

St Ursula's Convent School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100193
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	335501
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	624
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Adams
Headteacher	Mrs Geraldine Scanlan
Date of previous school inspection	0 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 14 lessons taught by teachers in the school and eight enrichment sessions delivered by the school's external partners on the cross-school enrichment day on the first day of the inspection. They met with teachers, middle and senior managers and governors, and talked to students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's self-evaluation, examination results and tracking of students' progress, development plans, records of lesson observations, minutes of meetings of the senior team and governors and curricular planning documentation. Evidence was also collated from 262 questionnaires returned by parents, as well as questionnaires from 99 students and 40 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by all groups of students in the school
- the progress made in raising students' achievement and improving teaching and learning since the last inspection.

Information about the school

St Ursula's Convent School is a smaller-than-average girls' Catholic secondary school. Although the school draws students from areas with relatively high social and economic deprivation, the proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has a high proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the largest numbers coming from Black African or Black Caribbean heritage. The number of students from Eastern Europe is increasing. Over 40% of students speak English as an additional language, though the number at early stages of learning English is small. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is well below average. The school specialises in humanities subjects and has specialist status as a training school.

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: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Ursula's Convent School is an outstanding school, as judged at the previous inspection three years ago. The headteacher, ably supported by a highly effective senior leadership team, has created a very positive ethos and a culture of high aspirations in the school, where it is believed that every girl, from whatever background, can achieve highly. The school works very closely with a wide range of external partners to support students' outstanding achievement, personal development and emotional well-being.

Since the last inspection, examinations results have improved even further, with almost every girl achieving five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades in 2009. The proportion who achieved five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics was also significantly above the national average. The proportion of girls achieving A* to A grades was also above average.

Students make exceptional progress between Year 7 and 11 in most subjects as a result of high quality teaching and excellent academic and pastoral support. School staff know all students well and are fully aware of their different interests and abilities, as well as personal circumstances which may affect their learning. This enables the school to provide very personalised and highly effective support to enable students to achieve their potential. In a few subjects, girls did not achieve as well in 2009. Previous staffing difficulties in geography and science contributed to lower attainment and the school is addressing these areas. Current tracking indicates that students' progress in these subjects is improving.

The school has a continuous focus on improving teaching and learning and has made excellent use of training school status to promote and support teachers' professional development and classroom practice. Teacher-led focus groups have promoted and begun to share best practice, with a strong emphasis on how to improve lessons from good to outstanding and on developing effective assessment strategies across all subjects. Feedback to students on how to improve their work is being developed well, but is not yet implemented consistently well across all subjects.

The school's excellent track record in improving students' results and its relentless focus on achieving even more ambitious targets for the future, along with a rigorously self-critical approach to the evaluation of its work, indicate outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students in all subjects know how to improve their work through

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sharing existing best practice in students' self-assessment, peer assessment and diagnostic marking of work by teachers.

- Reduce the differences in attainment between subjects by sharing best practice in teaching, ensuring that all teachers employ strategies to challenge students to develop higher-level subject skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

The school carries out very detailed analyses of all students' results and there are no significant differences in the performance of different groups. Students made at least good, and often excellent, progress in the lessons observed during the inspection. Students make the most progress where they have opportunities to participate actively, working in pairs or groups and engaging in discussions. This helps them to develop greater independence of thought, to explain and justify their ideas and to make strong connections between different aspects of their learning. For example, in an English class, the teacher made very good use of visual imagery and questioning to draw out students' responses to a poem, and develop higher-level language skills. The few lessons where students made less progress were often characterised by a slow start, and pace that was too slow to keep students fully engaged. Despite good planning, teachers sometimes talked too much and students remained passive for too much of the lesson.

Most students feel very safe in school and know where to seek help or support if they need it. They say that incidents of bullying are very rare and are confident that any such incidents would be dealt with effectively. A very small minority of girls present quite challenging behaviour on occasion and the school acts promptly to deal with this, with a strong emphasis on supporting students to remain within the school and helping them to achieve. One student, who had experience of fixed-term exclusion, said, 'The school never gives up on you.' The behaviour of the vast majority of students in lessons and around the school is exemplary.

Attendance, although above average, did not reach the school's very ambitious targets last year. It is closely monitored and absences are reported to parents in the school's effort to increase attendance overall. Students participate regularly in extra-curricular activities and physical education is popular. Topics related to developing a healthy lifestyle are thoroughly covered and a high proportion of students take the healthy-option school lunches, though a few students said they would appreciate more choices. Students are actively involved in the school and wider community. Since the last inspection, the school has introduced a prefect scheme for Year 11 and trained Year 10 students to mentor younger girls. Some girls observe lessons as part of the training-school initiative and others contribute to staff recruitment. Students regularly raise money for charity and work with local primary schools and children from a special school.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The vast majority of girls have very positive attitudes to learning and enjoy the wide range of

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opportunities the school provides. They develop self-confidence and maturity in their relationships with fellow students and adults and are welcoming to visitors in the school. Students appreciate the multicultural ethos of the school and how this helps them to learn to respect each other's culture and values. They respond positively to opportunities for time for thoughtful reflection provided in well-planned assemblies. Some teachers start lessons with a prayer and students use a prayer book to record prayers and thoughts for others in the school community and their families.

