

Plumstead Manor / Negus School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100183
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	307322
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes HMI

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
Number on roll	
School (total)	1905
Sixth form	718
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Frank Lerner
Headteacher	Ms Jo Harding
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2005
School address	Old Mill Road London SE18 1QF
Telephone number	020 3260 3333
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Plumstead Manor is much larger than most secondary schools. The local area, where the majority of students live, is one of considerable social disadvantage. About two fifths of students are of White British origin and one fifth are Black African. The remainder are from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, but very few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally. The largest group have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There is designated special provision for a small number of students with moderate learning difficulties. Boys are admitted into the sixth form.

The school is currently based on five sites, partly to facilitate the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme that will provide enhanced accommodation. This means that Year 9 students are currently taught in an annex, about half a mile away. The school gained Performing Arts College status in 2000, Humanities College status in 2004 and Applied Learning status in 2007. The school is part of the Department for Children, Schools and Families programme to reduce persistent absence.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Plumstead Manor continues to provide a good standard of education and ensures outstanding personal development for its students. This is largely a consequence of the headteacher's commitment to provide every opportunity for students to develop into confident young people well equipped for the next stage of their lives. This is supported by an exemplary curriculum that offers students an extraordinarily wide range of options, both during and outside of the school day. What makes the curriculum particularly noteworthy is the thoughtful way that it is matched to both the vocational interests of students and the local labour market.

The school has very strong foundations in many areas and has good capacity to improve further. Senior leaders have demonstrated that they are able to take decisive action to secure improvements, for example in improving attendance and GCSE results in 2008. Since the last inspection, the school has sustained its strengths in promoting the personal development of students and the curriculum. This is especially impressive in the challenging circumstances in which it works. The school has a relaxed atmosphere, where students from many backgrounds develop good relationships and shared values.

Good quality departmental reviews provide senior leaders with a largely accurate view of the school's work. Recent changes to the senior leadership team have enabled the school to focus even more sharply on the quality of teaching and the use of information about students' academic progress. However, as senior leaders acknowledge, these aspects of their work are still developing. As a result, judgements on teaching are not consistently based on either the quality of learning or students' progress.

The school is not outstanding as it judges itself to be, as the academic achievement of students is inconsistent across different years, subjects and groups of students. This is due to variability in the accurate analysis of student performance and the resulting inconsistency in holding teachers and middle managers accountable for academic outcomes. Governors, senior leaders and middle managers sometimes attribute satisfactory achievement to external factors rather than the quality of teaching and learning. This is preventing them from gaining a wholly accurate picture of the quality of lessons and of the school's performance in comparison to other similar schools.

Specialist status is a real strength of the school, particularly in the performing arts. Targets for both examination results and participation in the specialist subjects were met in 2008. The recently acquired vocational learning specialism is already enabling the school to provide a wider range of courses in the local area. The school has an innovative approach to working with performing arts professionals, local businesses, extended school services and developing effective relationships with local schools. Specialist status has yet to have sustained impact on standards across the school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students enter the sixth form with below average standards. Most do well in the wide variety of courses they follow and their achievement is therefore good. This is because the majority of the curriculum is wisely geared to vocational interests, which means that students are motivated and engaged by their work. The quality of teaching is generally good. However, in some Advanced Level and AS courses, students do not do as well as expected. In particular,

results in Advanced Level English have declined over the past two years and now represent satisfactory achievement. The head of sixth form has identified this, understands that it is related to the quality of teaching and has begun to work with middle leaders to secure improvement. Students speak highly of the dedication of their teachers and of the personal support they are consistently given. There is a very substantial range of opportunities beyond the curriculum for students to show initiative, take responsibility and to contribute actively to the school and the community beyond. They take these up in large numbers - an aspect of the excellent personal development, which their sixth form experience promotes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of the monitoring of students' progress, both through the analysis of data and judgements on the quality of lessons, in order to hold teachers and middle managers more accountable for academic performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students start Year 7 with skills, knowledge and understanding that are, on average, below that typically found nationally. About two thirds of students begin at or beyond national expectations. Since the last inspection, students have consistently attained results in national tests at Year 9 that are similar to national averages. This is good progress. In Years 10 and 11 this progress has been more variable and has fluctuated from satisfactory to good. By the end of Year 11, those who start Year 7 with the lowest levels make the most progress and those with the highest levels make the least progress. Students make consistently good progress in mathematics, but this varies in both English and science. Students of all ethnic backgrounds make at least satisfactory progress and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

