

St Mary's Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105110
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	336428
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael McIlroy HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1676
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	336
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tony Mossman
Headteacher	Mr Anthony Boyle
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2007
School address	Wallasey Village Wallasey Merseyside CH45 3LN
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 52 lessons and observed 52 teachers. Meetings were held with nominated staff, three groups of students and two representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, an assembly and several tutorial groups and looked at development planning, departmental action plans and school policies, including those that relate to the safeguarding of students. One hundred and eighty-seven questionnaires from parents and 193 questionnaires from students were also taken into consideration.

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

- What the achievement of students is, including that of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- What the quality of teaching is.
- Whether the quality of care, guidance and support, including steps to improve attendance, is outstanding as judged by the school.
- Whether students' contribution to the community is outstanding.
- What the quality of leadership and management at all levels in the school is and how well teaching and learning are managed.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average. Most students are of White British heritage and the percentage of students that is known to be eligible for free school meals is more than twice the average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that found in other schools but the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is nearly double the average. The school admits a smaller proportion of more-able students than is found in other schools. The school has two specialisms. One is for the performing arts and the other is for applied learning. At the time of the inspection, students in Year 11 were on work experience and therefore not in school. A new headteacher recently took up post.

The school holds a number of awards including the Artsmark Gold, the Healthy Schools award and the Sportsmark.

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. It also has a number of good and outstanding features. Its chief strengths lie in the excellent care, guidance and support it provides for its students and the outstanding contribution students make to the school and the wider community. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding, which reflects strongly the school's inclusive, Catholic ethos. The attainment of students is average and the progress they make is satisfactory. This means that their overall achievement is satisfactory. While students achieve more highly in English, their attainment in the key subject of mathematics is low and they make slower progress in this subject than in English. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning, due to the very good support and care they receive. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. The quality of assessment procedures and marking vary and the pace of learning in too many lessons is not fast enough. Nevertheless, within this satisfactory teaching, there is a proportion that is good and some that is outstanding. The school does not yet exploit these strengths sufficiently to improve the overall quality of teaching.

The behaviour of students is good, both in classes and around this large school. They have a good understanding of how to keep healthy. They are very proud of their school and contribute very well to its development. Their very strong contribution to the wider community is demonstrated by extensive fund-raising for national and international charities and practical help for local charities. The school's good, broad curriculum also contributes to their work in the community. A good example is the 'Hair and Beauty Academy' where students learn hairdressing and other skills and offer their services to the public. Satisfactory attendance and their average attainment mean that students are adequately prepared for future study and work.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. Leaders and managers have maintained outstanding outcomes in a number of areas of the school's work since its previous inspection. They have also improved results in English and maintained good behaviour as the school grew in numbers. However, key weaknesses, such as low results in mathematics, have not been tackled effectively or quickly enough. Under the determined leadership of the new headteacher, expectations of what can be achieved have been suitably raised and the implementation of appropriate measures to raise the quality of teaching has begun. However, these initiatives are at an early stage of development and the latter does not yet include all relevant leaders and managers. Nonetheless, given this new impetus and sharper focus on academic outcomes, a satisfactory level of self-evaluation and steady improvements in English, the school has an adequate capacity to develop further.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in mathematics and accelerate the progress made by students in this subject by:
 - strengthening the leadership and management of the subject
 - raising the profile of mathematics across the school and developing
- cross-curricular links with other subjects.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching by:
 - providing regular training on the key elements of good and outstanding teaching for all staff
 - improving the pace in lessons, the engagement of students with their learning and the match of work to students' differing abilities
 - making better use of existing good and outstanding practice in teaching within the school and providing more opportunities for staff to observe this in other settings
 - making assessment and marking procedures consistent throughout the school.
- Create robust monitoring systems so that school leaders, managers and governors have a more accurate picture of the effectiveness of teaching and learning and so that weaknesses can be identified and tackled by:
 - accelerating training in lesson observation and extending it
- to include all relevant leaders and managers
 - initiating a regular cycle of monitoring activities and using the outcomes to plan training and drive improvement
 - enabling governors to develop their own strategies for collecting information on the effectiveness of the school.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students enter the school with attainment that is just below average. In 2008 and 2009, the proportion of students who attained five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics was significantly below average because of weaknesses in mathematics. This figure for this key measure is increasing each year but provisional data for 2010 indicate that the school is not keeping pace with the national rate of improvement. In the last three years, students' attainment in English was average and rose each year, due to good teaching, a consistent and effective approach to marking and cross-curricular links with other subjects. In a good English lesson in Year 7 on female villains in literature, effective questioning by the teacher challenged both girls and boys and enabled them to make good progress in making inferences about the characters they were studying. In another lesson in Year 8, engaging and very well planned group work enabled all students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to make very good

