

St John's Catholic Comprehensive

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118933
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358476
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1120
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqueline McHugh
Headteacher	John Stanley
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 41 lessons involving 41 teachers, and held meetings with the chair of the governing body, representative staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at planning documents, assessment information and pupils' work. In addition, inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 272 parents and carers, and scrutinised others from staff and students.

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

- How well do pupils in the main school achieve, particularly girls, because they did not do as well as boys in 2010 and those with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- What is the impact of the community structure and vertical tutor groups on students' experiences and progress?
- How effectively does the range of sixth form courses help students to achieve and prepare them for their future life?
- What is the impact of leadership and management structures in enabling middle managers to evaluate their areas and drive school improvement?

Information about the school

This is an above-average-sized school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is high, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below that found nationally. These students' needs cover a wide range including moderate learning, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and speech, language and communication needs. An above-average number join the school part-way through their secondary education, and some of these students are new to the United Kingdom. The school has had specialist status in the visual arts since September 2007. Last year the school participated in the Gaining Ground initiative, a national programme to accelerate students' progress. The school moved into new premises in September 2010 as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school where students achieve satisfactorily. Students and staff have settled quickly into the new building, opened in September 2010, and are cooperating closely together to iron out the challenges of working in totally different surroundings. The school's overall effectiveness continues to be satisfactory, with students' attainment in GCSE in line with national averages. However, the school has improved other aspects of its work, including the advice, guidance and support for students, resulting in improvements in behaviour and students' understanding of how to stay safe in school and beyond. The 'three community' structure with mixed-age tutor groups promotes a sense of responsibility and creates a whole-school ethos which effectively ensures a good interweaving of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students are proud of their school and its new facilities, and as a result behaviour is good and they are taking a fuller part in managing themselves. For example, students reflected how the open nature of the school, shared equally by adults and students, is enabling students to report issues which make them feel uncomfortable as part of anti-bullying week.

Students achieve satisfactorily through the school. In 2010, there was an increase in the proportion of students achieving five or more good GCSE grades and in the proportion achieving both English and mathematics. This was a direct result of the school's involvement in the Gaining Ground programme establishing a closer school focus on monitoring students' progress and providing additional support for those not reaching the expected level. In the sixth form, students' attainment is broadly in line with national averages for the courses followed, although their performance in applied and vocational courses is generally stronger than in academic courses.

The new curriculum, with its emphasis on developing pathways from 14 to 19 and linking subjects at Key Stage 3, is developing well. Further training is required to ensure that all teachers have the appropriate skills to teach effectively within the new structure and in the large shared teaching spaces. In particular, teachers do not always use assessment information to set work which has the appropriate level of challenge for all abilities within their groups. Sometimes the pace is slow and students are not required to do enough in the time available. The school's specialist status in the visual arts contributes well to the social aspect of learning as well as developing a sense of creativity in the curriculum. Community links are satisfactory and the new specialist facilities now enable the school to make an even stronger contribution within the school and beyond.

The headteacher has successfully guided the staff and students in establishing a vision for the school's future, which is now becoming a reality in the new building. Staff and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas needing further improvement. For example, they realise that there is further scope to listen to students, parents and carers about learning and progress and the school's ongoing development.

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Self evaluation is broadly accurate and senior managers are driving and securing improvements satisfactorily. They have embedded essential systems in the new school to enable it to continue improving. A track record of improvements in the advice, guidance and support for students together with the resulting improvements in behaviour confirms the school's satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' learning and achievement by strengthening leadership skills across the school to ensure that:
 - all teachers have the necessary skills to teach the integrated curriculum effectively in the new learning areas
 - teachers use their assessment information to set lesson objectives and tasks which are identified precisely to take learning forward from students' differing starting points
 - lessons are more consistently conducted at a fast pace.
- Develop communication systems to ensure that:
 - students make a greater contribution, particularly about how they learn most effectively
 - parents and carers have the information they need about students' progress and their learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

In the large majority of lessons, students have good attitudes to their learning and make satisfactory progress overall. They are generally interested in their work, behave well and are keen to learn. Relationships with adults are good, and students have adapted to new ways of learning in larger groups and areas, for example, collaborating effectively in group work. In lessons where the curriculum is integrated across a number of subjects, not all students have developed the necessary skills of independent learning to work successfully without the direct input from an adult. In these instances, learning is not fast enough and learning only satisfactory as there is too much chatter amongst the group unconnected with learning. Conversely, there are examples of students sustaining high levels of concentration, more often in Key Stage 4. In many of these lessons, students are given detailed guidance about how their work relates to examination criteria, which they find particularly helpful and motivating. Students' average attainment in English, mathematics and science, and their information and communication technology skills, equip them satisfactorily for success in the future.