Well-planned careers education and guidance effectively supports students' choices when they leave school. Strong partnership working with a local Catholic sixth form college supports very high levels of progression to further education. Outstanding achievement, high-level academic and personal skills and growing self-confidence means that St Ursula's students are very well equipped for future life and careers.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

In most lessons, teachers plan a good variety of activities to engage students and meet their different interests and abilities. Most teachers focus clearly on how students can

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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achieve higher levels and grades and ensure that students develop and extend their subject skills to enable them to achieve at the highest level they can. This often helps lower-ability students to produce work above their expected level. In a lower-set maths lesson the teacher ensured that all students participated in group work and consolidated their learning through students explaining work to others in the class. As a result they made excellent progress and demonstrated a good understanding of the topic.

Some very good examples of diagnostic marking and feedback were seen, for example in English, and good use of self and peer assessment. In a music lesson, each student had personalised targets for that lesson and their peers gave constructive feedback on strengths in the performance and possible areas for further improvement at the end of the lesson. Students are encouraged to evaluate and annotate their work through the school's 'green pen' policy, though the school acknowledges that implementation is inconsistent.

The curriculum is planned very carefully to closely meet individual needs. All students take religious education and at least one modern foreign language at GCSE. Students are able to select appropriate courses for GCSE, though a few said they would welcome some more work-related options such as business studies. Higher-attaining students can take AS mathematics or critical thinking, and GCSE astronomy and Latin are also available. The humanities specialism has been very successful in introducing innovative work, including themed projects and enrichment activities. For example, during the inspection, Year 7 students created their own art and drama work in response to the historical setting and artefacts in the Royal Naval College. Students in Year 9 visited the BBC and Year 10 explored the business world at Canary Wharf. Students commented positively on the long-term impact of such activities, with one girl subsequently taking a degree at the London School of Economics, having been inspired by a school visit there. Students and parents value the excellent care and support provided by the school. Staff know individuals very well and are able to give highly personalised support to ensure no child falls through the net. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve very well as a result of this highly tailored support. Several parents commented that their daughters settled in to the school very easily in Year 7 as a result of well-planned arrangements to support transition from primary school. The school carefully monitors students' progress against individual targets and takes prompt and effective action to support any girls at risk of underachieving. Very good support for individuals who have had fixed-term exclusions has been instrumental in supporting them to reintegrate into classes and achieve well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1
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How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team and governors set very clear and ambitious targets for school and individual performance and there are high levels of accountability throughout the school. Students' examination results have improved significantly over the last few years as a result of rigorous target setting and monitoring, a very clear focus on improving teaching and learning and very well-targeted individual support for students. The school ethos also places great importance on students' personal and social development and preparing students to thrive in the wider world.

Governors have an excellent understanding of the key priorities for the school and provide good support, but also ask challenging questions of senior leaders and are very well informed about all aspects of the school's performance.

The school's evaluation of its performance, including the quality of teaching and learning, is thorough and self-critical. Managers have a very sharp understanding of the school's strengths and areas where further improvements can be made and this informs improvement planning. Evaluation takes account of the performance of different groups and ensures that all students have full access to the curriculum and other activities. Equality of opportunity is central to all the school's activities. The school makes a strong contribution to community cohesion through local, national and global partnerships, although it has not fully evaluated the impact of its work in this area.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and the school places a high priority on all aspects of safeguarding and child protection. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they are well informed on current requirements. Senior staff and governors are trained in safer recruitment procedures. Comprehensive risk assessments for off-site activities are monitored by senior staff. Health and safety are promoted well in laboratory and workshop activities.

Finances are well managed and future plans carefully balanced to meet students' needs and maintain the school's cost effectiveness. While a small number of parents and students commented that some facilities and accommodation would benefit from updating, the school makes the best use of the resources available and provides excellent value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Almost half the school's parents returned questionnaires, which is a higher proportion than usually seen. The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school and value the high quality of education and care their daughters receive. Many acknowledged the efforts the school has made to improve communications since the last inspection, and appreciate the newsletter and receiving text messages, though a few would appreciate further consultation on key issues.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Ursula's Convent School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 262 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 624 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	102	39	144	55	13	5	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	110	42	143	55	6	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	96	37	147	56	15	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	98	37	150	57	11	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	102	39	141	54	10	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	75	29	153	58	25	10	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	64	24	161	62	27	10	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	70	27	155	59	8	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	71	27	159	61	19	7	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	105	40	125	48	17	7	8	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	59	23	151	58	32	12	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	101	39	140	53	9	3	6	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	112	43	133	51	10	4	3	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



14 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Ursula's Convent School, Greenwich SE10 8HN

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for making us so welcome and helping us with the inspection. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you in your lessons and around the school. Many of you, and your parents or carers, spoke very positively about the school. We have taken these views into account in arriving at our judgement that your school is outstanding.

The school has developed a strong culture of high expectations where all students are supported to achieve as much as they can. This has led to most students making exceptional progress from Year 7 to Year 11 and GCSE results are well above the national average in most subjects. However, students achieved less well in geography and applied science in 2009 and we have asked the school to reduce this gap, by ensuring you all develop the skills and knowledge needed to achieve higher grades.

Teaching is consistently at least good, with much outstanding practice. In the best lessons teachers provide lots of opportunities for you to participate actively and challenge you to think independently, and this is when you make the most rapid progress. Some teachers enable you to make good use of self and peer assessment, but this is not yet consistent between every teacher or every subject. We have asked the school to share the best practice across all subjects.

Most of you told us that you enjoy school and the regular enrichment activities. Many of you take up the opportunities to get involved in school and local community events and contribute strongly to helping others, for example through fund-raising activities and mentoring other students in school.

Most girls are very proud to attend St Ursula's and recognise the very positive experiences and the excellent opportunities the school provides. You told us how much you value the help and support you get from staff in the school. They are very committed to ensuring you all achieve as well as you can and are able to progress to further and higher education and rewarding futures.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer

Her Majesty's Inspector

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