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progress in understanding how writers develop their views. However, attainment in mathematics was well-below average for the same period and provisional data for 2010 indicates that it has declined. In other respects, attainment is better. The proportion of students who gained five or more A* to G grades at GCSE was well-above average. In the last three years, all students left the school with at least one pass at GCSE level, which reflects the effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting students' interests. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning overall. Those with a statement of special educational needs make exceptional progress because of the very good care and support they receive. Students known to be eligible for free school meals make progress in their learning that is slightly above that of their peers.

Students move about the school between lessons calmly and sensibly. They are helpful and courteous to each other, staff and visitors. They feel safe at school. They know who to turn to if they have any concerns and are confident that these are quickly addressed. Vulnerable students are able to discuss their worries with trained staff in the Bosco Centre. Students' good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle is shown by their good take-up of extra-curricular sporting activities and of physically active subjects such as dance. They are well informed about the dangers of drugs and smoking. All groups of students help make an exceptional contribution to the school and wider community. Many are keen to serve as school councillors. There are good opportunities to help in the day-to-day running of the school and to serve as sports leaders in primary schools. They help with a local charity for the homeless and are heavily involved in arts activities that benefit the community, such as a local theatre. They have good communication skills, developed in part through drama lessons, and good collaborative skills. In a lesson in Year 7, students worked well in teams to prepare for a 'trade fair.' Attendance is average and is starting to improve. Students' outstanding sense of spirituality is evident in assemblies and in lessons. In a drama lesson in Year 10, students demonstrated this when they worked on themes such as loneliness and empathy. Students' very good social and moral understanding is reflected in their good behaviour. Their very strong cultural understanding is developed by a combination of informative geographical topics, visitors from different cultures and many good displays about foreign countries.

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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	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	1

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 is satisfactory. It is characterised by good relationships between adults and students, good behaviour management and effective use of resources, including information and communication technology. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and questioning is often well used to develop students' understanding and thinking. Learning objectives are routinely shared with students at the start of lessons. However, planning does not always ensure that activities are well matched to the different abilities of students in order to provide them with appropriate challenge. Too often, the pace of learning is satisfactory and teachers talk for too long at the start of lessons, which reduces the time available for independent work. In some lessons, students are allowed to be too passive and are not always engaged enough in their learning. Where teaching is good or better, the pace of teaching and learning are fast, expectations of what students could achieve are high and they are quickly engaged in memorable and active learning. An example of this was in a history lesson for Year 7, where the teacher began by rapidly revising prior knowledge about the feudal system by asking a pupil to dictate the order in which students, who were designated as barons, knights, or peasants, could sit down. Arrangements to share this good practice are not fully effective. The quality of assessment procedures is variable. Much marking is congratulatory and routine. Other marking is detailed and usefully informs students of the levels and grades they are working at and of the next steps they must take in order to improve.

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The curriculum is very broad and varied and caters for students' different needs and interests. It is being constantly developed in Key Stage 4, where new courses are created in collaboration with other institutions to meet students' needs. There is a wide range of traditional and vocational options, including courses in construction and motor-vehicle maintenance. The school makes alternative provision for students who are vulnerable and at risk of exclusion in the well-resourced Bosco Centre. Both the school's specialisms further enrich the curriculum. The performing arts subjects provide many creative opportunities for students as well as links with the local community. However, opportunities for links between mathematics and other subjects are missed.

