



Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 102354
 LEA Havering LEA

Inspection number 276701
 Inspection dates 10 - 11 May 2006
 Reporting inspector Mr Adrian Lyons HMI

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

Type of School	comprehensive	School address	70 St Mary's Lane Upminster
School category	voluntary aided		RM14 2QR
Age range of pupils	11-18	Telephone number	01708 222660
Gender of pupils	Girls	Fax number	01708 226686
Number on roll	822	Chair of governors	Mr D Leech
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mrs B Williams
Date of previous inspection	18 September 2000		

Age group	Published	Reference no
11-18	22 May 2006	276701

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School is a Roman Catholic comprehensive school with a thriving sixth form. Students come from many different primary schools located in several local authority areas. Most students are White-British with about twenty per cent coming from ethnic minority backgrounds. A handful of students are learners of English as an additional language. The percentage of students who have special educational needs is well below average, as is the proportion entitled to free school meals. The school was designated a specialist Business and Enterprise school in September 2005. 'Investors in People' has been awarded and renewed twice.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School provides its students with an excellent education and is an outstanding school. Standards are very high and students achieve well as a result of very good teaching. Students and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and what the school offers. However, while almost all elements of the school are at least good, what makes this an outstanding school is the exemplary personal development, care for the girls, outstanding examination results and the excellent quality of the sixth form. One parent wrote to the inspectors: 'Sacred Heart ... has given my girls the best start in life I could have hoped for. I will always be grateful to the wonderful staff who have made their time at high school so productive, positive, happy and worthwhile'. Her views are similar to those expressed by many others. Senior leaders and managers have an astute view of the school's strengths and weaknesses although their self evaluation was rather modest. Although outstanding, there is recognition that improvements are still possible. Examination results are high compared to the national average, but given their ability on entry to the school, students' academic progress could be even higher. The school is therefore improving the use of data very effectively to monitor progress and improving marking to provide students with better information on how to improve. Post holders have been appointed to specialise in the leadership of assessment. The strengths previously reported have been sustained. Standards have further improved as has the quality of teaching and learning. Subject leaders are now fully involved in monitoring quality and these improvements demonstrate the capacity of the leadership to bring about continual improvement. The school provides excellent value for money.

The school's Christian ethos and practise of the Catholic faith permeate the life of the school, and underpins the excellent relationships with staff and students and concern for the individual. This is evident in the outstanding personal development of students and the outstanding contribution they make to their local communities and abroad.

Grade: 1

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

This is an outstanding sixth form. Its profile, reputation and performance are excellent. Teaching is consistently good and often outstanding. Students know what they need to do in order to improve better than in the rest of the school because they are set challenging individual targets and are monitored effectively. As a result many achieve very well given their prior attainment, with the significant majority of students successfully gaining a place at university. There exists excellent provision for care and guidance, and for students' personal development and future economic well-being. Sixth form students make major contributions to the positive ethos of the school by acting as role models and mentors to younger students.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure consistency of approaches to marking and assessment so that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve

Achievement and standards

Inspection evidence supports the school's view that achievement and standards overall are good. Standards are consistently very high in nearly all subjects and have been rising over recent years. Students enter the school with standards above the national average. They make good progress and this is reflected in the exceptional results in national tests and examinations. At the age of fourteen, students' standards are well above the national average. At sixteen a very high proportion of students obtain grades A* - C in GCSE examinations. High expectations of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology ensure that students are well prepared for employment or further study. The rate at which students make progress shows an improving trend. Generally, students make better progress in Years 10-11 than in Years 7-9. The school has analysed the reasons why and it has correctly identified the priorities for development to raise students' achievement further. The process of setting targets is not consistently applied across subjects and it is more established in Years 10-11 than in Years 7-9. There is no underperformance by any group.

In the sixth form, the overall pass rate is outstanding compared with national standards. The examination results of the last three academic years show that the standards attained by students are consistently well above the national average and improving. In relation to their starting points, students achieve exceptionally well with data showing progress to be in the top ten per cent of sixth forms nationally.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Although the school judges students' personal development and well-being as good, inspectors found these aspects to be outstanding. Attendance is above average, students show interest in their lessons and thoroughly enjoy their education. They work very well in groups, and contribute exceptionally confidently to class discussions. Sixth form students speak enthusiastically about the courses they are offered and the opportunities to develop social skills. Students feel safe at school because behaviour is excellent and students act responsibly and maturely. Exclusions are low and involve very few students for very short periods of time. Relationships among learners are excellent. The students' willingness to take responsibility is impressive; the student council takes its role seriously and has been responsible for several improvements, including, for example, improvements regarding healthy eating. The teachers' evident respect for students and the civilised atmosphere in the school have a highly beneficial effect upon students' social development. They show consideration for others and respect their rights. Students are self-confident. They demonstrate high levels of concern for others through friendships in school, care for members of their local communities and the large sums of money raised for charity. Charity events are instigated by the girls resulting from their knowledge of and concern for the good causes. This is a sign of their excellent spiritual, moral and social development. Many

aspects, including sport, and an emphasis on healthy eating encourage students to adopt healthy lifestyles. They respect other cultures and there are very good opportunities for them to develop knowledge about the cultural diversities of our society.

