

Mulberry School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100968
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	335632
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter McGregor

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1425
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	378
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Chastney
Headteacher	Vanessa Ogden
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. They observed 37 lessons, and the same number of teachers, and held meetings with groups of students, staff and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at evidence including school policies and self-evaluation, development plans, information about students' performance and minutes of governing body meetings. The team received and analysed questionnaires completed by 32 parents and carers, and others by staff and students.

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

- what has contributed to a rise in attainment in mathematics and science seen in the most recent data compared with results in 2009
- attendance in the last year and the school's approach to dealing with absence
- the impact of the specialist arts curriculum on students' learning
- the impact on progress of the girls' attitudes to learning, and the consistency of the quality of teaching.

Information about the school

Mulberry School for Girls is larger than most secondary schools. It is a training school and has specialist arts college status. Almost all girls are from minority ethnic backgrounds, predominantly Bangladeshi, with a very small number from a White British background. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. A broadly average proportion has special educational needs and/or disabilities, mainly moderate learning difficulties, dyslexia, speech, language and communication or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. An above average proportion has a statement of special educational needs. The overwhelming majority of students speak English as an additional language, and a higher than average proportion is at an early stage of learning the language. Mulberry has achieved many awards in recent years, such as Investors in People and the British Council's International School status.

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

'I feel incredibly lucky to be in this school,' said a Year 9 student, summarising the views of girls and their parents about this outstanding school. It is now in the final stages of a journey embarked upon several years ago. The vision is being realised of a highly inclusive, caring school where girls develop into exceptionally confident, articulate young women who strive for the highest possible standards in all that they do. Key to this excellence is the way families and the local community are involved in the education provided at Mulberry. This has taken some time to achieve and is built on respect, tolerance and, most importantly, doing what is right for the girls' future.

The school promotes unashamedly an academic viewpoint, providing a curriculum that enables the girls to aspire to enter the most prestigious universities. It provides equally well for those who struggle to learn, giving them self-belief through the success they achieve in carefully selected courses. The academic subject approach is balanced by a focus on the creative arts which generates great excitement, enjoyment and the opportunity to become involved in highly successful ventures such as the Edinburgh Fringe.

The progress students make is excellent, and exceptionally so in English and mathematics. Assessment systems are rigorous, and once underachievement is identified high quality intervention is provided, often after school, at weekends and in holiday periods. As important in this success as the good teaching are the girls' outstanding commitment and their capacity for listening and learning. The school is aware of some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, particularly in terms of the use of assessment in lessons and in meeting individual needs.

Behaviour and personal development are excellent; girls feel entirely safe and are eager to become involved. Older students model conduct for the younger ones, as prefects, peer mentors and school council members. Attendance is excellent and all appreciate the importance of living healthy lifestyles.

The visionary practice of the headteacher, supported by her senior management team and all staff, is central to the school's success. Monitoring is systematic and rigorous, backed up with excellent training and highly effective self-evaluation. Knowledgeable governors challenge staff to maintain the momentum for further development. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent. This, and a constant drive to raise attainment and enhance girls' personal development, reflects outstanding capacity for further improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the contribution made by teaching and the use of assessment to support learning, by more consistent application of:
 - regular, high quality formative marking
 - effective questioning
 - matching tasks to girls' prior knowledge.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The girls make outstanding progress in lessons and thoroughly enjoy learning. They work extremely well individually and cooperatively, striving for high results in their GCSE and sixth-form courses. Results in GCSE English have been high for a number of years. In mathematics, they are above average and rapidly catching up. Highly effective analysis of past results has enabled improvement strategies to be targeted where needed; half the 2010 cohort have already achieved an A* to C pass through early entry. There is a similar, above average and improving picture in science where curriculum changes and a focus on high standards in coursework have greatly improved attainment. From a broadly average ability profile on entry, these impressive results represent excellent achievement. Girls, with their parents' support, are highly motivated to choose and do well in traditional GCSE courses as a means to achieve worthwhile careers. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are very high because students use computers in about a third of lessons – the school provides each girl with a laptop. Reflecting its specialist arts status, Mulberry exceeds its aspirational targets in English, media studies and performing arts. Success in these subjects has a marked impact on all others through the improved vocabulary and confidence for those who speak English as an additional language. Well-targeted support enables students at an early stage of learning English and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to excel.