Students' attainment when they enter the school varies considerably because of the above-average numbers who join part-way through their secondary education, some of whom are at early stages of learning English. By the time they leave, attainment is broadly average overall. This represents satisfactory progress and achievement from their starting points. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make relatively faster progress than their peers. This is because the specialist support they receive is of good quality and is proving beneficial in integrating them effectively in whole-class learning. There is no significant difference in

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the performance of boys and girls over time. A higher proportion of students follow GCSE art and design, the school's specialist area, than is found nationally, and do well in the subject.

Students are friendly towards each other, and feel the sense of community is much stronger in the new building. They feel safe and secure within their learning community, and vertical tutor groups work well together in the open social and learning areas. Bullying, racist behaviour or discrimination is rare. Students participate satisfactorily in a range of activities including parish events and charity work, such as 'Take it to Tanzania', supporting the school's Catholic mission. Whilst students understand the need for healthy lifestyles and have regular opportunity for sport and physical exercise, it is not reflected in their choice of food in the canteen, for example, by choosing fruit and salads.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but there are inconsistencies. They are strongest in Key Stage 4, where half of the lessons observed were good or better. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and give students good support to ensure that misconceptions are addressed, often in small group discussion. Adults are adjusting well to the different teaching styles and strategies. A good example of this was seen in a Year 11 science lesson considering the structure of the earth. One of the teachers set the scene using a well-chosen video clip and other adults used challenging questioning to clarify and

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consolidate students' understanding. Nevertheless, in some lessons the benefits of whole-class teaching are underused, resulting in teachers moving from one group to another teaching the same thing more than once. Students do not always concentrate well enough because their work does not build on their earlier learning or capabilities and learning intentions are not sufficiently precise. Students' progress is assessed and monitored regularly and increasingly this information is used to provide additional support or extra classes so they can catch up. Marking is inconsistent across the school, with means that students do not always have a sufficiently clear understanding of how to improve their work. Oral feedback is of a much higher quality, providing students with a helpful evaluation of their work.

The curriculum is innovative and creative and is carefully matched to the needs of the students. The approach of teaching subjects within 'hubs' of linked subjects, particularly in Key Stage 3, is in its earliest days of implementation. Staff are already evaluating its impact and making changes to ensure that there is no loss of momentum in students' progress. Curriculum planning incorporates effective use of laptops and interactive whiteboards, which are readily available for use when needed. Although the ongoing development of the site is restricting the availability of the school's playing fields, there is a wide range of enrichment activities, and participation is high, covering a wide cross section of students.

Good levels of support and care are removing potential barriers to learning and building students' self-esteem. A range of highly tailored programmes are used to ensure that the needs of students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are met. The pastoral system, with mixed-age tutor groups, effectively helps students to develop confidence and they appreciate the support they receive. Consistent guidance and advice supports students at each stage of their education as they join and move through the school, and guides them into options beyond school. This is reflected in very few students leaving school without appropriate work, training or further education places.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Managing the school's journey into the new building and introducing changes to the way lessons are taught have presented significant challenges for the senior leadership. Many middle leaders have recently taken up their posts within the revised leadership structure, and have made a good start in driving and embedding improvements. More needs to be done and it is too early to measure the impact on achievement and progress overall. Whilst staff have had an initial period of adjustment to different surroundings, the

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evaluation of teaching has focused on removing barriers to learning, such as the transference of noise. It has not yet focused sufficiently on the direct impact of teaching on students' learning and progress. However, early indications show that teachers are developing confidence at working in different ways and are monitoring students' progress closely to evaluate the impact of the recent changes.

