

St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104833
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	377134
Inspection dates	10–11 July 2012
Lead inspector	Allan Torr HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	691
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Dolan
Headteacher	Linda Mousdale
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Mary Liptrot

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 39 lessons, taught by 34 teachers. They held meetings with three groups of students, with staff, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school's data, students' work, documentation regarding the safety and safeguarding of students, and records of how leaders have monitored the school. Inspectors considered the views of 34 parents and carers who returned a questionnaire, 97 students and 10 staff.

Information about the school

This is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It specialises in the visual arts. An increasing and above average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. A higher than average proportion of students start and remain at the school for the duration of their education. The overwhelming majority of students are White British. In 2011 the proportion of students with special educational needs supported at the school action stage was well above the national average. In contrast, the proportion of students with a statement or supported at the school action plus stage was below average. The school has gained a number of awards including Investors in People (silver), Artsmark (gold) and the ICT mark (information and communication technology). It is also designated as a UNESCO school. In 2011, students' attainment met floor standards (the minimum expected by the government) but the progress they made in English and mathematics was below floor standards.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a satisfactory school that is improving well. It is not yet good because the quality of teaching in some lessons remains at best satisfactory.
- In a majority of lessons, students are highly active, spend most of their time completing activities which will move them onto the next level and there is a strong focus on taking ownership for their own learning and working independently. Where teaching is less than good, students complete activities that are too easy and are not challenged enough.
- Students' achievement is rising well. A higher proportion of students are in line to achieve five or more A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics, a higher proportion are reaching the levels expected for their ages and their progress in lessons is quickening. The gap between some groups of students has been wide but these are closing well. There is still some way to go to move all groups of students from satisfactory achievement to good but there are clear signs this has started to happen.
- Students feel safe, protected, and there is evidence that the different types of bullying are rare and have been tackled by staff and senior leaders. Attendance has risen well in the last three years and is now around the national average and the proportion of students missing a significant amount of their education has reduced. Students' behaviour in class and around school is good although there is low-level disruption in some lessons due mainly to teachers' weaker behaviour management skills and weaker teaching.
- Senior leaders, governors and middle level leaders have a shared vision, are ambitious and have been effective in improving the curriculum, the quality of teaching as well as students' achievement and their attendance. The specialist subject has been used well to strengthen the curriculum and students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that teaching in over 85% of lessons is good or better by:
 - ensuring the activities in lessons are well-matched to students' needs and enable them to move quickly onto the next level
 - making effective use of the high-quality teaching which already exists in the school
 - enabling students to work more independently and take ownership for their own learning.
- Raise the level of achievement of all identified groups of students from satisfactory to good or better.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

In some subjects, such as physical education, history, food technology and languages, students make rapid progress and reach above average standards. This is because in the lesson their time is taken up in constant activity, consolidating what they know and moving quickly onto new skills. In physical education, for example, students began by learning how to pass a baton in a relay race and quickly moved on so that by the end of the lesson they were using different passing techniques and developing advanced skills to maximise the speed of baton changes. Students' attainment overall in GCSEs A* to C is high and improving rapidly.

In the past, students' achievement in English and mathematics has been well below average and consequently the proportion of students attaining the important measure of A* to C including English and mathematics has been low. In some lessons in these subjects students made slow or no progress because the work was not challenging enough, the curriculum and activities were neither relevant nor well planned enough to move students quickly onto the next level and because their progress was hindered by disruption in lessons. However, there are strong signs of improvement. Students' progress in both subjects is accelerating so that a greater proportion of students are closer to the expectations for their age. A key factor in the success is targeted interventions which have been particularly effective in English in closing the gaps in students' learning and knowledge.

