

St James' Catholic High School - A Specialist Humanities College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106142
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	377363
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2012
Lead inspector	Neil Mackenzie

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	797
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Carter
Headteacher	John Barnes (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2007
School address	St James Way Cheadle Hulme Cheadle SK8 6PZ
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Introduction

Inspection team

Neil Mackenzie

Additional inspector

Nell Banfield

Additional inspector

Carmen Markham

Additional inspector

Clarice Nelson-Rowe

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 35 lessons taught by 34 different teachers, of which two were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. They also observed assemblies and tutor group sessions. They listened to students read during a reading recovery session. Meetings were held with members of the governing body and with staff. The inspectors spoke to many students. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including internal and external data about students' progress, school development planning, behaviour and attendance records, minutes of governing body meetings and students' work. They investigated safeguarding procedures, and scrutinised 270 questionnaires completed by parents and carers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection. They scrutinised questionnaires completed by students and by members of staff.

Information about the school

St James' Catholic High School is smaller than the average size secondary school. It became a specialist humanities college in 2004. It meets the current floor standards which are the minimum standards expected by the government. The majority of students come from White British backgrounds and very few students speak English as an additional language. The school is a locally designated centre for students who have a physical disability. The proportion of students supported by School Action Plus is below average, the proportion with a statement of special education needs is above average. The school has achieved Healthy School Status and holds Eco-Schools and International School awards. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. In 2009 the school was acknowledged as a High Performing Specialist School and awarded Leading Edge 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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. The school is not outstanding because teaching is not yet good enough to move the current good progress to outstanding and the impact of some school improvements is not evaluated with sufficient precision.
- Students' achievement is good and their attainment is high, particularly in the school's specialist subjects. Their literacy skills are also well-developed.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, with some that is outstanding. Recent professional development of teachers has been successful in increasing the engagement of students. Where teaching is less effective, activities do not always meet the needs of individual students and marking does not inform students how to improve their work.
- The behaviour and safety of students is outstanding. The school is a harmonious community and there is a very strong culture of mutual support and respect. Although students have very positive attitudes to their learning, they do not always take sufficient care with the presentation of their work. Effective actions have been taken to improve attendance, and it is now above average.
- The leadership and management of the school are good. Leaders and managers across the school have been successful in improving students' performance and raising their achievement through improving the quality of teaching. Systems to monitor students' progress better have been established and are effective in informing leaders as to where to focus further improvements. The same level of scrutiny is not applied to other areas of development, so information is less reliable. The curriculum is good, and the excellent enrichment opportunities make a significant contribution to the outstanding promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching to that demonstrated by the best practice in the school by:
 - continuing to improve the quality of feedback to students so that they can increase their independence in learning
 - planning challenging activities and providing suitable resources that meet the needs of all students
 - ensuring that students improve the presentation of their work.
- Ensure that all areas of school improvement are monitored and evaluated more rigorously.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Overall, the attainment of students on entry is above the national average. Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire overwhelmingly agree that their children make good progress. Inspection evidence supports this view. By the time students leave at the end of Year 11, their attainment is high. Teachers ensure that students are well-prepared for their examinations and they gain GCSE results which are significantly above average. In lessons, progress is particularly strong in English, religious education, drama and design and technology; this is reflected in the 2011 GCSE results for these subjects. Although never less than satisfactory, progress is not as strong for students in some other subject areas, notably modern foreign languages, science, and mathematics. There is no significant difference in the achievement of students from different minority ethnic groups. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are integrated into school life fully and make progress at least in line with that of their peers because they are well-supported. The gap in performance between those students known to be eligible to free school meals, and others, is narrowing. The great majority of students say they enjoy school and this was evident during the inspection. They have high aspirations and concentrate well.

In the best lessons observed during the inspection, learning was active and students' understanding was consolidated through excellent questioning which required students to reflect and explain. These particular qualities were regularly seen in English, religious education, physical education and geography. This ensured that all students enjoyed their work and achieved well. In one lesson, a student told the inspector that he was doing so well he had 'smashed his targets'. Inspectors saw slower progress when teachers had not considered the learning needs of different students. Students develop very good skills in reading, writing and numeracy, but they do not always take enough care when presenting their work. Students are articulate and work collaboratively exceptionally well. When given the opportunity, students use information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good overall and inspectors concur with most parents' and carers' views that their children are taught well and are very pleased with the progress their children make. There are examples of outstanding practice, but there is also some practice which is satisfactory, although none is inadequate. In the most successful lessons, teachers know how to unlock the potential of individual students and they ensure that all students are actively engaged in learning. Lessons are divided carefully into different types of learning activities. Teachers use a wide range of strategies that require students to think deeply about topics, to explain ideas or justify opinions. Group and paired work are often key features. These characteristics help to develop students' moral and social understanding. Many teachers are skilled at questioning students to ascertain their understanding, to provoke deeper reflection and to draw students into discussion. These qualities were particularly evident in a Year 7 geography lesson where students were preparing for a field trip to Manchester. Students were able to describe different types of housing and housing densities. They also reflected on the impact of housing and were able to justify their opinions on the benefits and difficulties with different types of housing development. All students learned enthusiastically throughout the lesson.

In the minority of lessons where teaching was satisfactory, teachers dominated the learning. Students were expected to complete the same task with the same guidance and support materials. This resulted in more-able students not being stretched fully and relatively less-able students developing weaker understanding. Questioning was directed at individual volunteers and students were often guided to a correct answer. Students were compliant and became passive.

Teaching assistants work skilfully, often applying specialist skills to enhance the learning of disabled students or those who have special educational needs. They also support students in classes more widely. The school has been improving the quality of marking and assessment and the impact of this can be seen in the work of some teachers. There are many examples of where teachers explain to students how they can improve their work. However, there was little evidence of students then using this guidance to improve their understanding, and so, further developing skills in learning independently. Not all teachers give this valuable guidance, and some marking is irregular. In these books, the standard of presentation is not as high and sometimes goes unchallenged.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and safety are outstanding because students feel entirely safe, they work enthusiastically, supportively and collaboratively. All students have a high moral code and this includes showing respect and caring for each other. It becomes apparent in some lessons that the students' positive attitudes are extended to cultures and countries beyond their immediate experience. Despite narrow corridors with many corners and blind spots, behaviour at lesson changeover is calm and orderly. Students are punctual and help each other get to lessons. As a parent commented, 'St. James' is a happy vibrant school'. Another said of their son, 'He is loving every minute of his time at St. James'. Students are confident in this environment and thrive.

Students show a good understanding of what constitutes different forms of bullying and the impact bullying may have on individuals. They are able to say with confidence that incidents are very rare and that they are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Through the questionnaires, some parents and carers commented that misbehaviour interrupted learning. During the inspection, no lessons were affected by disruptive behaviour, although some teachers had to control exuberant calling out and occasionally had to curtail chatting. Inspectors investigated this aspect further through discussions with students, who confirmed the view of the overwhelming majority of parents and carers that behaviour is typically very good. In the past, the school had a low threshold for the use of exclusion as a sanction. Over the last two years, this policy has changed and the number of exclusions has reduced significantly. Attendance is improving and is now above average with persistent absence reducing.

Leadership and management

The leadership team has raised achievement by improving the quality of teaching through well-targeted and well-planned professional development, and by very effective monitoring of students' progress. Leaders at all levels track students' performance and initiate early interventions if the progress of individuals or of groups, declines. The provision for those students who have underdeveloped literacy skills is good. The use of booster sessions is minimal; the school believing in quality teaching in the classroom. While areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been tackled effectively, the monitoring and evaluation of school-wide improvement relies on less-sophisticated analysis, so information about the impact of school improvements is less reliable. Members of the governing body give their time willingly and their support makes a good contribution to school improvement. They have developed their skills in analysing students' progress data and are becoming better equipped to support improvement through challenge. The school has good capacity to continue to improve. Safeguarding procedures are secure and meet statutory requirements fully.

A distinctive feature of this school is the success it achieves in blending the academic progress of its students with their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students grow to become well-educated, responsible and caring young people. Their emotional development is a key element in securing their academic success. The opportunities they have to work with local and wider communities are outstanding. This adds to their understanding of other cultures and gives them scope to develop their interpersonal and communication skills. There are other excellent opportunities which enrich the good curriculum including residential experiences, enterprise activities and specialist interest clubs. The inspection coincided with a professional musical organisation working with music classes for a day. Students participated enthusiastically in making live music and all played instruments or sang. Students are prepared to tackle discrimination in any form. Care and the promotion of equality of opportunity are central to the school's ethos; no groups underachieve consistently and there are opportunities for all. The numbers of students leaving the school without a planned route into further education, training or employment are very low.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



25 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St James' Catholic High School - A Specialist Humanities College, Cheadle, SK8 6PZ

Thank you for the friendly welcome that you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed working with you and would also like to thank those of you who completed the questionnaire or spoke with us. We took full account of your views and those of school staff, as well as those of your parents and carers who also completed questionnaires.

The highlight of your school is you! We judged your behaviour, and your attitudes to your learning and to each other as outstanding. We believe this comes from your personal values and the impressive way your school blends your academic progress with your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You are leaders in tackling discrimination. You told us you feel very safe in school because of the excellent care you receive.

We have judged your school overall as good. You make good progress and you leave with very good examination results, enabling almost all of you to fulfil your ambitions for the next stage of your lives. We have recognised the improvements to the quality of teaching over recent years and have asked your school to continue with these. In particular, we have asked your teachers to:

- give you more specific guidance on how to improve your work
- provide you with activities that are more closely matched to your needs.

We believe you have a role to play in your school's improvement too.

- We would like some of you to take greater care when presenting your work and to take even more responsibility for your own learning.

We have asked also that your school leaders make better use of the systems that enable them to analyse the effectiveness of all aspects of your school.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Mackenzie
Lead inspector

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