

Saint Joan of Arc Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117590
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	363874
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Stephen Walker

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	1315
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Barrett
Headteacher	Peter Sweeney
Date of previous school inspection	15 May 2008
School address	High Street Rickmansworth WD3 1HG
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 65 lessons and observed 37 teachers. They also held meetings with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and groups of students. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including the school improvement plan, the tracking system to monitor the students' progress, safeguarding documentation, and the work students were doing in their books. They also analysed questionnaires completed by staff, a sample of students and 346 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The inspection team explored the progress being made by different groups of students and subjects in the school.
- It looked at the effectiveness of teaching in engaging students so that they make at least good progress in lessons.
- It observed the quality of the personal development of the students.
- It examined the quality of provision in the sixth form in meeting the needs of the students.
- It investigated the impact of leadership and management in supporting improvements in the school.

Information about the school

The school is larger than the average comprehensive school. It serves students from a very large geographical area, which includes parts of Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and the London Boroughs of Harrow, Hillingdon and Brent.

The majority of students are from White British backgrounds although over a quarter of students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including Black African, Asian and East European heritage. The percentage of students with English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of students with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average.

The school was formerly a Roman Catholic convent and the buildings have subsequently been extended and refurbished. The school has an expanding sixth form with a significant increase in student numbers over the last two years.

The school has specialist status in science, mathematics and computing. The school has received Investors in People, Customer Service Excellence, Excellence in Careers Education and Guidance, International Baccalaureate World School awards and holds National Healthy School status.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. The strong Catholic tradition supports the very positive ethos in the school and the development of both the academic and personal development of the students. The headteacher provides very effective leadership so that there is a clear vision for continuous improvement in the school. Parents and carers speak very highly of the school and the support for their children. One parent wrote, 'I am very pleased that my child gained a place at this school. He has grown in confidence and has been encouraged in all aspects of his learning and personal growth.'

Students make good progress from their above average starting points and gain well-above-average results in the large majority of their subjects at GCSE. The standards of attainment in many subjects, including English, mathematics and science are significantly above the national averages. Improvements in attainment in these subjects over the last three years have been due to the good-quality teaching and the targeted support for students who need extra help with their learning. The revised system for tracking progress is identifying underachieving students who then receive appropriate support through a range of intervention strategies. Attainment in a small minority of option subjects is average or slightly below average at GCSE. This is because teachers do not always challenge and support the students to gain their target grades in these subjects. Heads of department in these subjects are not always fully effective in supporting and monitoring their teachers or sharing good practice in successful examination techniques.

The exceptionally high standard of care, guidance and support makes a strong contribution to the excellent personal development of the students. Students feel very safe in the school and display an excellent understanding of the issues relating to safety. They make an excellent contribution to the school and local community by volunteering to take responsibility in school, raising money for charities and arranging activities in the local area. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is outstanding. They are respectful towards each other and every student feels valued as an individual even in a larger-than-average school. Attendance is high and reflects the students' engagement with school.

Curricular provision is excellent and reflects the positive impact of the specialist status. The good range of academic subjects in Years 10 and 11 supports the high level of success in most GCSE examinations and these, and the extensive extra-curricular activities, support students' outstanding personal development. Provision in the expanding sixth form is good although the school acknowledges that there is a limited range of courses for all the students. The school has developed outstanding partnerships which are promoting the learning and well-being of the students. Teaching is good overall so that students work hard and show a commitment to do well in their studies. However,

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assessment information is not always used consistently to inform teachers' planning and students' learning to ensure that students are fully engaged and challenged in all lessons.