The governing body ensures that statutory requirements are met. Governors have developed a deeper understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses since the last inspection, but recognise they could be more effective and focused in holding the school to account for its performance. The school has a limited range of strategies for canvassing the views of parents and carers and recognises that the recent establishment of parent focus groups is a valuable step in building a new relationship with them.

The school meets statutory requirements for safeguarding students well and works with external agencies to promote the safety, health and safety of students. The promotion of equal opportunities, tackling discrimination and promoting community cohesion are at the heart of the school's ethos and aims and are of good quality. The impact of its actions is seen in how well students from different backgrounds get on with each other, respect each other, understand each other's cultures and values and have positive attitudes to school. The school's specialism makes a good contribution through a variety of projects within the local community to promoting understanding and tolerance. The school is actively encouraging students to take more leadership and initiative in running these projects organised with other schools. Data about the performance of different groups are analysed and are effective in guiding additional provision for groups or individuals when they do not make the expected rate of progress. This can be seen in recent success at improving the progress of pupils with English as a second language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities so they can play a full and active part in lessons.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Sixth form

Sixth form students make satisfactory progress given their starting points, and the trend is one of improvement. Students achieve particularly well in applied learning courses at both AS and A level, where attainment is close and sometimes above the national average. Attainment in most other academic courses is a little below national averages. Students are positive about the increasing number of vocational courses, although provision does not yet match the variety of courses at Key Stage 4, restricting opportunities for curriculum continuity.

Students contribute well to the school and wider community, for example, within vertical tutor groups, and are good role models around the school for younger students. Shared leadership ensures that ideas and strategies for improvement are linked closely with the main school, reinforcing the school's efforts to develop coherent 14-19 provision. Careers advice is effective in helping students to identify appropriate programmes within the sixth form and beyond school. Areas requiring further development have been identified, such as the need for more vocational provision. Now that students have better purpose-built facilities, leaders are focusing on monitoring teaching and students' outcomes so that any underachievement can be dealt with quickly.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The response rate to the parents' and carers' questionnaire was in line with the national response rate. Positive trends were identified in the school's ethos and pastoral care, provision for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the impact of transition arrangements into the new school. A few questionnaires had written concerns about the new approach to integrated learning, the communication and feedback on students' progress, and behaviour management. Senior leaders have identified improving communication as a key area for further development. Inspection evidence does not support the view that behaviour is not managed effectively.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John's Catholic Comprehensive School 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 272 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1120 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	81	30	162	60	20	7	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	72	26	175	65	19	7	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	43	16	149	55	65	24	7	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	15	162	60	43	16	9	3
The teaching is good at this school	34	13	170	63	43	16	8	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	12	148	55	64	24	8	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	15	166	61	43	16	4	1
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)	40	15	154	57	40	15	5	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	12	170	63	47	17	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	19	140	52	50	18	8	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	9	152	56	62	23	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	42	15	167	62	30	11	9	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	52	19	167	62	37	14	5	2

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



22 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St John's Catholic Comprehensive School, Gravesend DA12 2JW

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed seeing your impressive new building, talking to you and looking at your work. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection and your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it.

The school provides you with a satisfactory education. You told us that you generally enjoy learning, are keen to do well and are getting used to the new style of learning in large spaces. The new curriculum gives you a good range of opportunities to study subjects and topics which interest you. Teaching is satisfactory and attainment is rising gradually. Sixth form students set a good example to the rest of the school. The open area within the school is a wonderful indoor area for circulation and getting to know one another. You told us how proud you are of your new school and how this has strengthened the community feel of the school and improved behaviour.

The headteacher, governors and staff are committed to bringing about more improvement and have clear ideas about how this is to be achieved. We have asked them to help you to accelerate your progress and increase the pace of lessons by improving teachers' skills to teach the new curriculum in the larger teaching spaces, and by making sure that lesson objectives and tasks are accurately matched to your different starting points. You can help by continuing to work hard and not wasting any time in lessons. We have also asked them to develop communication systems so that you have a greater say, particularly about how you learn, and that your parents and carers have better information about your progress.

We wish you all at St John's a happy and successful future in your new school.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector

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