



The Charter School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131812
Local Authority Southwark
Inspection number 293855
Inspection date 29 September 2006
Reporting inspector Paul Dowgill HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Red Post Hill
School category	Foundation		London
Age range of pupils	11–18		SE24 9JH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02073466600
Number on roll (school)	1097	Fax number	02077346601
Number on roll (6th form)	207		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Ms Lin Proctor
		Headteacher	Mr Chris Bowler
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003		

Age group 11–18	Inspection date 29 September 2006	Inspection number 293855
---------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

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 an Additional Inspector in a one day visit.

Description of the school

The Charter School opened in 2000, has grown steadily and is now oversubscribed. It is slightly larger than average with around 170 more boys than girls. The vast majority of students live within one mile of the school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and with learning difficulties and disabilities is very high. Just over half the students are from minority ethnic groups and the proportion with English as an additional language is in line with the national average. Overall the mobility of the student population reflects the national trend, although it is higher than average in Years 10 and 11. The sixth form started in 2004 and continues to expand; it is expected to reach capacity in 2007-08. It has formed links with a local further education provider, other secondary schools and work-based providers. The school became a business and enterprise college in September 2005. There has been a significant turnover in staffing in the last two years, including the appointment of a new headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Charter School was founded to serve the needs of the local community and its ethos includes welcoming all local children whatever their ability, celebrating their individuality and valuing their social and cultural diversity. Parents, in their responses to the questionnaires, very much appreciate these values. 'We chose to remain in this area because of the opening of the school and regard it as a successful and dynamic community school with excellent and dedicated staff,' wrote one parent. Whilst another stated, 'We are very lucky to have such a school in our area, the vast majority of aspects of it are very impressive.' Many parents also commented very positively on the work of staff and the impact they have on the education of their children. 'The Charter School provides a strong basis on which to build my child's education academically and socially,' and the staff have been 'marvellous in providing patient, understanding encouragement.'

This is an outstanding school. From the headteacher to the newest member of staff, all are dedicated to improving the educational opportunities of all learners that pass through the school gates. There is a relentless drive for improvement across all aspects of school life and staff willingly give of their time to achieve this. The expectations of pupils are appropriately high and achievable, and the school's management and teachers have the ability to ensure that these are met in full.

The new headteacher's exceptional leadership has been instrumental in moving the school forward. His work has already had significant impact, in particular in improving behaviour, and this is recognised by pupils, staff and parents. The headteacher has ensured that there is clarity in what the school is trying to achieve and that all staff understand this. He has refined the school's management structure and introduced rigorous school self-evaluation so that open, often frank, discussions about performance and how it can be improved are encouraged. This has resulted in excellent leadership and management at all levels that are having considerable impact on school improvement.

The care, guidance and support provided by staff both for pupils' academic and pastoral needs are excellent. There are very good, constructive relationships between the pupils and staff. All pupils spoke very highly of the staff and stressed that there is a range of adults they can speak to about any concerns they may have. They are also very appreciative that staff are readily available and supportive. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported.

The school has made great efforts to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of learners and has been very successful in achieving this. For pupils in Year 10 and above, there are a range of curriculum routes they can follow that are tailored to their requirements. Very good links have been established with the local college and work placements to provide vocational learning. The school constantly seeks to improve pupils' educational experiences through both the statutory curriculum and extra-curricular provision.

Pupils' achievement is good. The progress they make between starting Year 7 and the end of Year 9 placed the school in the top 15% of schools for the last three years. It was also in the top 15% of schools for the progress made by the first cohort of Year 11 pupils in 2005. The standards achieved in national tests and examinations have been in line with national averages. This overall good performance has been due to good teaching. The school, however, is not complacent about its achievements and has a rigorous monitoring system in place to evaluate and improve teaching.

Inclusion is a strong feature of the school and its cultural diversity is valued greatly by the pupils and staff. The school is a harmonious environment with little bullying or racism. As one pupil put it, the school is a place of 'peace in the community.' Pupils are proud to come to The Charter School and celebrate its successes. They appreciate the wide range of opportunities provided and understand that they have to contribute to make the school a success. Many pupils are very willing to take on responsibility and give back to the school and local community.

The school is making very good use of its specialist status as a business and enterprise college to enhance and broaden its partnerships with external organisations and improve the curriculum. Partnership is a strength of the school and it works with a wide range of providers in order to present pupils and staff with opportunities to broaden their learning and improve outcomes.

Communication with parents is developing, via the website and other means. However, a significant minority feel that communication is not as effective as it could be.

Although there has been considerable staff turnover in the last few years, the changes have been managed very effectively and have not hindered the admirable drive for improvement. The headteacher and senior managers are successfully building capacity at all levels to ensure that improvements are sustainable, so enabling the school to continue to move forward.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form, although still in its infancy provides an excellent, flexible curriculum that meets very effectively the needs of all learners. First-rate support and guidance is provided for students when choosing vocational programmes or academic courses so that they have every opportunity to fulfil their potential. The teaching in the sixth form is good and leads to students making good progress. Standards for the first, small cohort of students were broadly in line with national figures. The attention given to the wider aspects of sixth form life is appreciated by students and results in their outstanding personal development. The director of learning has a clear vision for developing the sixth form and is implementing this successfully. Excellent student recruitment and retention are a result of this.

What the school should do to improve further

* Share the best practice in teaching more widely across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' achievement is good and standards they attain are broadly average. Students enter the school with broadly average attainment, although the proportion of low and high attaining students varies considerably each year. Between Years 7 and 9, the progress all students make is good and this results in them attaining average standards in the national tests. In 2006, more students attained higher levels in the national tests than in the previous year.