The school runs very smoothly because the senior leadership team is very effective in enabling teachers and support staff to work as a team, as recognised by the Investors in People award. The headteacher and governing body are well aware of the strengths and areas for development in the school. Strategic planning is good and there are clear actions for improvement. The improving record of students' attainment and progress, the effective leadership of the school and the rigorous systems of tracking students' progress indicate that this school has an outstanding capacity to improve further. The school provides excellent value for money but it is well aware that there is still room for further improvement, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in the small number of subjects where students' attainment is not well above the national average by ensuring that teachers:
 - challenge and support students to gain the target grades in all subject areas
 - share good practice in teaching and learning to support students with their external examinations
 - are supported and monitored more effectively by the subject leaders.
- Ensure that all teaching and learning is at least good by making sure that all teachers:
 - use assessment information more consistently to inform planning and learning
 - fully engage students in their learning and regularly check their understanding

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Evidence from students' work seen during the inspection demonstrates that students in the very large majority of classes are making at least good progress during the current year. The atmosphere in most lessons is positive and the students want to do well. Most students enjoy learning and make good progress. For example, Year 13 students were fully engaged in their psychology lesson on the family and made good progress when assessing each others work to identify areas for improvement in a recent assignment. Similarly, Year 11 students made good progress in a science lesson when the teacher used challenging questions and imaginative resources to develop students' understanding of the reflection of light waves.

The 2010 GCSE results for Year 11 are well above the national average with 72% of students gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. The school has been particularly successful in raising the attainment of boys in English and accelerating the rate of progress of all students in mathematics. The students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those entitled to free school meals make good progress, in line with others. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, also make good progress.

Students are very proud to be part of the school and they develop into very positive, friendly and confident young people. The behaviour of the very large majority of students

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is good and this supports a very cooperative atmosphere in the school. However, students are not always taking full responsibility for their own behaviour to support learning in all lessons. Most students have a good understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles as acknowledged by the National Healthy School status. A large number of students take part in a wide range of sporting activities and more students are choosing to eat healthily at lunchtimes. Students relish the opportunities to take responsibility such as acting as representatives on the student voice or the school and year councils. Students show high levels of respect and empathy towards each other as well as demonstrating an excellent appreciation of the multicultural diversity of our society. Students develop a high level of understanding of what they have to do to succeed in their future education and careers.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
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	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
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?

The large majority of teaching is good as most teachers plan lessons which are appropriate to the abilities of the students. The good relationships between teachers and students ensure that there is a positive learning environment in the classroom. In the best lessons, teachers plan a range of interesting activities and have high expectations of the students. As a result, students display enthusiasm and sustain high levels of concentration. Outstanding learning takes place when teachers extend the students, provide opportunities for independent thinking and encourage students to take responsibility for their learning. Students are well informed about their targets and how to

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improve their work although they are not always sufficiently challenged to gain their target grades in all subject areas. A small minority of teachers are not fully engaging their students in lessons or checking their understanding of the work. Not all teachers are using the assessment information effectively to inform their planning so that their lessons meet the different learning needs of the students.

The curriculum provides the students with an excellent range of learning opportunities. The school's specialist status ensures that there is enhanced provision in mathematics and science as well as a greater use of technology as a tool for learning. The transition classes in Key Stage 3 provide good support for students who are vulnerable or need additional support with their literacy and numeracy. There are a small number of vocational subjects at GCSE but the majority of the students chose the more traditional academic courses. Programmes in religious education and personal health and social education greatly support the outstanding personal development of the students. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits significantly enhances the students' enjoyment and experience of school.

The pastoral care for the students is outstanding because there are extremely effective systems of individual support for all students, including those who are vulnerable or have difficulties with learning. The school is very welcoming and students confirm that there are always members of staff to talk to if they have a problem. There are rigorous procedures for monitoring students' attendance and following up absences. Excellent working relationships between the school and external agencies particularly benefit students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, ensuring their social and learning needs are met through effective programmes. Heads of year, form tutors and the school chaplain are fully involved in promoting the academic and personal development of the students. The well-targeted support for students as individuals has ensured the high rates of success in examinations and the positive attitudes towards school. Good arrangements are in place to support a smooth transition from a range of primary schools. The Excellence in Careers Education and Guidance award confirms the outstanding programme which helps students make confident and well-informed choices about their future.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides energetic and collaborative leadership so that all staff are highly committed to further improvement of the school. The senior leadership team is also providing a very strong impetus for improvement across the school. Rigorous systems of monitoring teaching and tracking students' progress are supporting the improvements in

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the school. Most subject leaders are developing their effectiveness in their planning, supporting and monitoring responsibilities. Members of the governing body are very supportive of the school and are effective in their evaluating and monitoring roles. Governors have been particularly influential in driving forward the building programme at the school. Robust procedures for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and underpin the school's very caring approach. Members of the governing body regularly check that all practices and procedures fully meet health and safety requirements. There is a strong commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities for all which ensures that the school is fully inclusive in integrating students from different ethnic and social backgrounds.

The school has developed excellent partnerships with a range of organisations including the local cluster of schools, the school sports partnership, feeder primary schools and a number of universities. The school is an active member of the Archdiocese of Westminster Partnership which enables the sharing of good practice with similar schools outside the local authority. Parents and carers are given regular information about school events and the progress of their children. The school makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion and particularly works very closely with the families from minority ethnic communities to welcome them into the community of the school and the church. The partnerships with the leprosy school in India and the school in Trinidad provides an excellent opportunity for students to develop their understanding of the global community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students make good progress and attain results from A and AS level courses which enable them to continue successfully to higher education, training or employment. In 2010, over 60% of students gained A* to B grades in their A2 examinations which reflects an improving trend. Retention rates on all courses are high although there is some variation

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in progress between subjects. Students say that they enjoy their sixth form education. They have mature attitudes to learning, attend regularly, work hard and make a considerable contribution to the main school. They act as good role models for the younger years. All students take part in community service within the local community. Teaching is generally good although it does not always provide sufficient opportunities for independent learning. There is a good range of advanced courses available although there is a limited range of level 3 courses to meet the full needs of the expanding sixth form numbers. Students greatly appreciate the helpful support that they receive when they plan their futures. Many sixth formers take a full part in extra-curricular activities including sport, drama and music. Effective leadership and management ensure that students benefit from their time in the sixth form.

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 percentage of parents who responded to the questionnaires was much higher than average for this type of school. Most parents and carers are very positive about the work of the school and its impact on their children's learning. Responses to the questionnaire included a number of detailed comments emphasising the good leadership of the headteacher, the sense of community in the school and the caring approach of staff towards their children. A small minority of respondents suggested the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors found clear evidence that the school deals effectively with the very few students who display challenging behaviour. A small minority of parents and carers also mentioned that the school does not help them to support their children in their learning. Inspectors have asked the headteacher to review this point with staff so that parent consultation and information evenings can be more informative. Overall, parents' and carers' views reflect the inspection findings.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Saint Joan of Arc Catholic 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 346 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1315 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	155	45	172	50	10	3	5	1
The school keeps my child safe	185	53	150	43	8	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	137	40	180	52	22	6	6	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	128	37	183	53	18	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	121	35	196	57	14	4	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	118	34	174	50	36	10	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	103	30	210	61	23	7	1	0
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)	119	34	180	52	20	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	112	32	193	56	25	7	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	129	37	165	48	30	9	7	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	90	26	195	56	29	8	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	144	42	181	52	10	3	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	167	48	161	47	11	3	3	1

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Saint Joan of Arc Catholic School, Rickmansworth, WD3 1HG

Thank you for making us so welcome and for talking to us during the inspection. We really enjoyed watching your lessons and looking at your work. It was also good to see you during breaks and lunchtimes. Saint Joan of Arc Catholic School is an outstanding school. Your parents and carers told us how pleased they are with the standards of education in the school.

There are many excellent things about your school. The strong Catholic tradition supports the very positive atmosphere and your outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You have a very effective headteacher who is working exceptionally well with the staff to support you in your work and personal growth. It is excellent to see how you show considerable respect towards each other and look after the younger students. You are making good progress and attain highly in the majority of your subjects. Your attendance is excellent and reflects your commitment to the school. Many of you are enjoying the opportunities for responsibility in the school and all of you are regularly raising money for charities. You are certainly developing into extremely positive, friendly and confident young people. Well done!

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to do the following things to make the school even better.

Raise standards in the small number of subjects where your attainment is not as high as in others.

Ensure that all teaching fully engages you in lessons and encourages you to take more responsibility for your own learning.

We would like to wish you success in your future education. You can help by behaving well and supporting learning in all lessons. Keep working hard and enjoying the many good things in your school.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Walker

Lead inspector

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