

St Damian's RC Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106270
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	355918
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Janet Palmer 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	792
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Fr Myles Sheahan
Headteacher	Mrs F Ashton
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 33 lessons and 31 teachers. They had telephone discussions with a parent and a governor and held meetings with staff, groups of students, the School Improvement Partner and a local authority representative. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including policies and records relating to the safeguarding of students. They analysed the responses to questionnaires from 211 parents and carers, 221 students and 56 members of staff.

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

- the attainment and progress at Key Stage 4, particularly in English and mathematics and of middle ability students and girls
- the effectiveness of strategies to reduce persistent absenteeism
- the effectiveness of strategies to bring about improvements in teaching, learning and assessment
- the breadth and balance of the curriculum, including recent changes to better meet students' needs
- the rigour and effectiveness of performance management systems
- the capacity of leaders and managers to make sustained improvements.

Information about the school

St Damian's is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It has had a science specialism since 2003. Students are mainly of White British heritage. Few are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language; those students who do are mostly of Polish and African heritage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is due to move into a new building close to the current site in May 2011. The building programme has caused considerable disruption, particularly to the provision of social spaces for students, physical education and extended services.

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?**4****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****4**

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Students do not achieve as well as they should, particularly in English and mathematics. This is because teaching and learning are not consistently good enough to ensure that all students, particularly those in the middle-ability band, make the progress of which they are capable. Improvement strategies are in place but they have not been implemented with sufficient urgency and are not securely embedded in practice across the college.

When students enter the college in Year 7, their attainment is broadly above average. By the time they leave in Year 11 their attainment is broadly in line with the national average, except in English and mathematics where it is significantly below the national averages. As a result, students' attainment overall is low. Since 2008, the overall progress students make relative to their starting points has declined from broadly in line with to significantly below national expectations. The three-year trends in progress for English and mathematics are significantly below the national averages. Further to this, analysis of college data for English and mathematics indicates that, although improvements are evident, current Year 11 students are not expected to meet their progress targets in 2011.

Since the previous inspection, the college has worked hard to resolve a number of staffing issues, particularly in middle leadership, and has worked closely with local authority advisers and consultants to promote better quality teaching and learning. Where teachers' subject knowledge and classroom expertise have been secured, students are showing signs of improved attainment and enjoy their lessons. Students' progress is tracked but the information is not used well to ensure that lessons match learning needs and are sufficiently challenging. Much of the marking of students' work helps them to improve but this is inconsistent within and between subjects; very few teachers mark students' spelling, punctuation or grammar.

College leaders have succeeded in narrowing the achievement gap between girls and boys, and enabling those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make satisfactory progress. However, too few middle-ability students are achieving their expected grades. Considerable effort on the part of the college has led to improvements in attendance. Persistent absence has reduced to average levels and overall attendance has improved to above the national average. The curriculum is broad, balanced and appropriately designed to meet the needs of students. Those at risk of disaffection are provided for through a range of work-based learning and alternative curriculum options. The college provides a satisfactory level of care, guidance and support. Students whose

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circumstances have made them vulnerable receive good care, helping them cope with college and become more confident. Overall and in lessons, students' behaviour is satisfactory but incidents of poor behaviour are occasionally evident around the college between lessons and during break times. Students say that most bullying is dealt with effectively through college systems. Analysis of safeguarding systems and procedures concluded that, overall, arrangements are satisfactory.

Senior leaders and members of the governing body have a good understanding of the issues and priorities facing the college. A sound grasp of what is necessary to raise attainment and accelerate progress is evident. However, although monitoring of provision is now regular, it does not always bring key issues and priorities into sharp focus and one third of staff who responded to the questionnaire do not think that the college makes appropriate provision for their professional development. Target-setting is not reviewed regularly enough to ensure targets are sufficiently challenging for individual students. Leaders have not embedded their ambitions for improvement across the college and analyses of questionnaires show that leaders and the governing body do not enjoy the full support of stakeholders. Although the majority of parents and carers support the college's leaders, some do not think the college takes sufficient account of their concerns. Necessary improvements have not been implemented with sufficient rigour or urgency and remain fragile. This demonstrates that leaders and the governing body do not have the required capacity to bring about the necessary improvements swiftly or securely.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - – increasing the level of challenge in lessons
 - – ensuring work in lessons meets all students' needs and especially those who are of middle-ability
 - – making better use of the good teaching that exists in the college to improve practice more rapidly.
- Strengthen the capacity of leaders and managers to embed and sustain improvements in provision by:
 - – reviewing the process of target-setting at whole-college level so that it becomes a more effective tool with which to raise attainment
 - – ensuring that managers at all levels rigorously and consistently monitor and evaluate the performance of their teams.
- Improve the effectiveness of engagement with parents and carers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Outcomes are inadequate because students do not achieve sufficiently well, particularly in English and mathematics. Since 2008, the percentage leaving the college with five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics has fallen from above to below the national average. Although attainment in art and design, biology and chemistry was above average in 2010, it was below in all other subjects that had a large cohort of

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students. Attainment levels in information and communication technology (ICT) and in functional English and mathematics are in line with the national average.

Achievement is inadequate because students have not made the progress expected of them. Overall, progress has improved sufficiently well in Years 9 and 10 for students to meet their targets but this is not the case for the current Year 11. In 2010, middle-ability learners missed their target of achieving five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics by some distance. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because the care and support they receive are effective.