Grade: 1

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. The excellent quality of working relationships contributes to students' excellent behaviour, attitudes to learning and enjoyment. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and generally have very high expectations. They know their students well but not all teachers plan activities that closely match each student's needs. The needs of students with learning difficulties are well diagnosed and teachers usually make good provision for them. The school has a policy of full inclusion and students are not withdrawn from lessons. In outstanding lessons, the teachers use a variety of methods and approach that match the students' various learning styles. They provide consistent challenge for all ability groups and they communicate their enthusiasm for their subject. As a result, students are highly motivated to excel and achieve well. Most lessons are at least good and many are excellent. The quality of questioning is very good and this enables teachers to check students' understanding during lessons and provide effective verbal feedback. However, assessment is neither sufficiently rigorous nor consistent enough to inform planning and ensure that students achieve as well as they can. For instance, marking consists mainly of ticks and praise comments and doesn't always show students exactly how to improve their work. In the sixth form, the quality of teaching is consistently very good and the quality of care is excellent leading to the overall effect of teaching and learning being outstanding. Students appreciate the commitment of their teachers who readily offer one-to-one sessions on demand.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

The school offers a good and improving curriculum with a broad range of courses at GCSE and post 16. The school continues to respond to the needs and interests of its students. Some of the academic opportunities are provided by the after school classes, such as AS critical thinking. Participation in sport is high in Years 7-11. The citizenship programme offers valuable opportunities for social engagement with the community for which several pupils have won awards. While Business and Enterprise specialist status has not yet had time to impact fully on students' experience, preparation for their economic well being is already strong with effective careers education and an economic awareness programme that includes a link with a major bank providing very strong financial understanding. In the sixth form, applied A levels are particularly successful. The many trips and opportunities for foreign travel play an important role in extending student's education and are highly valued. As a parent wrote to inspectors: 'she's still talking about it'.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

Care and support are outstanding. All requirements for child protection are in place; members of staff are well aware of required procedures and follow them accordingly. The vast majority of students feel safe and are very well supported by staff. Behaviour is excellent and the very few incidents of bullying are dealt with efficiently and effectively. Teachers in Year 9 make sure that students are very well prepared for Year 10. Year 11 students are given high quality advice in preparation for work and the sixth form. Teachers respect students' views and respond to them. Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is very good. However the procedures for tracking the progress of pupils against targets are inconsistent. In some curriculum areas, such as English, the tracking of pupils' progress towards targets is well developed, but, in others, development is not as well advanced. In the sixth form, students are supported really well in making appropriate choices for higher education and students planning direct entry to the world of work reported that they were equally well advised.

Grade: 1

Leadership and management

The quality and effectiveness of school self-evaluation is good. The inspiring and highly effective leadership of the headteacher and senior managers over a sustained period has given the school a very good capacity to improve. In striving for continual improvement, the headteacher brought in a team of consultants to carry out a thorough audit of all aspects of the school which investigated the views and concerns of students and parents. The December 2004 'Investors in People' report found that "the school is tireless in its pursuit of best practice and has encouraged several staff to visit other establishments to ensure that there is no lapse into complacency".

Another example of good leadership and management is that while whole school and departmental development planning is well structured and uses data effectively, the need for more rigorous target setting has been recognised. Scrutiny of student books indicates that diagnostic marking, strategies for improvement, and target setting for the individual student are underdeveloped. The headteacher has taken the opportunity offered by restructuring pay grades to make appointments focussed on addressing this issue.

Staff are well qualified and their development is addressed through a programme of training that reflects the schools' priorities for improvement. Learning resources and accommodation are good and the school gives very good value for money. Excellent staff retention results from teachers feeling 'continually stimulated and challenged.'

Governors are extremely supportive of the school and bring with them a wide range of expertise. However, there is insufficient emphasis on challenging the school leadership on aspects of the school's performance.

There are wide ranging links to other religious, educational, and community groups locally, nationally and internationally.

Grade: 2

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