

Coombe Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102598
Local Authority	Kingston Upon Thames
Inspection number	308063
Inspection dates	28 - 29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Meena Wood (HMI)

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

Type of School	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1544
6th form	496
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Penny Parker
Headteacher	Mrs Carol Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2004
School address	Clarence Avenue New Malden KT3 3TU
Telephone number	020 8942 1242
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

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

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of leadership and management and of the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from lessons, students' work, an assembly, tutorial groups and discussions with the headteacher, staff and Chair of Governors. In addition, two groups of students discussed their views of the school and all parent questionnaires returned were examined. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Coombe Girls' School is non selective and inclusive with a mixed sixth form of 500 students. The school specialises in languages, is a 'High Performing Specialist School' and a Leading Edge School. It is also a Training School. It has established Healthy School Status and holds Investor in People Status. In 2006, the school federated with Coombe Boys' School under one headteacher and one governing body; the schools remain on separate sites sharing a sixth form offering a range of vocational courses and A levels. A significant proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups mostly Asian; Tamil Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Korean. A low number of students are in the early stages of learning English and there are low numbers of students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Low numbers of students are eligible for free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Coombe Girls' School is an outstanding school. The headteacher and her senior leadership team have provided strong direction for the school and have successfully created an inclusive ethos where students of diverse cultures and backgrounds work very well together and are equally valued. Indeed, the school achieves its mission of preparing each student 'for a world of opportunity' through providing excellent opportunities for students to reach high levels of personal development and good academic attainment through a stimulating and well-ordered learning environment. They are taught well and receive excellent care and support. The school's language specialist status has enhanced the well structured curriculum and offers additional learning opportunities both to students and to the local community through the extended school and as a centre for community learning and development.

Strong leadership and very effective teamwork, skilfully fostered by the headteacher, has led to very good progress in establishing the school as the principal partner in a federation of two schools with a well established and growing sixth form. This provides further evidence of the school's outstanding capacity to improve further.

Students enter the school with slightly above average attainment and leave in Year 11 with the majority making outstanding progress, and gaining good foundations for their future education or employment. Between Years 7 and 9, progress is outstanding in mathematics, science and English with students attaining high standards in national assessment tests. Although there have been fluctuations in the progress made by students in Years 10 and 11, standards by Year 11 in GCSE examinations are above those expected, with one third of students achieving a significant proportion of high grades at A*-A. In some subjects, such as art and design, drama, science, mathematics and English examination standards are especially high.

Students of lower ability make excellent progress through well targeted support from teaching assistants. However, the school recognises that vulnerable groups of students and some minority ethnic groups do not always achieve their potential, and following thorough and careful analyses of data, puts in place appropriate intervention strategies that address underachievement successfully. The school is aware of the need to continuously challenge and extend students of higher ability in Years 10 and 11. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those at the early stages of learning English are supported extremely well and make excellent progress.

Good results are achieved overall, through careful tracking of students' progress through academic reviews, parental support, mentoring as well as additional revision classes.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They have good opportunities to take on additional responsibility through an excellent peer mentoring scheme. As a result, they acquire a mature and well rounded view of life and have a very good awareness of how to stay healthy and keep safe. Bullying is rare, but dealt with appropriately. For instance, a group of younger students who had experienced racist bullying were encouraged to form a mutual support group facilitated very skilfully by a sixth form student who shared their language and culture. Students benefit from opportunities to be trained and interviewed for important positions, such as prefect or peer mentor, all students can gain an invaluable insight into the world of work and are well prepared for adult life. Students make an excellent contribution to developing their own and other students' moral, cultural and spiritual awareness through the well structured and innovative citizenship lessons and through leading assemblies. An Active Tutorial Programme helps students additionally to develop literacy, numeracy skills and learning to learn strategies. Students' attendance is good.

The students are cared for and supported outstandingly well. The staff, who are responsible for the care of vulnerable students and those with challenging behaviour work very effectively across departments and with external agencies to guarantee their well-being and achieve successful educational outcomes.

Teaching is good and in lessons, where teachers know their students well, they plan lessons that engage students of all

abilities, even those who, at first, appear reluctant to learn. Students are keen to do well and in those lessons where their learning and comprehension is checked thoroughly, they quickly understand the tasks set and make good progress. Students show a strong sense of creativity and enjoyment when given the chance to work independently. In one lesson, students representing countries at the Kyoto Summit argued passionately and articulately about environmental issues during an excellently structured role play. Behaviour is generally well managed, however, in the minority of lessons where students lack challenge or do not understand what is expected of them, they do not participate in their learning as well as they should. Consequently, in these rare instances, behaviour falls short of the high standards expected by the school and their work suffers as a result.

Whilst the quality of marking of students' work is inconsistent in some subjects, academic guidance is good and through focused sessions for target setting and reviews, most students have a clear idea of how well they are doing and how they can improve.

The school is highly responsive to how students have performed in public examinations. The students themselves have said that the curriculum is very well matched to the needs of students of all abilities. As well as work related learning for all students entering Year 10, they can choose from three academic and vocational pathways at level one currently and level two from next year. Excellent guidance and advice to students with their parents help them make informed choices to pursue courses based on their prior attainment and aspirations. Students for whom this is more appropriate, enrol on an Education to Employment course at the local college arranged through the school, with successful outcomes. The school has designed specific courses that effectively support the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills prior to GCSE and in Year 12. The school's languages specialist status makes a very positive impact on many aspects of the school's work and within the local borough. Students have good opportunities to visit foreign countries and can use their language skills in subjects such as B/TEC hospitality, travel and tourism. Opportunities for students to learn outside the normal school day are extensive and they speak very highly of the outstanding variety of activities during lunch times and after school, including the excellent drama, dance, debating club and art, photography and sports.

