

Our Lady's Convent RC High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	100282
Local authority	Hackney
Inspection number	376381
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2012
Lead inspector	Nasim Butt

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	704
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Frall
Headteacher	Jane Gray
Date of previous school inspection	14–15 January 2009
School address	6–16 Amhurst Park Stamford Hill London N16 5AF
Telephone number	020 8800 2158
Fax number	020 8809 8898
Email address	officeadmin@ourladys.hackney.sch.uk

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Introduction

Inspection team

Nasim Butt	Additional inspector
Karla Martin Theodore	Additional inspector
Kanwaljit Singh	Additional inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 32 lessons, including whole and part lessons as well as joint observations with senior staff, and saw 29 teachers teach. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and a range of school staff, including senior and middle leaders. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at a range of the school's self-evaluation documentation, including the school improvement plan and progress tracking data. Inspectors took account of the views expressed in 129 parental questionnaires as well as those completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than most secondary schools. The largest group of students are of Black African heritage, followed by any Other White and Black Caribbean. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic heritages is high. An above-average proportion of students speak English as an additional language, although few are at the early stages of language acquisition. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is slightly below average; most special needs involve behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as well as moderate learning difficulties. The school meets the current floor standard. The school is a specialist language college with sixth form provision shared with another local girls' high school. Having operated on two sites 1.5 miles apart for the past 18 months, the school is set to move into its new purpose-built site as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme in two phases – one in April 2012 and the second in July 2012.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. A key strength is the way in which it uses every opportunity to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, students of all backgrounds work really well together. In addition, students' attendance is above average and punctuality exemplary.
- Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 is significantly above average, although there was a dip in performance in mathematics in 2011. Nevertheless, the majority of students are achieving well in mathematics and very well in English. Reflecting the school's specialism, outcomes are strong in modern foreign languages.
- Teaching is mainly good and occasionally outstanding. However, a small minority of less effective teaching remains. Teachers are skilful in deepening students' knowledge and understanding by providing a variety of well-structured learning opportunities. Sometimes, however, teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan for the learning needs of the most able students, particularly in mathematics.
- The school has a strong focus on literacy throughout the curriculum and this enables targeted students early on in Year 7 to make accelerated progress in reading, thereby easing their access to the rest of the curriculum.
- The sixth form is good; students achieve well as a result of good teaching and close monitoring, coupled with effective personalised support.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is good and, although occasionally boisterous or noisy, it is equally good around the school. Students have an impressive understanding of personal safety because this aspect is promoted very effectively through the curriculum.
- The headteacher leads the school effectively and is well supported by an active and highly competent leadership team. Senior and middle leaders' use of data to monitor and evaluate students' performance has improved sharply since the last inspection. Governors challenge senior leaders about outcomes and have a good grasp of how to probe school data.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that almost all is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring all teachers use assessment information well so as to set high expectations in lessons and appropriate challenge for the more able students in their learning, particularly in mathematics
 - systematically sharing with students what they need to do to make good progress in the lesson
 - spreading and embedding the most effective practice in marking so that it is always sharply focused on the next steps for each individual student's learning and that clear feedback is given to students based on this.

- Raise attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 4 so that students reach and sustain above-average standards.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 has been significantly above average for the past three years, with stronger and more consistent outcomes for English than for mathematics. Given that students enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are broadly average, all groups make securely good progress and sometimes outstanding progress, particularly in English. Students' achievement is also consistently good in science, the humanities and languages, reflecting well the school's specialist status as a language college. In the sixth form, standards on entry and outcomes have both been on a rising trend in recent years and, although there is a degree of variability between subjects, students achieve well overall. Almost all students progress on to higher education after the completion of their sixth form studies. Parents are accurate in holding the view that their children achieve well across all key stages.

Students work well with each other, build good relationships with staff and want to achieve well, and their enjoyment of school is apparent. The quality of learning in most lessons is good because teaching is purposeful and enables the very large majority of students to increase their knowledge, skills and understanding effectively. In the most effective lessons, activities are practical and varied, students are involved in peer assessment or tasks are set in contexts to which they can relate. Such an approach was evident, for example, in a Year 9 drama lesson in which students explored the idea of personal responsibility, guilt and blame in the context of the infamous shooting of PC Miles in 1950s England. In the sixth form, students deepen their conceptual understanding through the process of evaluating published research. Year 12 psychology students demonstrated this admirably well when they

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evaluated a well-known piece of research on conformity. When excellent pace is maintained in lessons, students respond well, as, for example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson in which thought-provoking questioning elicited in-depth responses from students and sustained high levels of focus and concentration. However, the pace of learning decreases and progress dips when insufficient thought is given to creating maximum opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning in interactive and purposeful ways.

There was a dip in attainment in GCSE mathematics in 2011. Inspection evidence shows that the school is addressing this, but the targeted interventions in place have yet to show demonstrable impact. The school's secure tracking data show that disabled students and those with special educational needs are also making good progress, with the gaps in performance between those known to be school action plus and all students nationally closing steadily. The school has been conspicuously successful in closing the attainment gap between the students known to be eligible for free school meals compared with all students nationally. The attainment of these students has been consistently above average and they achieve very well across most areas of the curriculum.

Quality of teaching

Good relationships prevail in the classroom and these allow most lessons to proceed smoothly, even on those occasions where the pace and depth of learning slows. Teachers are enthusiastic and have strong subject knowledge, evident during explanations and when teachers develop further a student's response. The impact of teaching is particularly strong when students' assessment information is used precisely to match activities to their needs, for example in the good progress made by Year 7 students through their literacy interventions.