Although the majority of students enjoy college, approximately one quarter of those surveyed stated that they did not enjoy it and did not think that teachers were interested in their views. Despite this, attendance is good and punctuality is satisfactory. Most students display appropriate attitudes to learning, although there are incidents of low-level disruption when they are insufficiently challenged or engaged. Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and participate in extra-curricular sports.

Students contribute to the college and wider community through charitable fund-raising activities, drama and musical productions. Some have helped with the planning for the new college building and many in Year 11 contribute as prefects or buddies to younger students. The work of the student council has a low profile among the students and its impact on the life of the college is limited. Through the work-experience programme and work-based learning routes, students develop appropriate work-place skills. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall but their cultural awareness is restricted by the lack of opportunities to engage with those from different ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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?

Although there are instances of good teaching, too few lessons set high expectations for students. In the best lessons, teachers use information from the tracking of students' progress to plan work that meets their needs. The best teachers use questioning well to ascertain students' understanding and interrogate their learning; they employ ICT effectively to add pace and to develop students' critical thinking skills. In the less successful lessons, a disproportionate amount of time is spent on low-level tasks with little opportunity for independent learning. Expectations are often low, students become disaffected and valuable teaching time is lost.

The curriculum is enhanced by links with local colleges. Sports and other clubs are on offer but the take-up of extra-curricular activities is not well monitored to ensure students' needs and interests are met. Younger students value the project-based learning in Years 7 and 8 and older students take advantage of extra twilight courses. Induction arrangements for Year 7 are satisfactory but students say they would like more information and guidance to help their transition to post-16 education, training or employment. The most vulnerable students are well cared for and speak highly of the Emmaeus room where they can go to experience calm and reflection. Students also value the mentoring provided by the student support officers.

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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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

While leaders and the governing body have a clear vision and ambition for the college, this is not shared by all staff. Actions have not been sufficiently rigorous to raise performance levels across the college and secure sustained improvements. College leaders acknowledge inconsistencies and lack of challenge in the quality assurance and target-setting systems but do not have appropriate strategies in place to address them swiftly and effectively.

The governing body has a secure knowledge of the college's strengths and weaknesses, understands the challenges the college faces and is involved in setting priorities for improvement. It discharge its statutory responsibilities appropriately and ensure that staff and students are safe; records are up to date and complete. Partnerships with external agencies help to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. The college makes appropriate efforts to tackle discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. As a result, there is little difference between the progress of girls and boys, and students say there are relatively few incidents of racist or homophobic behaviour. Consultation evenings are more regular than in the past but parents and carers expressed the view that communications with the college are problematic. Overall, the college's engagement with parents and carers is inadequate. Concerns about lack of information and unresolved complaints are typical of the many comments received on this issue. Strategies to promote community cohesion are strong in the local and Catholic faith communities but students' experience and understanding of the diversity of the United Kingdom and their global awareness are limited.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
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	4
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

Approximately one quarter of parents and carers gave their views and most responses were supportive of the college and its managers. However, around one fifth of respondents did not feel that the college deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour. During the inspection, inspectors judged behaviour to be satisfactory overall, although behaviour was less good on corridors, around the school grounds and where teaching was poor. Approximately one fifth of respondents did not think that the college helped them to support their child's learning or that it took account of their suggestions or concerns. However, the majority of those who expressed a view, were happy overall with their child's experience at the college.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Damian's RC Science 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 211 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 792 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	68	32	124	59	9	4	7	3
The school keeps my child safe	71	34	129	61	7	3	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	68	32	108	51	24	11	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	27	117	55	21	10	5	2
The teaching is good at this school	51	24	131	62	11	5	6	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	18	123	58	31	15	6	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	41	19	127	60	30	14	2	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)	58	27	111	53	16	8	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	26	124	59	16	8	6	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	56	27	105	50	29	14	8	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	20	113	54	31	15	10	5
The school is led and managed effectively	50	24	124	59	19	9	9	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	71	34	111	53	14	7	7	3

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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 Damian's RC Science College, Ashton-Under-Lyne, OL6 8BH

Thank you for the time you spent talking with us during our recent inspection of your college and particularly to those of you who completed the student questionnaire. We were pleased to find that your attendance has risen, that you are beginning to make improvements in your learning and that you are well cared for. Most of you behave acceptably in lessons, but occasionally behaviour around the college could be better.

Following our visit, we have judged that your college needs to improve and we have, therefore, placed it in 'special measures'. This means that, although your college does some things well, there are weaknesses which need to be sorted out quickly. We have asked the college's leaders to make improvements so that you make faster progress and achieve higher grades, particularly those of you in the middle-ability sets.

Some of your lessons are not challenging enough, and you need more opportunities to learn independently and take responsibility. You told us that you learn best when lessons are lively, when your understanding is checked, and you are shown how to improve your work. We have asked the college to review the targets you have been set to be certain they are high enough and make sure that the quality of teaching and learning is regularly checked on across the college. Some of your parents and carers would like better communications with the college so we have asked leaders to improve these as well.

The college will be provided with help and support to carry out these improvements and inspectors will visit the college regularly to check the progress everyone is making. You, your teachers, parents and governors will all need to work together to ensure improvement happens. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer

Her Majesty's Inspector

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