm so pleased I chose Gunnersbury, I feel really well known, and I'm doing really well'.

Staff are actively engaged in their own professional development and in planning for the future by developing innovative approaches to improving learning, teaching and the curriculum. Leaders recognise the need to improve attainment in Year 12, extend the range of vocational courses and to enhance the use of new technologies

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to build upon the school's good work, increasing the proportion of pupils who achieve A* and A at GCSE.
- Further develop the learning pathways to include additional vocational courses in Year 12.
- Continue to use the school's specialist status in science for the benefit of all students through the development of new technologies such as the Virtual Learning Environment programme.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

When students enter the school, their standards are mainly above average although each year a small proportion enters with test results below the national expectations. For many, mathematics and science skills are stronger than literacy skills. Effective interventions over the last few years have improved students' skills and decreased the gap between these subjects. In 2008 over a third of Year 9 students achieved results well above the national expectation in mathematics, with the remainder achieving above expectations. Over three quarters were at or

above the expected level in science and over a half in English. Students make extremely good progress so that by the time they take their GCSEs they attain standards that are above, or well above average in most subjects. In the recent mock examinations, over 80% achieved five or more GCSEs at the highest grades (A* to C) with English and mathematics. Students from a wide range of ethnic groups and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress in line with their peers. Teachers and support staff provide excellent guidance using rigorous tracking and monitoring systems in all areas of the school's work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

A palpable feeling of respect and care permeates the entire site because staff and students consistently give of their best. The school's religious ethos pervades all subjects and activities. In lessons and assemblies, students reflect maturely upon the challenging moral issues facing the planet. Consequently, their spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding, as is their cultural development. A great strength of the school is its practical commitment to sustainable development. Waste is recycled from each class and an eco-garden, run by the boys, grows and sells organic crops. This develops students' economic awareness and promotes the value of achieving goals through community effort. They raise impressive amounts for local and national charities through these sales and from concerts and other fundraising events.

Students accept personal responsibility for eating nutritiously and taking regular exercise. They enjoy greatly the many opportunities for sport, and large numbers represent the school proudly in competitive games. Students feel safe, and adopt safe practices around the school and in lessons. Their joy of learning is evident in the vibrant atmosphere in many lessons. Students are loyal to their school and serve it well. It is therefore not surprising that attendance is above average, and behaviour is outstandingly courteous. Students develop self-confidence and excellent presentational skills through giving talks in lessons, through involvement in assemblies and through leading forms and houses. Their extensive social responsibilities and exceptional academic experiences develop them into well-rounded people who will serve society exceedingly well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school fully justifies its latest specialist status, 'Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning' (RATL). Extremely well-planned lessons and innovative teaching methods challenge all groups of students equally. Varied and interesting activities support learning and engage the interest of classes effectively. Good use is made of technology such as interactive whiteboards. Staff and students enjoy excellent, and mutually respectful, relationships. Learning generally develops at a rapid pace. Well-focused questions encourage students to think critically, develop skills for independent learning and assess their own progress. Students attend regularly, are hard-working, well-behaved and show a great keenness to learn and be successful. Consequently, they make excellent progress in all year groups.

Senior leaders and department heads use assessment data exceptionally well to set challenging targets that help students to improve. Teachers' accurate views of individuals' termly attainment are used to monitor progress rigorously and to inform future teaching. Marking is regular,

thorough and constructive and ensures that students know the levels at which they are working and what they have to do to reach the next level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets the needs of all students most effectively. Provision for music in Years 7 and 8 has been extended and is excellent. Extensive and thorough transition arrangements accurately identify the needs of potential Year 7 students. Effective intervention procedures, including a commercial, individualised programme of study, boost progress and narrow the attainment gap across subjects. Year 7 students follow a Thinking Skills course in line with new requirements. Personalising learning, a key feature of the curriculum, allows students to follow courses matched to their aspirations and capabilities. Rigorous tracking enables staff to identify the most appropriate course of study for each individual in the main school. Additional classes outside normal curriculum time ensure that students can follow their chosen selection. Individual, flexible learning pathways are being developed further in the sixth form to ensure that all students have access to courses that more fully match their aspirations and capabilities than at present.