In the best teaching, in-depth knowledge of where students are in their learning enables teachers to plan for students' next learning opportunities very effectively. For example, high levels of interest were generated in a Year 9 English lesson when the teacher skilfully built on students' prior knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare's sonnets. However, teaching does not always cater well enough for the needs of more-able students. In mathematics, for example, students who are capable of coping with more demanding problem-solving challenges are not always given the opportunity to engage with this work early enough in the lesson. Nevertheless, most parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire are of the view that their children, in the main, are taught well and this view is endorsed by inspectors.

Teaching in the sixth form is similarly good because, in the main, teachers make effective use of questioning and provide students with an engaging range of activities in vibrant classrooms. Literacy is well taught throughout the curriculum, for example in design and technology, where strong emphasis is placed on learning and applying subject-specific terminology. Teaching promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well by, for instance, helping students to develop

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independence and confidence in their learning. Sometimes teachers miss opportunities to check students' progress frequently or deeply enough, partly because the learning outcomes sought are not sufficiently clear or well thought through. As a result, on these occasions the pace of learning slows. Students receive good written feedback on their next steps in learning in a range of subjects, for example English, technology and languages. There are inconsistencies, however, in the quality of marking but also the opportunity for teachers to learn from the most effective practice in school, of which there is plenty.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

An orderly and calm environment prevails in most lessons, which facilitates successful learning. Most students know how to conduct themselves well and are skilful in negotiating their way around some of the narrow corridors and stairwells. The school recognises and is working effectively with a small minority of students who do not always live up to the high expectations set for behaviour in corridors during transitions and in lessons. When exploring the small proportion of negative responses to the behaviour question in the pupil survey, it emerged that students have high expectations of themselves and viewed the prevalence of low-level noise in the building as evidence of behaviour that is less than good. The eradication of all types of bullying has a high profile in the school. Students report that in the rare cases of cyber-bullying or race-based bullying the school is very effective in dealing with both the symptoms and the causes. The monitoring of bullying has been well thought through and is sharp and effective. The detailed records that the school keeps of the rare occasions when bullying does occur confirm the views so eloquently expressed by students. Most students have a well-developed understanding of what constitutes unsafe situations. Although the two existing sites are temporary before an imminent phased transition into the new building, students say that they feel very safe on both sites. Most parents also report that all reasonable steps are taken to keep their daughters safe, not least of which is an impressive partnership with some local shopkeepers so that, in the event of a dramatic crime incident on the streets outside, the girls can find an immediate safe haven inside the store. Students' attendance is high and punctuality exemplary.

Leadership and management

There is a clear drive and ambition to improve the school. The senior leadership team have active roles in promoting school improvement and empowering middle leaders to take increasing responsibility. As a result, the analysis of performance data now used to drive improvement in individual departments, in particular English, mathematics, science and languages, is considerably sharper than previously. The School Improvement Group which meets every half term has proved to be an effective mechanism for holding middle leaders to account and generating a greater sense of urgency in combating potential underachievement. Members of the governing body make an effective contribution to school improvement as a result of their active involvement in this group. In addition, targets have been skilfully used to raise students' achievement through steady increase in their challenge. Over time,

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this has resulted in securely good and sometimes outstanding progress in English, science, the humanities and languages, a track record which demonstrates the school's strong capacity for further improvement.

The quality of teaching has been improved through systemic quality assurance coupled with well-tailored opportunities for continuing professional development. However, while the school has a very accurate view of its strengths and areas for development, actions for improvement are occasionally not followed through with sufficient rigour. As a result, although the quality of teaching has improved, it is good rather than outstanding, with a small proportion that remains satisfactory. Significant improvements have been made to the school's student-progress tracking systems, so that any underperformance is identified early and acted on swiftly. As a result, the very large majority of students are achieving their challenging targets.

The quality of the curriculum is good, both in the main school and the sixth form. Some aspects of it have been redesigned to better accommodate students' varying needs and interests and to accelerate their progress. Programmes to consolidate learning skills in Year 7, for example, are having the desired impact in accelerating pupils' progress in reading as well as improving their attitudes to learning. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted highly effectively through all areas of the curriculum. The school's effective promotion of equality and tackling discrimination is reflected in its active approach to ensuring the appropriate support for all students. Safeguarding arrangements are equally effective because of the close attention to detail in record keeping, rigorous recruitment procedures and thorough training for all staff.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Our Lady's Convent High School, London N16 5AF

Thank you very much for being so welcoming when we visited your school this week and for the time you gave up to talk to us. Yours is a good school and we very much enjoyed meeting many of you and spending time in your lessons. We were most impressed by the opportunities your school provides for promoting your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This ensures that you value one another's differences and get on really well together. It is pleasing that practically all of you enjoy school, as reflected in your high attendance, and that you feel very safe, which your parents also noted in their questionnaire responses.

Your achievement is good as a result of the good teaching you receive, supported by a curriculum which prepares you well for the next stage of your education. Overall, standards by the end of Year 11 have been well above the national average for the past three years, although there was a dip in the GCSE mathematics results last year. The school is working to reverse this but outcomes will only improve, of course, with your full support in ensuring that you work hard to achieve your challenging targets. School and national data show that you achieve particularly well in English.

Despite the good and sometimes outstanding outcomes, there are elements of teaching that could be even better. For example, some of you explained to us that work in mathematics is not always challenging enough for you. This was confirmed by our own observations. Therefore, we have suggested that all teachers use assessment information more sharply to prepare work which matches your different ability levels, especially for those of you who are more able. We have also suggested ways that teachers can share their good practice in marking as there is lack of consistency in the quality of written feedback that you receive. You can help by making sure that you read and act on your teachers' feedback in order to make the best possible progress.

I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Nasim Butt
Lead inspector

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