Most students and parents and carers agree that their children enjoy school, learn a lot, are now making good progress and that adults explain to them how to improve their work. There are differences in the rates of progress and in the standards reached by different groups of students. Those known to be eligible for a free school

meal, for example, particularly in the past, have made slow progress and attained far lower standards than their peers. This gap is closing well, in part because all teachers know who these students are and most teachers know the techniques which are effective in accelerating their progress. There are a few students who are disabled. Expectations are high for this group which means they are successfully targeted to make the same progress as their peers. Some students who have special educational needs make good progress, particularly in improving their reading ages and their attitudes to learning. This is because of highly effective and personalised support from the inclusion team. Some students in this group only make satisfactory progress but the school is working well on ensuring that all students within this group start to make good progress.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers and students agreed that teaching is good. Inspectors judged teaching to be satisfactory but improving well but there is a mixed picture across the school. In some lessons the teaching is outstanding because it ensures that all students are active throughout the lesson, expectations are high and high-quality activities enable students to make ground on what they already know and can do. In one food technology lesson, for example, the teacher's questioning was challenging, made students think creatively, reason, and explain and the activity was based strongly on what would move each student onto the next level of understanding. In the lesson, students took responsibility for extending their own learning. The same was the case in an English lesson in which excellent teaching quickly extended students' prior learning and set high expectations for their responses. Every student was active throughout making high level reflections about relationships within the text, 'An inspector calls'. In a mathematics lesson, students with special educational needs made good progress because the teacher gave each person time to think and explain their reasoning. Students were active throughout, the teacher gave quality individual support and asked questions that made them apply their knowledge.

A key strength in lessons with good or better teaching is the use of targets and National Curriculum levels to motivate students and give very clear feedback about what they need to do to reach the next level. The teaching, however, in some lessons was satisfactory at best. In these lessons the learning was over-directed and the chances to make students responsible for their own learning or to work independently were not taken. Students' progress was slow in these lessons because students of all abilities and prior learning had to complete the same tasks and activities were not well matched to their needs.

Parents and carers and students agreed that lessons across subjects help students develop skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. In some students' work, however, there are examples of low-level worksheets that hinder the development of writing skills. In some lessons, such as French and Spanish, there is a strong focus on grammar, punctuation and the sounding out of words. In one lesson, resources were used very well to tape conversations in Spanish. Learning was good as students filmed themselves asking and answering questions about themselves and conversed fluently. Students were challenged to use different tenses to achieve higher levels and, consequently, improved their use of spoken language.

Teaching across the curriculum is successful in developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Lessons, particularly in art and design, history and personal and social education, help to extend students' understanding. In a history lesson, for example, students challenged stereotypes and thought about the moral perspective around conscientious objectors in the war.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most students and parents and carers felt that behaviour was good in lessons and around the school and that bullying was dealt with well. Inspectors agreed. As one parent/carers in a comment on the questionnaire noted that the school, 'places great emphasis on learning in a caring, supportive, consistent manner. Every pupil is valued and school staff go out of their way to listen to parents'. A very small proportion of parents and carers and a small proportion of students felt lessons were disrupted through poor behaviour. Inspectors observed this sort of behaviour but it was confined to a few lessons where the quality of teaching was weak. Different types of bullying such as extortion, cyber-bullying, racism and homophobia are rare. One of the reasons for this is staff have been trained in how to recognise and tackle different forms of bullying, the school follows up incidents to check there is no reoccurrence and students have been told unequivocally that prejudice-based language is unacceptable.

Students appreciated the visibility and the work of the police officer and of the behaviour and inclusion team of staff who work successfully to ensure all students feel safe. Around school, such as in science and technology laboratories and in using equipment that is potentially dangerous, students act responsibly and safely.

Key to the rise in attainment is the rise in students' attendance, improved leadership and management in English and mathematics and a programme of targeted support and intervention for students. Far fewer students are missing large proportions of their education because of persistent absence and the gap in the attendance of groups of students is closing. Students, for example, who are known to be eligible for free school meals, girls and students with special educational needs had weaker attendance in 2011 than their peers but have increased their attendance strongly in 2012. Key to the success is the excellent leadership helped considerably by strong tracking and monitoring of patterns in absence. All staff have a responsibility to identify and improve attendance.

