

The Camden School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100054
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	307289
Inspection date	6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	John Kennedy HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1001
6th form	437
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Penny Wild
Headteacher	Ms Anne Canning
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2005
School address	Sandall Road London NW5 2DB
Telephone number	020 7485 3414
Fax number	020 7284 3361

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Introduction

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

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning, the 14-19 curriculum and the effectiveness of middle managers. Procedures for safeguarding students were also checked. Evidence was gathered from observing parts of lessons, national published assessment data, the school's own records and other documentation, and observation of the school at work. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with staff, students and the chair of governors also informed inspectors' judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Camden School for Girls is an over-subscribed comprehensive school with a larger than average mixed sixth form. The school serves an area where the proportion of those eligible for free school meals is well above average. It also attracts a wide range of students from across London. Students are drawn from diverse ethnic backgrounds with over half from minority ethnic heritages. A small percentage of students are refugee and asylum seekers. Almost half of the students speak a home language other than English, and a small percentage are at an early stage of fluency. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly below average while the proportion of those in receipt of a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. Students' attainment on entry varies widely but is broadly average. The school has specialist status for music.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Camden School for Girls rightly deserves the outstanding reputation it has among parents and in the community. Among the many positive comments written by parents, one typifies what inspectors found: 'This is a wonderful school. I have nothing but praise for the quality of teaching and leadership and am constantly impressed by the inclusive atmosphere: they really do consider every individual's needs, strengths and weaknesses - all in a friendly family environment.'

Camden Girls' is a truly comprehensive and inclusive school where staff and students are valued equally and as a result develop a deep sense of loyalty and pride. Excellence in students' achievements is not merely confined to academic progress but can be seen in their creativity, social awareness and confidence. The school nurtures each student, regardless of background or ability, and students thrive and develop in a secure, and stimulating learning environment. They leave as young people who are very well prepared for their future lives. What makes this school outstanding are exceptional leadership, and strong teaching and learning enhanced by a top class curriculum and caring ethos. However, students themselves are also key contributors because of their own attitudes, hard work and determination to excel.

Vulnerable students, including those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties receive sensitive support, which enables them to succeed in achieving as highly as the rest. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding because of the exemplary provision of care, guidance and support. This can be seen, for example in their very positive attitudes to learning, good attendance and the impressive contributions they make to the local and wider community.

Students show their enthusiasm for learning in excellent standards and achievement. From very varied starting points, they make excellent progress at Key Stage 3, achieve well-above average standards at the end of Year 9 and continue this progress into Years 10 and 11. The trend over time is that they achieve GCSE results that are consistently well above national and local averages. Despite a dip in science results in 2007, the number of students achieving five higher grades, including English and mathematics was well above average. The school is quick and effective in taking steps to ensure a high performance across all subjects. Current data on standards and progress indicate that the excellent pattern of previous years is being maintained. The school is also effective in tracking and identifying any individuals or groups of all abilities who are not achieving as well as they could. This is because staff are very skilled in the sophisticated use of data monitoring systems.

Teachers build on students' average prior attainment very successfully, through excellent planning and outstanding teaching. The ethos of the school means that students are motivated to succeed and they want to learn. Behaviour is excellent and relationships are positive so that the single focus in classrooms is about learning. Teachers are highly knowledgeable, skilled practitioners and passionate about their subjects. As a result, students are stimulated and challenged to think for themselves and develop an enthusiasm for independent learning. Lessons are fun and learning materials are creative and varied; this engages student interest. Effective use of questioning ensures that learning moves along at pace and students are stretched. Staff and students use information from assessment well to monitor progress and set challenging targets. This enables students to have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Through an exercise in peer evaluation of homework in an art lesson, for example, students were able to show very good skills in using assessment criteria

to mark and evaluate the work of others. Teaching assistants provide good targeted help for students, though at times it is not clear from lesson planning how they are being deployed in lessons.