Students know that issues such as bullying will be tackled with great rigour and fairness to all. Both younger and older girls work to rules which they understand and apply. Responsibilities such as the membership of the school council – from which came the initial suggestion of laptops for all – are taken very seriously. All of the girls participate in two hours' physical education each week and about half in after-school sports clubs. A large majority eat school food at lunchtime and appreciate it as nutritious and sensible. Their high order ICT skills, confidence and examination success equip the girls extremely well for future life. Participation in the Model United Nations (MUN) hosted by Mulberry School and attended by pupils from 25 other London schools, is one example of many that shows the girls' excellent contribution to the wider community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Respect, tolerance, reflection and an inclusive approach are at the core of their conduct.

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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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The large majority of lessons are characterised by high expectations, work at a good pace and make highly effective use of ICT, both laptops and interactive whiteboards. Lesson planning is clear and detailed, guiding teaching and learning. Students often work cooperatively in pairs, debating their understanding and reviewing each other's written work. Work is usually challenging and directed well at the needs of individuals, whether in sets or mixed-ability classes. Such teaching results in girls aspiring to attain the highest possible standards; they listen with rapt attention, persevere and make excellent progress in their learning. In a small minority of lessons, teachers tend to speak for too long, or ask insufficient questions or questions that do not identify girls' prior knowledge or extend their understanding. Such is the determination of the students that this has only minor impact on their learning in the lesson and very little on their overall achievement. Marking is uneven and not always constructively critical. Tracking systems, however, are rigorous and the data generated are used most effectively to decide interventions that benefit individual girls.

Through different pathways to success, the curriculum meets the needs of all students. An excellent balance has been achieved in the range of courses taught. The drive to improve girls' self-esteem with extensive arts subjects and extra-curricular activities results in positive attitudes to learning, which in turn give the girls confidence to opt for subjects they might otherwise disregard. The school achieves academic excellence, with its higher education opportunities, at the same time as

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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offering very worthwhile vocational courses, for example hair and beauty at a local college. An excellent opportunity was provided for the hospitality and catering group, who prepared outstanding food for over 300 MUN pupil delegates on two successive days.

Staff care greatly about the girls’ welfare, tutoring them with skill and patience. The school invests considerable energy and time, and has highly effective systems, to ensure that attendance is high; the rise in the last year has been exceptional. The ethos of the school is based around care for the individual needs of each girl, working very closely with their families. An excellent range of family workshops covers areas as diverse as obesity and ICT skills. Many expert external agencies make a valuable contribution to the care provided and the school’s own staff, such as health and family liaison officers, add greatly to this strength. The most vulnerable pupils and their parents and carers receive outstanding guidance and support.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and governors are exceptionally ambitious on behalf of the students and enjoy total support from a senior team with complementary skills. They work very closely together, driving forward improvement. All staff are involved in development planning, as are the students, who respond to draft documentation through the school council. The governors’ robust committee structure enables them to evaluate progress and hold to account all concerned. For example, heads of department are expected to discuss with governors both the attainment and progress of students in their subjects, and the changes in hand to secure further improvement. When monitoring and self-evaluation indicate any point of concern, such as a relative weakness in some teaching, action is taken to find a solution. These excellent systems and the passion of all concerned to maximise the girls’ enjoyment of their education result in outstanding academic results and highly motivated and successful students. Both staff and governors benefit regularly from excellent specialised training which keeps them abreast of important developments in teaching, learning and the welfare, health and safety of the girls. Investor in People status has been well earned.