The headteacher's leadership is outstanding as she has a clear vision and strong determination and has established a continuously improving ethos in a highly successful school. She is most ably supported by a dynamic and skilled team of managers whose focus is to continuously drive up students' achievements and standards throughout the school and the sixth form.

The school's self evaluation process is collaborative and rigorous and provides an excellent account of the school's strengths, and the areas where the school needs to improve. Areas of development identified at the school's last inspection, have been successfully addressed.

A robust performance management system that uses student performance data and information from lesson observations sustains good professional development for staff. However, the lesson observation process is too focused on teaching and does not sufficiently analyse the impact of teaching on students' learning and achievement. Subject departments analyse data on their students' performance and identify intervention strategies that target underperforming student groups and individuals. The school is aware that there is some variability in the quality of these analyses and that there is insufficient emphasis on post 16 provision.

Governance is good as governors are generally well informed and fully involved in the school's development.

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school, especially appreciating the quality of education and care provided for their children. One parent reported, 'Every Child Matters is of high importance to the school; we are extremely pleased with our daughter's achievements; the dedication of the staff and managers and the wide variety of academic and recreational opportunities have helped our daughter develop into a happy confident and mature young lady.'

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The federated sixth form is large and highly inclusive, is thriving and provides a good quality of education. Half of the students come from twenty five feeder schools across a number of boroughs and including the partner boys' school. Students of all abilities and backgrounds are choosing the school sixth form precisely because it provides an effective vocational and academic curriculum that caters well for their needs. This is a good indicator of the esteem in which external and internal students view the work of the sixth form that is based both in the school and in the Coombe Vocational Centre, in the Federation partner boys' school. One student said, 'You know the school wants you to do well and this makes you want to do well and achieve those high grades.'

The progression rate for Coombe Girls Year 11 students to the sixth form is currently 68% and improving year on year as the sixth form's good reputation grows, and the school's post- 16 recruitment procedures are further refined with an excellent induction, for example, subject taster sessions and the greater involvement of parents.

Academic guidance is good and valued enormously by all students, but especially those who find the transition from GCSE to GCE AS level difficult. A broad range of GCE A-level subjects is offered with good and expanding provision at level two and three in vocational subjects. Whilst students' standards across most subjects have been broadly average in the last year, standards in art and design, drama and photography have been above average. Current students are projected to gain good results in most GCE A levels as they are making good progress in relation to what is expected of them based on their GCSE performance and starting points. The changes in the curriculum include greater level three vocational provision and this will help improve students' results yet further, through providing more appropriate progression routes.

The overall standard of teaching is good. However, students are not always given adequate opportunities to develop independent working and critical thinking skills. Students are extremely well motivated with strong aspirations and when given the opportunities, participate well in lessons. Students greatly appreciate the high levels of support from teachers, especially when choosing their future options and all are helped into employment, education or training, even when their achievements are lower than expected. Students progressing to higher education receive exemplary support when making their application. Sixth form students make a valuable contribution to the life of the school acting as excellent peer mentors and very creditable role models to younger students, for instance, working closely with younger students in paired reading and other activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate student's progress in the sixth form.
- Improve the progress of Year 10 and Year 11 students through a greater emphasis on monitoring their learning and performance.

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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?	1	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	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	2	

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 interest of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
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	2
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	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



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

11 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Coombe Girls' School, New Malden, KT3 3TU

Following our recent visit to inspect your school, I am now writing to let you know about our findings. We would like to thank you for your contributions to the inspection. Thank you in particular to those who gave up time to talk to us, and to the students who showed us around the school. We enjoyed sitting in your lessons, talking with you and looking at the high standards of your work and observed that you are motivated during lessons, and where teachers give you structured opportunities, you make excellent contributions.

Your school is an outstanding school. You told us that you enjoy working together as a school community and one student told us that, 'I really love going to school because of my friends and teachers!'

The headteacher and staff have worked successfully with you to create a very supportive learning environment and the progress most of you make between Years 7-11, the standards you reach in course work and examinations in Year 9 and in Year 11 are outstanding. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are learning English make excellent progress.

The standards of written and art work we saw displayed around the school are especially impressive. We glimpsed parts of the rehearsals for the 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' drama production during our visit; this looked very professional and most importantly, highly enjoyable for those participating! Your behaviour is good and we were particularly impressed by the relations between sixth form students and younger students, especially those who act as peer mentors and contribute significantly in positions of responsibility to the daily life of the school. You informed us that you feel safe and enjoy your learning at the school, especially the extra curricular activities, where you have many opportunities to develop additional skills and gain confidence in your talents. In order to improve even further, the school agrees with us that they need to:

- raise standards further in the sixth form
- help all of you participate more actively in your lessons through greater independent and reflective learning with frequent checks on your learning so that you make even greater progress, especially in years 10 and 11.

We hope that you will all do well in the future and with the help of the school realise your ambitions.

Yours sincerely,

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector