

St John Wall Catholic School - A Specialist Humanities College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103534
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	376925
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2012
Lead inspector	Robert Barbour HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	621
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rose Mason
Headteacher	Andrew Hyatt
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2008
School address	Oxhill Road Handsworth Birmingham B21 8HH
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

James McAtear

Additional inspector

Deloris Reviere

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Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 27 lessons taught by 27 different teachers. Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, with members of the governing body and with four groups of students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at planning documents, school self-evaluation, data concerning student performance and behaviour, governing body minutes, 82 questionnaires submitted by parents and carers and questionnaire responses from students and staff.

Information about the school

St John Wall Catholic School is smaller than the average-sized comprehensive school. Its students come from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high, as is also the proportion of students for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is high. The school meets the current government floor standards which are the government's minimum expectation for attainment and progress.

The school was designated as a humanities specialist college in 2007 and this designation was renewed in 2010. In 2012 the school was awarded the Cultural Diversity Quality Mark at gold level.

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	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school which is permeated by a strong ethos for the welfare and progress of every student. As members of a very harmonious community, students from diverse cultural backgrounds take a full part in the life of the school. The quality of teaching is good. The school is not yet outstanding, however, because there is still some satisfactory teaching and because the quality of leadership provided by subject leaders is not consistently good.
- Students make good progress. Students who enter the school with low skills in English are supported well but the degree to which they have opportunities to develop their speaking and writing skills across subjects varies. Students who are from backgrounds with above average social deprivation make particularly good progress.
- Teaching is good and a significant proportion is outstanding. In the best teaching, teachers plan questions that open a rich seam of dialogue across the class and this fosters students' speaking, thinking and writing skills. In the minority of satisfactory teaching, questions are often very closed in nature with consequent limits on the development of students' speaking, thinking and writing skills. The quality of marking is consistently good.
- Students behave well in school and feel safe. Their attendance has improved considerably over the past year and is now above average. The school has developed effective internal capacity to manage and improve behaviour.
- The headteacher and the senior team have provided high quality leadership that has resulted in significant improvement across the full spectrum of the school's work. Some subject leadership is also of high quality. In some subject areas this is less secure, with subject leaders following agreed practice but with less evident impact. The performance management of staff follows clear systems and is rigorous.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase further the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, and in particular the skills of teachers to plan questions and activities that foster students' skills in speaking, thinking and writing across all subjects.
- Increase the consistency of high quality leadership across all subject areas.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students as a whole enter the school with low attainment. By the time they reach Year 11, their attainment is broadly average and they have made good progress. This progress is faster in the older year groups as students become more mature and have a desire to achieve future ambitions. All the many ethnic groups represented in the school contribute to this progress. In 2011 the progress of the more-able boys was below expectations, but this is not the case for students currently in the school.

Students work together well. A lower ability Year 8 class collaborated on an experiment in science with evident pleasure in their work. A teacher and teaching assistant provided good support; with work closely tailored to students' abilities, but containing challenge, all groups made outstanding progress, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is not their first language.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress. In a Year 7 maths lesson, students each had a solid cube that they could flatten into a net, and this enabled them to gain a good grasp of the concept of surface area. This equipment, the small size of the class and the focused contribution of a teaching assistant alongside the teacher led to students with special educational needs making outstanding progress.

Many students enter the school with weak skills in reading, in some instances because they are newly arrived from overseas. With high quality support they develop their reading skills well, and are successfully encouraged to read for enjoyment by imaginative use of the library. Students are keen to read aloud in class.

Parents overwhelmingly agreed in the questionnaire that their children are making enough progress, and inspectors concurred that students' progress is indeed good.

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Quality of teaching

Teachers have good subject knowledge. This applies also to teaching assistants and enables them to work effectively with groups of students, and at times in teaching parts of the lesson to the whole class. Teachers explained concepts clearly and made the learning objectives of lessons explicit, often with National Curriculum levels. In addition, the quality of both written and informal feedback to students is high so that students have a good understanding of their successes and what they need to do to improve. Good use is also widely made of peer and self-assessment.

In many lessons, teachers clearly identified and displayed key vocabulary and this helped all students, and especially those for whom English is not their first language. The development of wider skills in speaking, thinking and writing is more varied. In a religious studies lesson, Year 10 students displayed very strong interpersonal skills and keen spiritual and moral awareness as they debated, in groups, ethical issues around genetic engineering. The teacher planned high quality questions to stimulate debate. The quality of sharing of perspectives between groups, and the level of discussion across the class, were high. This illustrates the impact of high quality dialogue in developing students' learning. By contrast, in some lessons such opportunities were missed as teachers simply looked for a single 'correct' answer to their questions, even where the issues were far from straightforward.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs benefit from high quality support from teaching assistants and from the use of equipment to help make abstract concepts more concrete.

Reading is supported well for students who have a need to improve their skills. In addition, there is a paired reading scheme which enables senior students to support younger students. Records show significant gains for many students.

Parents and carers overwhelmingly agreed that teaching is good at the school in the questionnaire responses. Students said that they enjoy their learning, and especially when they work on practical activities or in groups. They find too much reliance on textbooks can make learning dull. Inspectors judged teaching to be good, and that the highest quality teaching is engaging and active. In the minority of lessons where teaching is satisfactory there is indeed at times too much reliance on textbooks or work sheets.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students and teachers share a strong sense of community and identity. Students are emphatic that their teachers genuinely care about their welfare and do all that they can to secure their development and their progress. Students are proud of their school and are pleased with the way that good behaviour is positively recognised and fostered. The school has developed good internal capacity through the St Francis Centre to manage and improve behaviour, and this has led to steady improvement over time. In particular, the incidence of fixed-term exclusions has declined sharply

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over a two-year period. Punctuality is good, and attendance has improved strongly so that it is now above average.

Students have a well-developed understanding of keeping safe in and out of school. They have a good understanding of bullying and the different forms that it can take. They express confidence that their teachers deal with the rare situations that arise and indicate that they feel safe in school. Year heads keep good records of behaviour incidents, including bullying. Parents and carers, in their questionnaire responses, expressed strong confidence that their children are safe and that any bullying is dealt with well. They believe that behaviour in the school is good, but a minority note that disruptive incidents have occurred in lessons on occasions. Students say that such ill-discipline is rare and is dealt with promptly, and inspectors noted that school records supported this view.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and his senior team have overseen a significant improvement in the school since it was last inspected in 2008. They have a good understanding of the strengths and development needs of the school. The leadership of teaching is of high quality. The performance of each teacher is closely monitored, and a programme of continual professional development has been effective. Whole-school initiatives have been implemented across all teachers and classes. A good example is the development of marking, which is now consistent and of high quality. On an individual level, a coaching scheme has enabled teachers to have specific needs met. The quality of teaching is monitored at regular intervals, and a steady improvement has been tracked, and the current judgements made by school leaders are very close to the inspection team's assessment. The management of teachers' performance is rigorous and ensures that a clear link is maintained between performance and pay. In a few cases, the targets agreed for teachers are not well matched to whole-school priorities, however.

Some subject leaders are highly effective in their roles. They know how the priorities of their departments link to the whole-school priorities and they are able to drive these priorities through effectively, coaching their colleagues as necessary. In some cases, however, subject leaders follow school policies in monitoring their departments but are not as effective in driving through improvement.

The curriculum is good; it is broad, balanced and provides well for the range of students' abilities, interests and aptitudes. Good links with partner organisations mean that wider options are available in Key Stage 4. Opportunities are taken to apply numeracy and literacy skills across the curriculum, with good examples seen in physical education and religious education. A wide range of extra-curricular activities are available and the take-up of these is good. A programme of cross-curricular days adds depth to the curriculum and is appreciated by students. The school's specialist humanities status contributes materially to the success of these days.

The school's promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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is good. A wide cross-section of students contributes to assemblies and masses, irrespective of their faith. The religious festivals of other faiths are celebrated also. Imaginative and high quality art work adds to the school's environment, both inside the school and outside. The appointment of a lay chaplain has added significant capacity to the further development of the school's caring ethos. Above all, the evident harmony of the range of cultures and faiths represented in the school is creditable.

The governing body is effective in providing strategic leadership to the school. It has successfully targeted new funds in key areas, such as to improve attendance, while managing a reduced budget over time. One committee oversees their safeguarding duty, along with two nominated governors, and this duty is discharged in an exemplary manner.

Leaders and managers promote equality and tackle discrimination very well. The performance of groups is carefully monitored and key actions are taken when one group falls behind. With many small groups, this can occur for largely individual reasons, but it is evident that school leaders take any variation seriously. The school has been particularly successful in the achievement of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals. Their progress is well ahead of national expectations.

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.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
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.



6 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St John Wall Catholic School - A Specialist Humanities College, Birmingham B21 8HH

I should like to thank all of you who spoke with us, or who filled in a questionnaire during the recent inspection of your school.

We have judged your school to be a good school. You told us in our discussions that you believed that the school has a happy, family atmosphere; that your teachers work hard to support you; that you feel safe and that you are making good progress in your studies. We agreed with all these sentiments. We were also impressed with the way that your attendance has improved over the past year, and in the way the number of exclusions has reduced over a two-year period. Most of all, we noted the very strong and united ethos of the school where you get on well with each other, show high standards of behaviour and enjoy your learning.

We have recommended that the school can become even better if teachers plan their lessons and their questioning to make sure that you are more actively involved in extended answers to questions and in talking about your learning. In this way your speaking, thinking and writing skills will improve. We have also suggested that there is greater consistency in the way that subjects are developed in school.

Your headteacher and his senior team have worked effectively to improve the school over the past few years, to your benefit. You can help them by maintaining your hard work, your good attendance and the way you take part so actively in the opportunities that the school presents.

Yours sincerely

Robert Barbour
Her Majesty's Inspector

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