Discrimination is not tolerated, as is apparent in the excellent harmony created throughout the school. Equality of opportunity is the basis for the outstanding curriculum and the excellent approach to inclusion. Promotion of community

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cohesion is outstanding and achieved through many facets of the school's work, including a conference on women leading global change and many visits in this country and abroad. The achievement of International School status reflects the high quality of this work. The girls see themselves in a local, national and international context. Safeguarding students has the highest priority. Procedures are detailed and helpful and managers adhere tenaciously to all statutory requirements concerning child protection policies and staff appointments. Parents and carers are kept very well informed through regular formal and informal contact about school life and their children's achievements. Electronic communication is a great strength: equipment is provided for families so they can gain access to the internet through the school's system. The school maximises the use made of its substantial resources 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
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Sixth form girls are exceptionally confident and highly motivated to gain top examination results. Most work hard, complete their chosen courses and make excellent progress, with many gaining their first choice places at leading popular universities. The high quality tracking system indicates that results will be high in 2010, substantially better than last year. Attendance is high. An excellent quality of individual care, and teaching that effectively supports learning contribute to these outstanding outcomes. Excellent relationships, good subject knowledge and helpful dialogue typify the large majority of lessons. Where teaching is less effective, work is not well enough matched to the range of students in the class and questioning is not sufficiently thorough. Leadership and management of the sixth form are dynamic and strong, focused on improving teaching and learning and the girls' enjoyment and attainment. The wide-ranging curriculum, care, guidance and support provided are

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outstanding. The most vulnerable sixth formers are given the very highest quality support by the headteacher and all staff. Numerous extra-curricular clubs in the arts and sport allow all girls to find activities which interest them. Students are inspired by many famous people invited to visit the school to share their experiences. Several visitors, inspired by meeting the girls, have offered their services to the school, such as a university science professor who mentors A-level students. Sixth formers make an excellent contribution to school life, for example assisting in lessons and providing assemblies. Their main strength, however, is as excellent role models for the younger girls to emulate.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	

Views of parents and carers

The views expressed by the very few parents and carers who responded to a questionnaire about the education provided were overwhelmingly positive in most areas. They believe that the school has an excellent impact on their children’s lives. A very small number indicated some concern over the healthy lifestyles of the girls but inspection evidence indicated that a good range of healthy options are offered at lunchtime, a breakfast club is available, sport has a high priority and education about healthy living through the curriculum is excellent.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mulberry School for Girls 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 32 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1425 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	44	18	56	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	41	19	59	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	38	18	56	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	44	17	53	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	16	50	16	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	28	21	66	2	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	28	19	59	4	13	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)	16	50	16	50	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	22	24	75	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	34	19	59	2	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	19	23	72	3	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	28	21	66	2	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	53	15	47	0	0	0	0

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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.



12 July 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Mulberry School for Girls, London E1 2JP

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We greatly enjoyed meeting you and judged your school to be outstanding.

Our main findings are as follows.

- You told us how much you enjoy school life and know that you are doing exceptionally well when you take GCSE, A-level and other examinations.
- Your attendance and behaviour are excellent; you feel very safe and follow a healthy lifestyle.
- You are extremely confident young women, appreciating the outstanding care you receive and the way the school welcomes the involvement of your families.
- Relationships between students and with staff are excellent.
- You persevere with your studies most effectively, wanting to be as successful as you can be; you have high expectations of what you can achieve in life.
- Older students are outstanding role models for their younger peers.
- The curriculum is excellent, providing you with many opportunities to take part in activities such as music and drama festivals.
- You are well taught by staff who have your best interests at heart.
- Your headteacher is an outstanding leader who receives excellent support from her colleagues and governors.

In a small minority of lessons work does not match your needs as well as it could, and some assessment could be more helpful to you. So we have asked the school to look into ways of improving these aspects. You can help by always asking questions when you find work too easy or difficult.

Thank you once again for your help during the inspection and our best wishes for your future success.

Yours sincerely

Peter McGregor
Lead inspector

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