The progress made by the first cohort of students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, to sit GCSE examinations in 2005 was good overall. Black Caribbean students, however, did not make the progress expected of them. It is too soon to determine if this is a trend and the school has already taken steps to intervene. Standards attained by students at GCSE in 2005 and 2006 are in line with national averages. The extensive range of support available to students has helped ensure that many achieve well and attain good results.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good and improving. They feel safe as bullying is rare and isolated incidents of name-calling are taken seriously. Though a minority of parents feel that classroom behaviour is an issue, the drive to improve conduct has had considerable impact and behaviour around the school and in lessons is very good. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen rapidly. Students fully understand the benefits of healthy living and many positively aspire to this. They appreciate the school's efforts to encourage healthy eating and participation in physical exercise. The school places a high premium on developing students' social, moral and cultural values, and the results of this are outstanding. Its development of students' spiritual values is satisfactory. Students are very willing to take responsibility through the many opportunities provided and to contribute to the school community; older students acting as mentors for younger students are one example of this. Students are also fully involved in charity events and international links. The school works in partnership very effectively with outside organisations to prepare students for their future in the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The committed and enthusiastic staff has established a very good rapport with students, based on effective classroom discipline and stimulating work, which encourages them to work confidently and independently. Teaching assistants are effectively trained, although opportunities for them to liaise effectively with classroom teachers are not fully in place. In some lessons, teachers showed remarkable understanding of the differing needs of each student and provided work that challenged their understanding. This very successful practice is not consistent among all classes. The progress students make throughout the year is very effectively monitored and regularly reported on, and targets for improvement are swiftly put in place. Students with additional learning needs have work well matched to their needs, based on a sound initial diagnosis.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's curriculum is highly effective in meeting learners' needs and its impact on different groups of students is outstanding. The curriculum provided for students with learning difficulties and disabilities has improved since the time of the last inspection and is now highly relevant to their needs. Business and enterprise status has a significant impact on broadening opportunities for students and the facilities in the school. A comprehensive programme of citizenship lessons helps students prepare for their future economic well-being as well as developing their social and moral understanding. The rich and well-attended programme of extension and enrichment classes outside the school day makes an excellent contribution to many students' progress and their enjoyment of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

This is a key strand to the school's success. The system of pastoral care linked to academic progress ensures that students' welfare is as high a priority as their examination results. Addressing the needs of the whole child provides students with the confidence and self-esteem to succeed. Students feel they have a voice in school and that they are listened to. The induction of Year 7 students is successful and many parents report that their children are happy at school. Excellent guidance continues as students move through the school and into the sixth form. The school has robust and very effective systems in place to support students whose learning falls behind.

It also works effectively with parents and other agencies to ensure that students, whatever their needs, make good progress. There are opportunities for parental involvement, such as in the school's healthy eating programme where parents can monitor the diet of their own children in case of medical need.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The excellent leadership and management demonstrated by the headteacher permeate down through the headship team to middle managers. All have a clear vision of the strengths of the school and the priorities for improvement and know how these are to be achieved. The headteacher has empowered managers to be proactive and take risks and holds them fully accountable for their responsibilities. The high quality management underpins the drive to improve students' expectations and achievement. The school has outstanding capacity to improve.

Monitoring and evaluation is at the heart of the work of the school and one of its strengths. The school is both data rich and information sharp. Challenging targets are set and reviewed regularly and all staff is aware of these. The systematic approach to evaluation allows the school to identify individual and groups of students for targeted support; as a result the equality of opportunity for students is outstanding.

Governors play a strategic role in school development and act as a critical friend to the senior leadership team. They help ensure that finances are controlled and that value for money is achieved. They are very well informed as to the school's strengths and opportunities for development and fully support the school improvement plan.

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

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

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 behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 the learners' needs?	2	2
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

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.

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	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
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	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to inform you about the outcomes of the inspection. However, on behalf of Ms Power and myself, I would first like to thank those of you who we met and spoke to during the visit. We appreciated your openness and cooperation and were impressed by the thoughtful way you talked about your school.

Yours is an outstanding school. There are many reasons for this, but the main ones are the leadership and management provided by the headteacher, senior team, curriculum and year leaders. They and all the staff are committed to ensuring that you have every opportunity to succeed. The care, guidance and support the teachers provide for you are excellent and, as you told us, they willingly go the extra mile for you. We all also thought that the curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities available to you met your needs very well. Most of you make best use of these opportunities and we would encourage all of you to do so.

The progress you have made since joining the school has been good and you are getting results in national tests and examinations that are in line with national averages. We know the school has high expectations for you and would expect that you would want to achieve these. The good teaching you get helps you gain these results. We have suggested to the school that it could share the features of the best teaching more widely in school.

You have played an important part in the school's success. We were very impressed by your appreciation of the cultural diversity in the school. As one student told us, 'the diversity is what makes this school good.' Another said the school is a place of 'peace in the community.' We understand that some of your parents feel that behaviour is an issue in the school. However, you told us that due to the impact of the headteacher and the new systems in place, that behaviour had improved considerably. What we observed during our day in the school confirmed your views. You have an important role in this by respecting the right of others to learn, much as you impressed us with your respect for the different cultures present in the school.

We left the school confident that it will continue to improve. You have an important role to play in its improvement and we wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dowgill HMI