Leadership and management

Staff who completed the questionnaire agreed they are proud to be members of staff, leaders do all they can to improve teaching and provide professional training and development, and they know what the school is trying to achieve. As one commented, 'The school is going in the right direction and improving every week, month, year'. Since the previous inspection attendance and students' achievement have improved and the school's data show teaching is improving well. The specialism in visual arts has been used successfully to improve the quality of teaching. It has

led, for example, on the highly successful system to encourage students to self-review and self-evaluate their work. Gaps between different groups of students, although there is some way to go, are closing. There is a good focus on equality and on diversity. Policies and procedures are inclusive of all forms of diversity including race, religion and faith, sexuality, gender identity, disability and gender. The school works hard to ensure all students and staff are respected and valued.

The inclusion team works successfully to ensure those in circumstances that make them more vulnerable, such as those being looked after by the local authority, are protected and are able to succeed. Procedures to ensure staff and students are protected and safeguarded are good. Vetting arrangements of staff and visitors are robust and meet requirements as do safety procedures and risk assessments. Governors take their statutory responsibilities seriously and are well-informed, involved in supporting senior leaders and holding them to account and are highly committed. They have taken difficult decisions to ensure students benefit and have a good oversight and knowledge of the school.

The curriculum has been improved and enhanced in the last few years. The mathematics courses that students follow, for example, have been restructured which has helped more students to reach their potential. Additional lessons and interventions have been brought in to plug the gaps in students' literacy and numeracy skills. Extra-curricular activities, trips and visits and links with the community enhance the taught curriculum. The graphics department, for example, worked successfully with the local community to improve a local park area and give students a real-life project. The curriculum has a strong impact on students' good spiritual, moral and cultural development. Students have time to reflect and have a strong understanding of other cultures, faiths, countries and moral perspectives.

The school's self-evaluation is honest and accurate. The school improvement plans are good quality because they are prioritised and the success criteria are ambitious and easy to monitor and measure. Systems to monitor the quality of the school are robust, detailed and thorough. A good feature is the significant involvement of high-quality middle leaders in monitoring their own departments and improving students' achievement. The headteacher and senior leaders have an ambitious vision for the school and for its students and have taken difficult decisions to improve the quality of education. Although there has been some cross-department work to improve the quality of teaching there is a way to go to make better use of stronger teachers to strengthen the teaching of others.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	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.



12 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School, St Helens

I am writing on behalf of colleagues in the inspection team to express our gratitude to those of you who completed the Ofsted questionnaire, those who met with us in groups and around school, and to those we observed in lessons. This letter is a very brief précis of our findings.

Your school is satisfactory and improving strongly. The large majority of you said you learn a lot in lessons, teaching is good and the staff help you to do as well as you can. In the past, standards in English and mathematics have been well below the national average but there are signs that standards in both subjects are improving strongly. We judged your achievement to be satisfactory and took into account the fact that you attain above average standards and make at least good progress in history, languages, design and technology, and in your GCSEs overall. Some groups of students, particularly in the past, attain less well than others so we have asked the school to close any gaps in the achievement of groups of students even further.

The inspection team judged the overall quality of teaching to be satisfactory but improving well so that teaching in a majority of lessons is good. We have asked the school to improve so that at least 85% of teaching is at least good. To do this we have asked the staff to think about how you could work with greater independence in lessons. We have also asked that activities that you work on in lessons are better matched to your abilities so that by completing them you are quickly able to move onto the next level. Some teachers already do these things and show teaching that is outstanding so we have asked leaders to use these teachers more to help the overall quality of lessons to improve.

Your attendance has improved over the last few years and is now around the national average. Some of you told us that lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour and calling out. We have told your headteacher who said she would act on this immediately. We judged your behaviour to be good in lessons and around school because most of you said behaviour was good, bullying was rare and you feel safe.

I wish you the greatest success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

Her Majesty's Inspector

