

The Urswick School

Paragon Road, Hackney, London, E9 6NR

Inspection dates 20–21 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school's motto, 'believe and achieve', fuels the headteacher's powerful drive to improve the school, which is shared by all school leaders. The headteacher has established a vision of excellence, shared by all members of the school community, which has the students' success firmly at its heart.
- Standards have risen steeply since the last inspection and all groups of students now achieve well from their starting points.
- Students' enthusiasm for learning and their hard work ensure that at all times their behaviour is excellent. They are polite and welcoming to guests to their school, of which they are very proud indeed.
- Students routinely experience good and sometimes outstanding teaching. As a result of the school's skilful training, teachers plan interesting and challenging lessons to which students respond enthusiastically.
- The sixth form is good. Students speak highly of their experience of sixth form life and learning because they study courses that match their abilities and interests and are well taught.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A minority of teaching is not yet entirely successful because the school's marking policy is not consistently applied to ensure students know exactly what to do to improve their work.
- When teachers ask more complex questions, they do not always develop students' ability to think in a way that will ensure they achieve the highest grades in their examinations.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 part lessons, 12 of them with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors met with students, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair and with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the school’s records of parents and carers who had responded to the questionnaire that the school regularly uses. No parents or carers had used the online survey (Parent View) before or during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the school at work, looked at information about students, including about vulnerable and disabled students and those with special educational needs, and examined records of students’ attendance.
- Inspectors examined school documents including the school’s evaluation of its own performance, the school’s improvement plan; minutes of the meetings of the governing body; records of lesson observations; records of staff training; minutes of performance management and appraisal meetings; progress data related to the use of the pupil premium grant; and reports from the school’s local authority adviser.
- Inspectors scrutinised 51 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Patricia Barford, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Roger Garrett	Additional inspector
Babrul Matin	Additional inspector
Caroline Pardy	Additional inspector

Information about this school

- The Urswick School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- A new sixth form was set up in September 2012 and has 39 students enrolled this year.
- The proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals is much higher than the national average.
- Seven out of 10 students are supported by the pupil premium grant, which is provided by the government to schools to give extra help to students known to be eligible for free schools meals, those who are in the care of the local authority and those who are children of service families. No students currently on the school's roll are from service families.
- About a quarter of Year 7 students are eligible for the catch-up premium that the government gives to schools to help students who need extra help with reading, writing and mathematics as they start secondary school.
- Nine out of 10 students are from minority ethnic communities. This proportion is much higher than average. Over half of the students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportions of disabled students and those with special educational needs are broadly average at the level of school action but in the case of students at school action plus or with statements the proportions are much higher than the national average.
- A much higher proportion of students join or leave the school outside the normal times than is the case nationally.
- The school has a formal partnership with The Boxing Academy that provides alternative courses for students from the ages of 13 to 16 who are at risk of exclusion. Nine pupils are currently at the academy.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that standards rise even more quickly by ensuring that:
 - when teachers mark students' work, they always give them precise guidance about how to improve it
 - teachers encourage students to read carefully the advice given and, if necessary, discuss it with them to be sure students have understood and can apply what they have been told
 - students are given enough time to think in depth about their responses to complex questions and making sure that all of the class understand and can contribute to the answers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school at the start of Key Stage 3 with levels of attainment much lower than the national average.
- Since the last inspection, standards, including in English and mathematics, have risen strongly and the school's very thorough information about the students now in the school shows that this improvement is set to continue. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are now broadly average.
- Students make good progress in their lessons, producing a great deal of work that they are proud to show to, and discuss with, visitors. Parents and carers are confident that their children are achieving well.
- Little use is made of early entry for GCSE examinations with only religious education being taken by students in Year 9.
- Students, regardless of their ethnic background, and students for whom English is an additional language make at least good and sometimes better progress to reach standards that are broadly average. Students in the sixth form are, in these very early days, doing well in their chosen subjects.
- Students eligible for the pupil premium do better in their GCSE examinations than do other students in the school and better than their comparable students nationally. They make at least expected progress and, as a result of the support they receive, frequently make far more than expected progress, as the school's information, supported by case studies, shows. In 2012, Year 11 students in English, scored one quarter of a grade better than other students in the school and in other schools nationally. In mathematics, there was no gap between the standards they reached and the standards attained by other students.
- The school's own reliable data show that those students who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium are progressing quickly to reach the same standards as other students of the same age. Students that join the school other than at the normal time of transfer also achieve well.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs gain higher grades in their GCSE examinations than their peers nationally and make very strong progress from their starting points. Very few students are in public care but case studies show that they do well in school and progress to college or to employment.
- All of the students who attend The Boxing Academy achieve five or more GCSE examination passes below the level of a grade C. This represents good achievement from their starting points.
- Almost all students continue in their learning post-16 in a college or sixth form including those who win scholarships to attend independent boarding schools with which the school has strong partnerships.
- Reading is vigorously promoted throughout the school. The library is busy from early morning until late afternoon, with a high level of loans from the stock of expertly selected books to engage students' interest and to support their studies. Students read aloud confidently in lessons. Extensive support is provided for students whose reading is less secure, through individual and group work, with the results of regular tests of all students' reading ages used effectively to ensure that those who need it most are receive extra help.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved a great deal since the previous inspection and in most lessons teaching is now consistently good, and in a significant proportion it is outstanding. Parents and carers believe their children are well taught. Students' desire to learn makes a strong contribution to the quality of teaching because their speed of response and their discipline in following instructions enable lessons to proceed at a good pace and without interruption.
- Teachers plan well. They have high expectations of what students can achieve, and provide challenging, interesting opportunities so that students are engaged and enthusiastic. Students

approve of the homework they receive and understand its importance.