GCSE results in 2008 were a definite improvement on the previous year, and were similar to results for girls nationally. In contrast to both 2006 and 2007, which represented satisfactory achievement, this was good achievement and resulted from effective action by senior leaders. Evidence provided by the school and gathered during lesson observations suggests that the students currently in Year 11 are also on track to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students adopt healthy lifestyles and enthusiastically take part in a wide variety of sports, ranging from dance to archery. Many get involved in the community, both within and beyond school and are keen to instigate change. They develop the confidence to do this, taking part in local politics, fund-raising, performances and through taking an interest in topical events. Relationships with staff are very good. Although the rate of temporary exclusion is high, students say that bullying is uncommon and behaviour is good. Because of very good relationships, permanent exclusion is rare. Students on both the main sites say that they feel safe. Attendance has risen strongly in the past year and the level is now about the national average. Students particularly enjoy lessons in the school's specialisms such as drama and music, and in lessons involving role play, a practical activity or discussion, for example their personal development lessons. As a result, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students learn to work well in teams and independently, and the school has an award for the

quality of its work-related learning. Consequently, students have high but realistic aspirations for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students make good progress as a result of effective teaching. They value the good relationships they have with their teachers, who are confident in their subject knowledge. They use questioning effectively to ensure that most lessons are brisk and that students are engaged and behave well in class. The best lessons use imaginative and enjoyable tasks which help students to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, in an English lesson, some students held a group discussion while others were asked to comment on specific aspects of their performance. However, some lessons do not give students enough opportunities to work independently or to develop their speaking and listening skills. The level of challenge overall is good and most students know how well they are doing in relation to national expectations. Teachers plan lessons well, usually providing work to suit the needs of individual students. In some instances, however, teachers do not provide sufficiently personalised work to meet the needs of more-able students. Teaching assistants provide very effective support for those in need of extra help, particularly the least able. Many teachers help students to make progress by marking their work constructively and thoroughly. However, the quality of marking is not consistent. Consequently, some students are not certain what they need to do to reach the next level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it is exceptionally well matched to students' needs and enables most to make good progress. The school's specialism in performing arts contributes notably to developing students' skills in drama and dance and in general to their confidence and self-esteem. The development of an applied learning curriculum looks imaginatively towards students' ambitions for employment. Students who might struggle with a wholly academic curriculum are therefore extremely well served by the school's arrangements. There is close collaboration with outside agencies to widen and make relevant students' experience of work and study. Similarly, the programme of extra-curricular opportunities is remarkably wide-ranging, taken up by large numbers, and enriches students' academic and cultural interests in evident and much appreciated ways.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those at an early stage of learning English is very well coordinated. The range of information for staff is excellent and support in class is very effective. A particular strength is the school's championing of a healthy lifestyle, including mental health, and provision is exemplary. The school has worked hard to successfully reduce the student absence rate through rewards, competition and the provision of more unit-based courses in Years 10 and 11, which make integration easier. Pastoral care, especially for vulnerable groups, is excellent. Students value their teachers' interest in them as individuals. Academic guidance is good. Students know their 'challenge grades' and they reach

challenging targets. Progress-tracking of students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English, is excellent. Students enjoy assessing each other's work and this practice has been successfully extended from the performing arts to other areas of the curriculum.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has an ambitious commitment to ensuring that students have a broad and relevant education, giving equal emphasis to personal development and examination results. This has had a sustained impact on the quality of students' personal skills but a more variable one on their academic achievement. Recently appointed members of the senior leadership team are strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of the middle leaders' role. Some subjects are improving at a faster rate, highlighting inconsistencies at this level of management. This is because some departmental planning for improvement lacks sufficient focus on tracking students' progress. Despite very well-tailored internal and external staff training, there are still inconsistencies across departments, for example in marking and assessment. Senior leaders are generally accurate in their assessment of the quality of teaching. However, they judge there to be a greater proportion of good teaching than inspectors observed, or results in examinations would support.

The school's contribution to community cohesion at the school, local and global level is outstanding. It is enhanced by the specialisms that provide an excellent context for students' education and closely involve parents. The governing body takes its role seriously and is actively involved in the strategic management of the school. It has subject links with specific departments, particularly the specialist areas. Its ability to challenge senior leaders robustly on students' academic performance is at an early stage of development.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Plumstead Manor / Negus School, London, SE18 1QF

Thank you very much for talking to inspectors so openly and enthusiastically during the recent inspection. You spoke to us warmly about the headteacher, who you value for her open and approachable style. You told us that you really appreciated all the extra opportunities that the school provides outside the normal day, and the wide range of trips. Inspectors were particularly impressed by how ambitious many of you were for your futures and the wide range of imaginative choices that you were considering.

We have judged your school to be a good one, with some features that are excellent. The way in which the school supports your development into confident young people, well equipped for life after school, is outstanding. The range of courses and options that the school provides, as well as all the after school clubs and activities, is also excellent.

Your results in exams at the end of Year 11 and Year 13 are good, but they are variable in different years and in different subjects. This is because some lessons do not give you enough opportunities to work independently or to develop your speaking and listening skills. Therefore, we have asked the school and subject leaders to:

- analyse the progress that you make more closely so that teachers are more aware of what you need to do to make even better progress, and to build this information into their teaching.

As you know, the school is highly ambitious, and will want to work with you on this. You can do your part by asking for more challenging work when you think you are ready, and by discussing your progress with your teachers.

I wish you all the very best for your futures.

Yours faithfully

Michael Lynes

Her Majesty's Inspector