The school provides outstanding care and support for its students and these contribute to their good behaviour and rising attendance. Good transition arrangements enable new students to settle into school life quickly. Homework is often linked to work in lessons. There is a very good level of pastoral support for vulnerable students, including those at risk of exclusion, and their families. Very good support from additional adults enables students with a statement of special educational needs to make progress in their learning that is well above average. A good range of information evenings and booklets for parents and students provides very good guidance on future study options.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Although there are strengths in senior and middle leadership, the overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have maintained a number of very good outcomes for students but have not tackled quickly enough major weaknesses, such as low results in mathematics. Procedures for the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning at both school and departmental level are underdeveloped and are often informal and heavily dependent on an analysis of exam data. As a result leaders, managers and governors do not have a fully accurate picture of the quality of teaching or the quality of students' work. Consequently, the school's self-evaluation of its effectiveness is only broadly accurate. There are some weaknesses in subject leadership, because of decisions to deploy some managers, such as in mathematics, to other school-wide responsibilities. This reduces the time they can spend on improving outcomes in their department. The headteacher has identified these weaknesses and begun to address them. Academic targets have been made more challenging and procedures whereby departments evaluate their effectiveness have been sharpened and made more systematic. Development planning is now focused on driving academic improvement but lacks important milestones and success criteria by which progress can be judged.

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Procedures for the safeguarding of students are good and the school's large site is carefully monitored. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It works well as an inclusive community, has good links with others beyond the immediate area and students contribute very well to the local and wider community. Any kind of discrimination is tackled robustly, but the weaknesses in the core subject of mathematics mean that the school's promotion of equality of opportunity for students is satisfactory, rather than good. Links with parents are good and they are kept well informed about students' progress, their future options and curricular developments. There are good and effective partnerships with pastoral agencies and other educational settings which are well used to increase curriculum options. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is supportive of leaders and managers but does not as yet offer a good level of challenge to them about aspects of the school's work. Given students' satisfactory outcomes, the school provides adequate value for money.

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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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

Sixth form

Academic outcomes for students are good. They make good progress in their learning at AS level and this is stronger at GCE Advanced level. Students spoken to cited the good level of support for their learning which they receive. They listen carefully in lessons and display good attitudes to study, for example, when they work silently and industriously in the library. They make good contributions to fund-raising activities and assist at parents' evenings in the main school. The great majority of students who embark on courses complete them. A key factor in this is the very good care, guidance and support they receive from staff, including the learning coach and the head of the sixth form. The curriculum is very inclusive and meets well the interests of students of all abilities. It covers both traditional subjects as well as vocational studies, such as childcare. As one student said, 'It is versatile and caters for all.' Induction procedures are good, with

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information evenings and booklets for students and parents. The quality of teaching is variable and ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. Where teaching is at its best, as was seen in an outstanding German lesson for Year 12 students, teachers' subject knowledge is very good, students are well supported, the pace of learning is very fast and work is challenging. The sixth form is well led. Data are carefully analysed but opportunities for sixth-form leaders to check on the quality of teaching are not yet fully developed.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires are supportive of the school's work and agree that their child enjoys school. A few thought that the school did not help their child to have a healthy lifestyle and that it did not deal with poor behaviour well. A few also thought that their child was not making good progress at the school. All of these issues were raised with the school and a wide range of evidence gathered. Inspectors found that the progress students made in their learning was satisfactory. They found that students adopt healthy lifestyles well and that behaviour was good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's Catholic College 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 187 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1676 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	82	44	95	51	8	4	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	101	54	79	42	5	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	74	40	97	52	11	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	73	39	96	51	12	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	82	44	92	49	6	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	64	34	104	56	10	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	30	110	59	17	9	1	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)	82	44	88	47	6	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	81	43	96	51	5	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	71	38	92	49	13	7	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	55	29	107	57	12	6	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	76	41	97	52	6	3	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	93	50	85	45	6	3	0	0

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.



10 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic College, Wallasey CH45 3LN

Many thanks for being so polite and helpful when we inspected your school recently. Your school is a satisfactory school with a number of good and outstanding features. Some of the best things which we saw were that:

- you make an outstanding contribution to your school and the wider community
- your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent
- the care, guidance and support which your school provides is outstanding
- your behaviour is good.
- you know well how to follow a healthy lifestyle
- the sixth form is good and is well led
- the curriculum the school provides for you is good.

Your attainment is average and the progress you make in your learning is satisfactory. This is why the school is satisfactory overall, rather than good. We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to make a number of improvements. First, we have asked them to raise standards in mathematics and to ensure that you make faster progress in this important subject. Second, we have asked that all teaching is as good as the best that we saw. Finally, we have asked the school to put in place rigorous procedures for checking how good teaching and learning are so that weaknesses can be identified and improvements made rapidly. You can help your school improve by coming to school every single day.

Once again, many thanks for being so helpful and courteous when we inspected your school.

Yours sincerely

Mr Michael McIlroy

Her Majesty's Inspector

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