The Learning Group provides a proactive vehicle for curriculum development. The science specialism has provided the impetus to develop a range of applied courses, Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) vocational courses at different levels and a popular course in personal development. High numbers of students take part in, and derive great enjoyment from, a comprehensive range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities. The school monitors and evaluates the impact of these activities and provides new activities as required.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The promotion of every student's health and well-being is central to the school's caring ethos. Liaison with parents and other agencies is a strength of the school. Indeed, so good are these links that one parent wrote, 'there is no room for misunderstanding between parents, school and students'. Highly effective strategies have improved attendance. The extensive reward system reflecting the varied interests and ages of students motivates and sustains high levels of performance throughout the year. Students speak enthusiastically about the awarding of 'colours', celebrating achievements across a range of categories. Students wear their colours with pride. Arrangements for safeguarding students are robust and statutory requirements are met.

Frequent, systematic monitoring of progress promptly identifies any potential underachievement, enabling the timely and very effective implementation of suitable intervention strategies to improve students' basic skills. One quarter of Year 7 students regularly attend individualised study sessions before school. Outstanding pastoral and academic support are seamlessly integrated for students entering the school from a large number of feeder primaries. Academic guidance is a significant strength. Marking is consistent across all subject areas and provides students with clear indications of what they need to do to meet challenging targets. Students speak confidently about how marking supports their learning. As one student reported, 'My target is to be more concise in my writing and now my writing is to the point'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The extremely competent acting headteacher is exceptionally well supported by the committed and able deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers. They have the full confidence of the governing body. Middle managers lead with assurance, making a positive difference to their departments' performance. Together, they have achieved impressive improvements in standards, progress, teaching and use of data since the last inspection, demonstrating an outstanding capacity to improve further. The impressively knowledgeable governing body provides outstanding strategic direction that has served Gunnersbury admirably over time. Plans to appoint the next headteacher are advanced. Everyone understands the importance of their role in 'Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning'. High-quality teamwork, underpinned by a wholehearted commitment to first-rate professional development and training, builds on people's strengths, developing new skills and competencies.

Provision for community cohesion is exceptionally well developed and is outstanding. Faith, ethnicity and cultural dimensions are seamlessly incorporated into most aspects of school life. Students speaking over 50 languages between them get along harmoniously and show a mature appreciation of their role in the global community.

Management of both specialist areas is exceptionally good and fosters the school's vision of continually seeking to raise students' expectations and achievements. Specialist status has contributed effectively to improvement by allowing the school to extend its community provision, develop excellent links with partner schools and the local community and significantly improve its buildings. Funds are used well to maximise learning. Current plans include improving drama provision and developing a dedicated eating area for sixth formers. The school looks to the future with an optimistic and passionate belief that is epitomised by the chair of governors who said that with good teachers almost anything is possible.

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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	2	2
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	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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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**

19 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Gunnersbury Catholic School, Brentford, TW8 9LB

Thank you for your cooperation when we inspected your school recently. These are our main findings. You may want to read the full report on the Ofsted website.

Gunnersbury provides a very high-quality education that helps you to become informed, articulate and well-rounded young adults who are very well prepared for your future. The staff and your parents are very proud of you and we can see why. We were extremely impressed by your exceptionally mature attitude and by the care and concern that you show to each other.

You and your parents are very appreciative of the staff who provide such excellent role models, making this a very happy place in which to learn. You work hard and make the most of the many academic and social opportunities offered to you. Your excellent senior leadership team, wise governors and committed teachers ensure that you make extremely good progress in your learning and many of you achieve highly. The school looks after you exceptionally well and you say that you feel safe there. Sixth form girls settle in quickly and say that they feel welcome and at ease. Many of you make a positive difference to others through your various duties and through your involvement in local and international projects.

Your teachers believe that a few more of you could achieve the highest levels at GCSE and in Year 12 courses. We have asked them to continue to pursue these challenging targets with you. This will involve extra work for some of you but we believe that you will accept such challenges readily. As you know, the excellent science department is piloting a visual learning environment. This has great potential to move learning forward to another plane and we agree that this is an apt and exciting aspect for the school to develop.

I wish you and your school a happy and successful future.

Yours faithfully

Cathie Munt

Her Majesty's Inspector