A particularly strong feature of the school is its superbly rich and personalised curriculum that raises students' aspirations and broadens their learning experiences. Its breadth is outstanding, with courses on offer from the classics to beauty therapy. Performing arts contribute substantially to the school's highly inclusive ethos. Very good partnerships exist to provide vocational courses. In Years 10 and 11, there are five distinct qualification pathways extremely well matched to student needs. The wealth of extra curricular activities and enrichment opportunities, with very good rates of participation, supports students' achievement and develops the motivation of the most and least able alike.

Inspectors agree with many parents who wrote in praise of the school's exceptional leadership. This is typified by a parent who wrote, 'The staff seem to work as cohesive group under the excellent leadership of the headteacher'. Leaders and managers know the school well, are highly analytical and have an exceptionally clear focus on the priorities for sustaining and building on already high standards and an impressive record of achievement. A very effective governing body, led by an outstanding chair, acts as a 'critical friend' to the school, and provides excellent support and challenge.

Leaders give high priority to the recruitment of teachers of the highest calibre, and their impact can be seen in the high quality of teaching and learning. Senior and middle managers observe lessons rigorously, and quickly identify and challenge any areas of relative underperformance. Effective coaching for teachers has led to an improved quality of teaching and learning. The leadership team recognises that there is further scope for the sharing of exemplary practice to enable some teachers to develop a more secure understanding of the key features of the excellent lessons. Training needs for the staff are met through carefully identified professional development activities. Challenging targets are set at all levels, for leaders, teachers and students. Many staff spoke of the collegiality that pervades the school. This can be seen in the quality of support and professional challenge they exercise with each other. Governors have worked hard in supporting the school to ensure that resources are managed very effectively and finances are secure. The headteacher and other leaders have a proven record of implementing change which can be seen, for example in the steps taken since the last inspection to ensure that curriculum provision is first rate. The school has outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision in the sixth form is outstanding. Because of excellent teaching, a stimulating curriculum and their own positive attitudes to learning, students attain very high standards and make excellent progress in their achievement and personal development. Standards are consistently well above local and national averages and are improving year-on-year at the highest levels. Teaching allows students to develop their own creativity with appropriate support. Effective leadership and management of the sixth form can be seen in the exemplary monitoring of students' academic progress, and the care and guidance they provide so that students leave as confident and well-rounded young people. The majority who join the sixth form stay on and most leave to go on to higher education. Parents and students, including those who join from other schools, speak very highly of the induction programme, which helps from early on to welcome them into a vibrant and supportive community. Students respond well to this and

make their own significant contribution to the ethos and management of the school. They develop the confidence which enables them, including the young men, speak of belonging to 'Camden girls' with pride.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning.

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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?	1	1
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	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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?	1	1
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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

14 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Camden School for Girls, London, NW5 2DB

Thank you for making us to welcome when we visited your school recently. You said that you were very proud of your school and we can see why: it is an outstanding school. This letter summarises our findings. I would encourage you to read the full report at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Your headteacher, other leaders and the governors set very high standards and work hard to support you in every way possible. This means that you are exceptionally well cared for, make excellent progress and achieve very high standards. You develop well academically but also into confident, articulate and mature young people. We were impressed with how focussed you are on wanting to learn and how good you are in taking responsibility for your own learning. Your achievements are not just the results of high calibre teachers but your own attitudes and work-rate. The school also provides you with an excellent curriculum that caters for your needs and interests, and gives you wonderful opportunities for enrichment. You are already making a significant contribution to the wider community from the work you are doing to fund raise and help others.

The school has very good systems to keep an eye on how well you are doing and show you how to improve. You are also developing very good skills in assessing your own work to see how well you are doing. This is a particular strength of the school and is one of the reasons you do so well. You told us that you thought some of your teaching and learning was good and a lot of it was outstanding. We agree and we have asked the school to continue the work they are doing to increase the proportion that is of the highest quality. You can help with this by continuing to work your hardest. Your headteacher and all the staff do an excellent job to make sure you leave the school very well prepared for your futures. You are playing your own part in this success because of your positive attitudes to learning. We were struck by the number of you, including some young men in the sixth form, who spoke with pride of being one of 'Camden's girls'! We wish you every success for your futures.

With best wishes

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector