

# St George Catholic Voluntary Aided College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	116507
<b>Local Authority</b>	Southampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	379629
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christopher Wood HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	480
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Godfrey Doyle
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Graham Wilson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 June 2009
<b>School address</b>	Leaside Way Swaythling Southampton SO16 3DQ
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## Introduction

This inspection was conducted by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They observed 33 lessons taught by 31 teachers, which is almost all of the teachers who were available to be seen during the inspection. This included joint observations with school leaders.

During the inspection, meetings were held with school staff, three members of the governing body, a representative from the diocese and four groups of students including the college council. Inspectors visited tutor periods and a Year 9 assembly. Inspectors scrutinised the school's self-evaluation, policies, improvement plans and documents relating to the tracking of students' progress. They also analysed the responses to questionnaires returned by 215 parents and carers, 104 students and 37 members of the college staff.

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

- The rate of progress made by students, particularly middle-attaining students in Key Stage 4, to ascertain whether teaching is appropriately adapted and/or sufficiently challenging across the full range of subjects.
- The extent to which the school's care, guidance and support has promoted improving outcomes for students, particularly in terms of their attendance.
- The extent to which the curriculum, including the school's specialism, has improved since the previous inspection and has led to better achievement.
- The extent to which leaders at all levels have secured improvements to provision and outcomes.

## Information about the school

St George Catholic Voluntary Aided College is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the national average as is the percentage of students who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is similar to the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also similar to that seen nationally.

The college has held specialist status for science and sport since September 2010. It is consulting on a move to co-educational entry from September 2013.

**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?**

**2**

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

**2**

## Main findings

St George Catholic Voluntary Aided College is a good school which is improving strongly in all areas of its work. Its Catholic ethos fosters a highly unified community of eager learners who value and celebrate each other's differences. Consequently, students from diverse backgrounds get on extremely well and feel exceptionally safe. The care, guidance and support students receive are outstanding. As a result, they develop into well-rounded and courteous young men who make an excellent contribution to their college and local community. An extensive range of opportunities to hone their leadership skills, reflect deeply on ethical and societal issues, and extend their sporting and artistic talents means that the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary.

Students achieve well during their time at the college and their achievement is improving yearly. They make good progress in their learning and by the end of Year 11 their attainment is similar to that of all other students nationally. Unvalidated GCSE examination results for 2011 indicate that the rate of progress made by students is accelerating. Over time, students' attainment in mathematics has been consistently above the national average and their progress in this subject is excellent. Students also achieve well in the specialist subjects of science and physical education (PE).

Teaching is good and some is outstanding. In the best lessons well-planned and imaginative activities encourage high levels of engagement and collaboration. In these lessons, teachers ensure that students of different abilities are fully challenged and know precisely what skills or knowledge they need to demonstrate in order to achieve their ambitious personal targets. Nevertheless, this good practice is not yet wholly consistent across the college. In general, teachers' use of different questioning techniques is good. This helps students to extend their thinking and deepen their understanding. However, in some lessons the teachers' use of the detailed information they have about students' prior learning is inconsistent or does not match the quality of the best. In a small number of lessons, the success criteria for learning that students are given are too vague and in some instances students are asked to complete the same tasks irrespective of ability. In these lessons, students have more limited or less well-structured opportunities to reflect on their learning or develop their independent learning skills. This means that their rate of progress slows.

The college's engagement with parents and carers is excellent and its popularity is

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increasing. An overwhelming majority of parents and carers praise their children's experience at the college. One parent echoed the views of many when stating, 'I feel that St George treats my child as an individual. He has gained in confidence and self-esteem and is very proud to be a member of this school.' Inspectors endorse this view. Leaders regularly survey the views of parents and carers and use this information astutely to shape the future strategic development of the college. Communication between the college and home is excellent and attendance at events is high.

In the past, students' attendance has been too low. As a result of the college's relentless focus on this area it is now average. Nevertheless, leaders recognise the need to improve attendance further, particularly for those few students who find it difficult to attend college regularly. Leaders are committed to working even more closely with students and their families while evaluating regularly the impact of the college's successful strategies to improve attendance so that these are well tailored to individual needs.

The headteacher is highly respected. He, like his senior leadership team, is visible and proactive. They are well supported by an enthusiastic team of middle leaders. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on regular cycles of monitoring and analysis which involve leaders at all levels. Staff are proud to work at the college and feel fully involved in its ongoing journey of improvement. Since the previous inspection, there has been a discernible track record of improvement in provision and achievement. This demonstrates the college's good capacity to sustain and build on these improvements in the future.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that all teachers' use of the detailed information they have about students' prior learning is consistent with the best, by:
  - planning activities that are sufficiently challenging for students of different abilities
  - identifying success criteria for learning which focus precisely on the skills or knowledge students need to demonstrate in order to achieve their personal targets
  - providing students with regular and structured opportunities to reflect on their learning and develop their skills of independent learning.
  
- Improve attendance further, particularly for those students who find it difficult to attend regularly, by:
  - working even more closely with students and their families
  - evaluating regularly the impact of the college's successful strategies to improve attendance so that these are well tailored to individual needs.

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## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

At the college, students are well prepared for their future education and careers. Students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, make good progress and attain standards that are broadly average. Some make rapid progress and in some subjects their attainment is above average. Inspectors looked in particular at the achievement of middle-attaining students at Key Stage 4 and found this to be in line with their peers. In lessons, most students apply themselves enthusiastically. They frequently support each other’s learning during well-planned group work. They respond with confidence during class discussion, often showing insight, sensitivity or a willingness to take risks. In a small number of instances, where the pace of learning slows, they become passive or restless.

There is a high level of mutual respect between students and staff. Students feel extremely safe and look after each other. One Year 11 student summed up the views of others when saying, ‘We are a tight unit here – the boys don’t allow bullying for any reason.’ Their behaviour is good and sometimes exemplary. Students understand the importance of staying healthy and most try to adopt healthy lifestyles. Attendance is broadly average and improving. Students have excellent opportunities to develop their talents in art, music, drama and sport. Sports teams are frequently successful and recent productions include *Treasure Island* and *The Dracula Spectacular*. These opportunities are valued highly by students who, refusing to be pigeon-holed, feel equally at home when competing in the sporting arena or performing on the stage. Their contribution to their college and local community is excellent. Older students put their skills to excellent use when coaching sports teams or directing originally devised drama to raise money for charity. The work of Year 11 mentors is excellent; the building of effective relationships with Year 7 begins when students visit the college’s feeder schools. The system of captains, vice-captains and prefects who focus on different areas of the college’s work, (such as transition, external links and events) is exceptional. Students are regularly involved in the college’s self-evaluation processes and enjoy learning about different cultures through educational visits and long established participation in events such Black History Month. Consequently, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.

*These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes*

<b>Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2

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

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

## How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers:

- use their secure subject knowledge to plan activities that are well adapted to the needs of students of different abilities and develop their independent learning
- share precise success criteria for learning with students so that they understand what skills or knowledge they need to demonstrate in order to achieve their personal targets
- employ good questioning techniques to challenge students' thinking and enhance the quality of their responses
- plan structured opportunities for students to evaluate their own work and the work of others
- provide regular oral and written feedback which guides students successfully on how to improve their work.

Nevertheless, the most successful practice is not yet wholly consistent across the college. Teachers have access to good information about the students' prior learning. This is used well by the majority of teachers and some practice is outstanding. However, in some lessons this is inconsistent and, as a consequence, the rate of progress made by students in their learning slows.

The curriculum is good and improving. There is a good balance between academic and vocational pathways. Increasingly, the options available to students of different abilities are closely tailored to their needs and this has led to their good achievement. The specialist subjects have a positive profile and achievement in these areas is strong. Cross-curricular initiatives such as the recent Second World War day enrich learning across a range of subjects. Different departments regularly seek out opportunities to work together for the benefit of students. Participation in extra-curricular activities, notably in sport, is high. There are regular opportunities for students to take part in stimulating educational visits and challenges. For example, Year 9 students utilised well their product design, communication and foreign language skills during a 'business dynamics day', while Years 7 and 8 students

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employed their science and engineering skills successfully in an inter-school competition to build a rocket car.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The tracking of students’ progress and achievement, including those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, is excellent. This means that support, which is often innovative, can be closely tailored to the needs of individual students. This ensures that their achievement is good and their personal development is sometimes outstanding. Attendance has improved since the previous inspection but remains a college priority. Staff work exceptionally well together to ensure that pastoral care for all students is of high quality. Support for those students who speak English as an additional language is extremely well devised. Consequently, these students are swiftly integrated into college life and make quick progress. Students receive excellent advice and guidance when making choices about their future education or careers. As one student noted, ‘The school sets you up for life.’ The very large majority of parents and carers say they are well informed about their children’s progress and feel supported in helping their children to learn. The systems that support students who are joining the school are excellent. One parent expressed views similar to many when saying, ‘Every effort is made to help Year 7 children settle.’

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Under the far-sighted leadership of the headteacher, well supported by leaders at all levels, the college has gone from strength to strength. Following the previous inspection, a shared focus on the most pressing priorities has led to distinct improvements to provision and student achievement. Good partnerships have been developed fruitfully that enhance the curriculum. They also underpin the good systems that the college has for keeping students safe. The college has been well served by an experienced and knowledgeable governing body which ensures that statutory responsibilities, such as the monitoring of safeguarding, are carried out efficiently. Governors hold leaders to account well but recognise the need to seek out more first-hand evidence when monitoring the quality of the college’s provision.

Much of the college’s recent success is founded on its effective tracking of students’ progress alongside a well-embedded cycle of self-evaluation, known in the college as ‘departmental validation’. This robust process is used successfully by leaders to identify key areas for improvement which underpin well-focused staff development



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opportunities such as those undertaken through the school improvement groups. Leaders are also willing to innovate and learn from each other. For example, a successfully piloted initiative designed to help students understand visually the aspirational targets that are being set, known as ‘flight paths’, is now being rolled out throughout Year 7. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching carefully and their actions have led to improvements since the previous inspection. They are now rightly focused on ensuring that the few remaining areas where teaching and the use of assessment information are less effective are brought up to the level of the best.

The college is an extremely cohesive community which nurtures the students’ keen interest in/and understanding of other religions, cultures and backgrounds. The college understands the needs of the diverse community it serves and the evaluation of its actions demonstrates a good contribution to community cohesion, particularly within the college’s surrounding area. Leaders track the achievement, attitudes and attendance of different groups of learners well to ensure there is equality of opportunity. They monitor carefully any variations in the performance of different students or subject areas so that the college’s actions minimise any gaps in achievement.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Views of parents and carers

The proportion of questionnaires returned by parents and carers was much higher than average. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are extremely positive about their children’s experience. One parent echoed the views of many when stating, ‘My son is very happy at school. He is both inspired and challenged by most of his teachers.’ In their positive written comments, parents and carers

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commonly praised the tireless commitment and approachability of staff, the high quality of individual care, the effective communication with the school and the regular opportunities for their children’s success to be celebrated.

There were a few concerns expressed in the written comments. Almost all of these related to individual issues. Nevertheless, the headteacher was made aware of any concerns and, in particular, the small number of parents and carers who felt poorly informed about their children’s progress or curriculum. Most other parents and carers thought this was a strength. Nevertheless, leaders are determined to ensure that the excellent information that they already provide is even more widely accessible.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St George Voluntary Aided 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 215 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 480 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	117	54	91	42	7	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	115	53	97	45	1	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	121	56	82	38	4	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	102	47	92	43	9	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	117	54	93	43	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	92	43	105	49	6	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	76	35	122	57	10	5	0	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)	99	46	101	47	3	1	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	89	41	106	49	8	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	106	49	90	42	9	4	1	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	83	39	104	48	10	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	124	58	86	40	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	136	63	76	35	1	0	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



30 September 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of St George Catholic Voluntary Aided College, Southampton  
SO16 3DQ**

Recently, I visited your college with a team of inspectors to see how you were doing. We were delighted to meet you and were grateful for the time you spent talking to us.

I am pleased to say that you go to a good school which is improving every year. You make good progress in lessons because teaching is good. The balanced curriculum now offers you a wider range of options which are better suited to your academic or vocational needs. Overall, by the time you leave in Year 11, your examination results are similar to those achieved by all other students nationally. In some subjects, such as mathematics, you make excellent progress and attain consistently above the national average. Your behaviour in lessons is good and sometimes exemplary. In a few lessons, where the pace of learning is slow, you become restless or are too passive. Your attendance has improved and is broadly average.

The care, guidance and support that you receive are excellent. You get along exceptionally well with your teachers and each other. Consequently, you feel extremely safe and the college is a cohesive and welcoming place to learn. Inspectors were impressed by your many sporting successes and your passionate dedication to the arts. You also make an excellent contribution to the community through your charitable efforts, your first-rate mentoring of younger students and through your roles as college captains, vice-captains and prefects. Your keen interest in ethical issues and respect for people from other cultures and backgrounds means that your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Your parents and carers are extremely positive about the college. Leaders are committed to working with them very closely to ensure that you succeed. Your headteacher and I agree that there are two things the college should do to improve further.

- Ensure that the information teachers have about your prior learning is used more consistently to plan lessons that help you to achieve your ambitious personal targets.
- Ensure that your attendance continues to improve.

You can play your part by applying yourself fully to the challenging work that your teachers plan.

Yours sincerely  
Chris Wood  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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