- Students' ability to read and write is promoted at every chance with a focus on key words and on acquiring a wider active vocabulary.
- Teaching assistants provide very effective support to students for whom English is an additional language. Disabled students and those with special educational needs receive high-quality support from teaching assistants in class and in specially created smaller groups where they are given intensive help. The school's data show that their reading and writing skills are improving as a result of this.
- Teachers use carefully designed seating plans, using the very detailed data provided about each pupil to make sure that pair and group work will be successful. Students work well in groups and pairs. They organise themselves and listen hard to their peers, and make considered and confident contributions.
- Despite many examples of exemplary practice, the quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent, because teachers do not always give students sufficiently detailed comments to enable them to improve the quality of their work. Moreover, teachers do not give students enough explicit encouragement to read the advice given, discuss it with them if needed and act upon it in future work.
- Similarly, although the use of questioning is an undoubted strength for many teachers, not all consistently use challenging questions to promote students' ability to think about and to understand in depth the topics they are studying.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Relationships in this very diverse school are extremely positive and equality of opportunity is successfully promoted at all times. The school's ethos is rooted in values of self-worth, respect for others and forgiveness, and students display these values in their everyday conduct. Their behaviour is exemplary, with the result that learning can take place unimpeded. Students present their work in the classroom knowing that they will be applauded, literally, for their efforts.
- All the staff who responded to the questionnaire agreed that behaviour is a key strength. Students are very positive about behaviour in the school.
- Students hold a range of leadership positions in the school and do their work with pride.
- Students are very well informed about different kinds of bullying. Students report there is little if any bullying and that any signs of it are dealt with quickly. They feel very safe at school and know how to keep themselves safe. Parents and carers agree that their children are safe in school and that behaviour is good.
- Students are on time for their lessons and for the start of school. Attendance continues to improve and students attend regularly. Rates of persistent absence have fallen sharply as a result of the extensive and very high-quality support and challenge the school gives to families.
- Rates of fixed-term exclusion have also declined sharply because the school has effective arrangements in place to avoid the use of this sanction. Permanent exclusion is very seldom used and there are very good alternative arrangements in place to avoid it. Students whose behaviour has caused problems in the past speak very positively about the help that specialist staff give them.
- The quality of students' experience at The Boxing Academy is just as good as it is at the school because the headteacher ensures that this is the case. These students attend well and their behaviour is excellent.
- Older students describe the improvements that they have seen over time in behaviour and are full of praise for how the school is now.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Visionary and decisive leadership has transformed the school since the last inspection. All leaders share the same ambition for the school's success and have the same understanding of how it can continue to improve. All the staff who responded to the questionnaire say they are proud to work at the school and that they receive very good help to improve their practice. Morale is high. Staff are wholeheartedly committed to the school.
- Results of the parent questionnaires show that parents and carers have a great deal of confidence in the school.
- The school is very well managed, with an attention to detail that ensures that it runs efficiently. Leaders make their high expectations very clear to staff in policy documents and handbooks, and ensure that procedures are routinely followed.
- Strong leadership means that teaching has improved a great deal and continues to improve, as a result of the emphasis placed on developing the skills of the staff through personalised training. The team of advanced skills teachers that the school has created is a key element of the school's capacity to improve even further.
- Performance management arrangements are most effective in ensuring there is a very high level of accountability in the school where excellence in teaching is prized and rewarded, and underperformance is robustly challenged. Feedback to teachers is direct and unflinching and based on a secure understanding by leaders of what constitutes excellent teaching.
- Those staff who are responsible for students' welfare have an impressive grasp of the needs of every student, and make sure that all students are very well looked after indeed and every effort is made to reach every single family.
- The curriculum, in and beyond the school day and in all key stages, is broad and balanced and designed astutely to ensure that all pupils progress well while they are at and after they leave the school.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, can and do take part in a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, related to the subjects they study, and to theatre, dance, music and sport. As a result, students' development, as in the rest of the school, is very strong in social and cultural aspects, with the school's ethos providing extensive opportunities for spiritual and moral development.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority adviser provides good support and challenge to the school through regular visits in order to support the school's process of self-evaluation.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very well informed about all aspects of the school. They receive clear, detailed and frank reports from the headteacher and from the local authority adviser. They make regular, focused visits to see the school in action. They emphasise the need to know what parents and carers are thinking about the school and they ensure they receive an analysis of the regular parent surveys. In particular, they share the priority the school has made of the development of teaching and raising students' achievement, and know where there are strengths and where there is more to do.
 - They demand that performance management and the management of pay progression are rigorous, and are related directly to teaching quality and to students' achievement. They hold the headteacher strongly to account in his performance management, ensuring the school's strategic priorities are at the heart of the process.
 - Financial management is very efficient and governors know how the use of the pupil premium is contributing to the enhanced performance of the students who benefit from it.
 - Governors share the school's ambition. They communicate strongly the Urswick values and the importance of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students alongside their academic achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	100284
Local authority	Hackney
Inspection number	400404

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	800
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Pryce
Headteacher	Richard Brown
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 September 2009
Telephone number	020 8985 2430
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