

Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102354
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	323626
Inspection dates	30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes (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	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	817
Sixth form	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Trevor Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Bernie Williams
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2006
School address	St Mary's Lane Upminster RM14 2QR
Telephone number	01708 222660
Fax number	01708 226686

Age group	11-18
Inspection Date(s)	30 April 2009
Inspection Number	323626

(c) Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the effectiveness of the sixth form, focusing on achievement, teaching, the curriculum and academic guidance
- how effectively governors challenge senior leaders on aspects of the school's performance
- the extent to which students know how they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations and by looking at students' work and school documents. Responses from parents in questionnaires and discussions with students and staff also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but evidence gathered suggests that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, are accurate in nearly all respects, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School is a Roman Catholic comprehensive with a thriving sixth form. Students come from many different primary schools located in several local authority areas. Most students are of White British origin with about a fifth coming from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities 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

Grade: 1

Sacred Heart of Mary is an outstanding school which enjoys the full support of parents. The number of replies to the confidential questionnaire was both extraordinarily high and extremely positive. A considerable number of parents and carers praised the individual attention that many of their children receive. It is very clear from these responses that the school does everything in its power to ensure that students feel happy and achieve academic success. One comment, which typifies many, stated that the school has 'consistently provided my daughter with a positive educational experience throughout her six years...this includes supporting her spiritually, encouraging her socially and ensuring she makes the most of her educational opportunities'. A strong Catholic ethos is the foundation of both the warm family atmosphere of the school and the very strong personal relationships.

Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in responding to the key recommendations; standards at Key Stage 4 have risen and specialist status has been implemented very successfully. In particular, the rise in the number of students achieving at least five GCSEs, including English and mathematics, at the higher grades is impressive. Achievement in the sixth form has been more variable, largely because senior leaders do not monitor the quality of teaching or the level of students' performance with the same rigour as at Key Stage 4. Senior leaders and managers are extremely committed to the school and have a largely accurate picture of its performance. The strong leadership of the headteacher ensures that high standards in all areas of the school's work are maintained. However, senior leaders judge both the quality of teaching and the overall effectiveness of the sixth form to be outstanding, whereas inspectors judge them to be good. The curriculum is broad and balanced and offers a very wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. However, about two thirds of students in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their weekly entitlement to two hours of physical education.

All elements of students' personal development throughout the school are excellent. Students are very clear about how to lead a healthy lifestyle and this is reflected in their work to improve school meals and by their active participation in the very wide range of clubs and activities. Behaviour is exemplary in the vast majority of lessons and around the school. On the extremely rare occasions where students misbehave, they are treated firmly and fairly and they respond in a respectful, good-humoured manner. Their excellent personal development and high academic standards means that they are very well prepared for life beyond school, and a high proportion go on to higher education or take up their chosen career.

The girls' enjoyment of school is evident not only from their behaviour but also from their high levels of regular attendance. However, in the lessons that are taught in a more traditional fashion, it is clear that they tolerate the teaching rather than fully enjoy themselves. In these lessons, opportunities are missed to draw out the students and engage them in a meaningful intellectual dialogue. The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was good overall. Senior leaders observe teaching regularly and have recently instituted a system of 'learning walks', but judgement of its quality is based largely on examination results. Good use is made of this information to challenge middle leaders to improve performance. An example of this is the way in which the headteacher has very effectively challenged the English department to improve the number of students gaining an A* at GCSE. The head of English has responded in an enthusiastic and effective way. However, the systems used during the school year are not rigorous enough to spot potential underperformance, which leaves the school vulnerable to unexpected dips in examination results. This is especially true of the sixth form, where achievement was only satisfactory overall in 2007 and in specific subjects in 2008. As a result, students in the sixth form experience a more variable quality of teaching than students in Years 7-11.

The last inspection recommended that the school should improve the way in which students are informed as to how they are doing and what more they need to do to improve. Systems to improve the quality of assessment have improved and target setting is now well established. Students report that it allows them to have an input into their academic development. They have opportunities to evaluate their own work, identify short-term targets and meet regularly with teachers to set long-term targets. The school has also made good use of staff-training sessions to improve the use of assessment for learning. As a result, more lessons give students the information they need as to how well they are doing. This is more strongly developed in Years 7-11 than in the sixth form, where it is inconsistent across subjects.

Governance has improved and is now good. The recently appointed chair has a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a very firm grip of governors' responsibilities regarding safeguarding and finances. Governors have improved their knowledge of the school, have close links with senior leaders and show great loyalty to the school. They are rightly proud of its achievements and highly supportive of the senior team. The chair acknowledges that governors require further training to ensure that they are able to challenge the school even more effectively on students' academic performance.

Just before the last inspection, the school achieved specialist status in business and enterprise. The positive impact of this on both standards and the curriculum is evident. To have achieved this in a relatively short period is particularly impressive. As a result, students now have the opportunity to study a greater range of subjects. Particularly noteworthy is the highly successful introduction of a financial studies diploma in the sixth form. During the same period, achievement in GCSE mathematics, one of the specialist subjects, has improved considerably. In addition, students have successfully taken part in many enterprise-related competitions.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The managers of the sixth form know the students extremely well and relationships are very good. Students feel that staff are highly supportive. Some aspects of the sixth form are very well monitored, for example, attendance. However, neither the quality of teaching nor academic progress is tracked as rigorously as at Key Stage 4. This means that achievement in the sixth form varies from satisfactory to outstanding over time and across subjects. Nevertheless, achievement is still good overall and enables the vast majority of students to progress to higher education.

Students report that they receive very good advice on their option choices when they enter the sixth form. They have a wide range of both academic and more vocational A levels to choose from and receive regular, helpful advice on the quality of their work. A few students reported that some lessons did not engage or challenge them enough but, instead, relied on teaching from the textbook. Inspectors saw lessons of this kind but also observed a number of good lessons where students were being intellectually challenged and encouraged to work independently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor the quality of teaching and learning more rigorously, particularly in the sixth form, to ensure that any potential underperformance is identified early and effective action taken to remedy it.
- Ensure that all students at Key Stage 4 have their entitlement to two hours of physical education each week.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	----------------	-------

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	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	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
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	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

14 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School, Upminster, RM14 2QR

Thank you for very much for welcoming me to your school and speaking so openly and enthusiastically about it during the recent inspection. I am writing to let you know my main findings. You can download the complete report from www.ofsted.gov.uk.

I judged your school to be outstanding, not just because of your excellent examination results in Year 11, but also because of the very high level of care and support that you receive. This means that your behaviour is excellent and you get on very well not only with each other but also with staff. An extremely high number of your parents and carers wrote to us to say how pleased they were with the school. You achieve more academically in Years 7-11 than you do in the sixth form, where exam results are good rather than outstanding. You are very well prepared for life beyond school and the vast majority of you go on to university or to a career of your choice. So, well done to all of you.

Even in an outstanding school there is more to do, so we have asked the senior leaders and governors to make improvements in two key areas:

- check the quality of lessons more carefully, particularly in the sixth form, so that, if any of you are not achieving your best, it can be identified quickly
- make sure that everyone in Years 10 and 11 is timetabled to do two hours of physical education each week.

You can play your part by letting teachers know if you are struggling with something or feel that you are not making as much progress as you could.

It was a pleasure to visit your school and I wish all of you, particularly those taking exams this term, the very best.

Yours faithfully

Michael Lynes
Her Majesty's Inspector