



Mulberry School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 100968
Local Authority Tower Hamlets
Inspection number 285932
Inspection date 21 February 2007
Reporting inspector Asyia Kazmi HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Richard Street
School category	Community		Commercial Road
Age range of pupils	11–18		London E1 2JP
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	020 7790 6327
Number on roll (school)	1413	Fax number	020 7265 9882
Number on roll (6th form)	380		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr John Chastney
		Headteacher	Ms Vanessa Ogden
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Mulberry is a large, popular school which takes students from the full ability range. The students are predominantly of Bangladeshi heritage. Nearly all speak English as an additional language and a high number are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is five times the national average. The school is a Leading Edge school and a Training School, and acquired specialist status in the arts in September 2006. The school moved into new buildings in 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mulberry is a good school, with some outstanding features. The headteacher, with senior leaders and governors, provide strong and highly effective leadership. They have an accurate and detailed understanding of the schools' strengths and areas for improvement and have identified appropriate priorities for development.

The headteacher, senior leaders and the school staff value the considerable talents the students bring with them; but they also work hard to make sure that barriers to their achievement are systematically removed. The school is not complacent, senior leaders know that the progress students make is good, but it could be even better. The new systems that have been introduced to track students' progress more closely and improve teaching are already beginning to have an impact. This can be seen in the improvement in standards and, hence, the school's capacity to improve is outstanding.

Students enter the school with standards in line with national average. They make satisfactory progress through Years 7 to 9 and make good progress in Years 10 and 11. The school's monitoring systems have identified that while many students make good progress the most able students do not make as much progress as they should. It has rightly targeted this as an area for improvement.

The senior leadership team has put in place highly effective systems to improve teaching and learning. The in-house 'consultant practitioner' programme to share the best practice that exists in the school is helping teachers to improve their practice.

The school's vision for the students to become 'young women aspiring, leading and excelling' can be seen in: the commitment senior leaders demonstrate in pursuing better standards for students; the support teachers give to students in enabling them to develop into confident young women, and in the excellent range of opportunities the curriculum provides. A very high proportion of girls go on to higher studies at universities. The school is rigorous in pursuing equal opportunities and takes pride in the fact that girls are as likely to study the sciences as arts. The recently awarded specialism in arts is already having an impact on students' self-confidence, public speaking and curriculum choices.

The support for girls who are experiencing personal difficulties is outstanding. The school has a very effective and integrated support system to ensure vulnerable students get the academic and pastoral support they need. As a result, students with learning difficulties and disabilities make exceptional progress.

There is an excellent range of courses, academic and vocational, to meet students' needs and aspirations. Students told inspectors that the range of opportunities provided for them 'is what makes Mulberry'; they appreciate teachers' generosity with their time. The girls benefit from an excellent range of activities through the in-school and out of hours learning programme. This includes participation in the UN youth conference in New York, charitable work, trips and many sporting activities, including combining table tennis with revision. Students organise their own youth conference

with high profile speakers. They speak highly about the 'urban scholars' programme, where they study in a Saturday school.

Students told inspectors 'in this school all our views are counted and considered'. They speak enthusiastically about their involvement in the decisions that affect them through the student council and the prefect system. The school has been innovative in ensuring students are part of school improvement planning. They were involved in the appointment of the new deputy headteacher. The school has recently set up a programme of lesson observations by students. These leadership opportunities develop students' confidence, communication skills and their understanding of the world around them. As a result of this, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Students told inspectors that the 'beautifully warm and welcoming atmosphere makes learning enjoyable'. Their behaviour is impeccable and attendance is good. The school is sensitive to the cultural and religious needs of the students. It knows that parents have high aspirations for their daughters and all members of the school community work hard to realise these aspirations.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the growing sixth form is good. The school has sustained a steady rise in examination results over several years. Standards at the end of Year 13 are in line with national figures. Students achieve well, particularly in advance courses. However, not all students make as much progress as they should in some subjects in Year 12.

The sixth form is well led and managed. The overwhelming majority of students complete their courses and continue onto higher education. Students are looked after exceptionally well and their personal development is outstanding. Students are particularly appreciative of the business, international and local enrichment opportunities. Through their positive attitudes and commitment to the well-being of others, students provide good role models for younger students. Working relationships with adults are good and underpin the overall good teaching and learning within the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement at Key Stage 3 so it is as good as in Key Stage 4
- Ensure that able students achieve the challenging targets set for them

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards and achievement are good and improving. There were significant increases in 2006 for the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes including

English and mathematics at the highest grades. At the end of Year 9 progress in English is outstanding. It is satisfactory in mathematics and science, the school has put in place actions to improve this. Students make good progress in Years 10 and 11 so, by the time they take their GCSE examinations, they achieve standards above national average. Some able students do not make as much progress at the end of Year 11 as expected of them. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress as a result of the support they receive.

Standards in the sixth form are improving, progress is good in A level courses. However, there is variability in progress between different subjects at AS level and students studying these courses do not always make as much progress as they should. School's data shows that through detailed analysis and support for areas where progress is not as good, students are now making better progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of the students is outstanding. Students are proud of their school and feel safe within it. They display real regard for the safety and well-being of each other and show a sensitive awareness of customs and cultures other than their own. Their enthusiasm and appreciation of the learning opportunities and facilities around them is very impressive. Students are very clear that they know how to obtain help if they need it, both from their peers and from adults in the school community. Relationships with adults and between students are courteous and respectful. Students told inspectors, 'staff really care about us'.

High levels of participation in nutritional-related activities reflect the students' understanding of the importance of healthy eating. Students are also actively involved in physical activities, both within and outside of the school day. Many follow the community sports leader award. Students demonstrated passionately their commitment to improving the local and global environment.

Many students make a difference to others through their contributions to charity events or through involvement in a range of community initiatives. Strong business links complement the already sharp focus on academic standards so that students are very well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The senior leadership team judges teaching and learning to be good and evidence from inspection, including the views of students, confirms this. Very good attitudes,

relationships and behaviour ensure that there is an excellent culture for learning both in and outside classrooms. Successful lessons include well targeted questioning to develop students' understanding and thinking skills. Teaching and learning is made enjoyable through effective use of interactive whiteboards and a good range of resources. Support staff are used effectively to enable students with learning difficulties to make excellent progress. Students learning English as an additional language make good progress.

The school has prioritised the use of assessment data to inform teachers' planning so more of the teaching is at the level of the best. It has good systems in place to improve teaching and learning, such as coaching of teachers and regular opportunities to share best practice.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The flexible curriculum meets the needs of students outstandingly well, both in the main school and in the sixth form. A well-considered range of academic and vocational options, in collaboration with local schools, provides useful pathways into higher education, work and training. Provision for personal, health, social and citizenship education is good as is the emphasis on developing literacy and thinking skills. It supports students' personal development successfully as does the well established work related learning programme. Enterprise and financial awareness opportunities for Years 8 and 9 are successfully broadening younger students' horizons.

Students' learning is enriched by an exceptionally wide range of out-of-hours activities, especially in the arts, sport and public speaking events. Excursions and visiting speakers add further support for the school's very effective efforts to raise students' aspirations whilst retaining positive links with their cultural heritage. Specialist arts status has already had an impact on option choices at Year 10 and is encouraging opportunities for performance among all pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students rate the care, guidance and support the school provides as outstanding and inspectors agree. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are exceptionally well supported. Arrangements for promoting students' health and safety are well thought out and are secure. The school works very well with an extensive range of external agencies to promote students' welfare and to guide them in career choices as they move through the year groups. Mentors from business and industry, alongside school staff, regularly provide good role models to inspire students to achieve.

Academic guidance is increasingly well managed. Procedures for checking students' academic progress are thorough. There is an increasingly effective range of initiatives

to support students who are not achieving well enough both in the main school and in the sixth form. There are now clear systems for identifying and supporting more able students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership of the school. She is ably supported by a very effective and able senior leadership team who share her vision. Senior leaders are strongly focussed on raising standards. They are ambitious for their students and have implemented rigorous systems to improve achievement further. The support governors provide is good.

The headteacher's vision for the school is shared at all levels. Middle leaders have excellent understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility and take appropriate action in light of their priorities. Excellent use is made of external agencies to support students' wellbeing and improve teaching and learning.

The headteacher has been astute in cultivating the talents of her staff by providing training and opportunities to share good practice at all levels. Middle leaders told inspectors that, because of this, teachers new to the profession were able to lead training for more experienced staff in their area of expertise. More experienced staff provide support for others through a well planned coaching programme.

Teachers told inspectors 'there is a strong ethos of sharing good practice'. Leadership is shared throughout the school, including with students who are actively involved in school improvement.

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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
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
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	2	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	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 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	2	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

On behalf of Sheila Nolan and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us. We valued the discussions we had with many of you and are grateful for the way you shared your views about the school with us. In return, I want to tell you our findings.

Your school provides you with a good education, you work hard in your lessons and achieve well. The teaching in your school is good. You told us you enjoy school very much and were particularly pleased with the many opportunities you have to be involved in school life. The range of clubs and activities that you take part in is excellent. You discuss important matters in a mature and confident way and demonstrate very good leadership skills. Those of you who need extra help are well supported and make very good progress. We think the way the school cares for you and provides you with guidance is outstanding.

We were very impressed with your excellent behaviour, the care you show each other, the pride you take in your school and the appreciation you show for what the school does for you. We were pleased that in the sixth form so many of you finish your courses and go onto higher education.

The headteacher and all the staff are determined to ensure that all of you excel in your work and do the very best you can. They are making the right decisions to make sure this happens. You achieve good standards but we, like the school, think you can do even better. To build on the many good things your school does we have asked the school to make sure that all of you make as much progress as you can, particularly in Years 7 to 9 and higher ability students.

We wish you and your school every success.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector