

John F Kennedy Catholic School

Hollybush Lane, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 2PH

Inspection dates

18–19 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well and gain good results, particularly in mathematics and religious studies.
- Teaching is typically good and some is outstanding. Most teachers use their skills and subject knowledge very well, ask perceptive questions to check students' understanding and adapt lessons as appropriate to enable them to progress further.
- The sixth form is good. It offers a good range of academic and other subjects that meet students' needs. Students remain for the duration of their courses and gain good examination results.
- Teachers and students enjoy good relationships which create a very positive climate for learning.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Students say bullying is rare, that they get on well together and that they feel safe at school.
- The newly appointed headteacher has reorganised the leadership team and concentrated its work effectively on improving teaching and learning.
- The governing body works effectively with the school and parent communities and offers leaders appropriate levels of challenge and support.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally teaching is not strong enough to ensure the learning and achievement of more able students is consistently outstanding.
- Data is not always used systematically enough to identify the scope to challenge students appropriately and ensure they make the best possible progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, of which nine were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of short visits around the school.
- Meetings were held with three groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, school staff, including middle and senior leaders and inspectors held telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and representatives from the partnership of schools and the local colleges, of which the school is a member.
- Inspectors analysed the 134 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), a letter from a parent and the 73 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- They observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including those relating to the monitoring of teaching, the management of teachers' performance, minutes of governors' meetings, case studies relating to support for vulnerable students, policies and records relating to attendance, behaviour, safety, bullying, and safeguarding.

Inspection team

James Coyle, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Rosemary Barnfield	Additional Inspector
Mehar Brar	Additional Inspector
Jennifer Bax	Additional Inspector
Paul Bartlett	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average voluntary aided comprehensive school which serves the Catholic communities of the surrounding suburbs of Hemel Hempstead and neighbouring counties to Hertfordshire.
- The great majority of students are of White British, Irish or other White heritage, with very few speaking English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported by school action is above average, whilst the proportion of those supported by school action plus or who are disabled or with a statement of special educational needs are well below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average.
- The school has specialisms in technology and languages and has the Healthy Schools and Sports mark awards.
- The school is a member of the West Dacorum Schools Consortium, working in partnership with Oaklands and West Hertfordshire Colleges.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2013 improve the quality of teaching so that it:
 - offers greater challenge to the most able students
 - consistently matches the outstanding practice already evident in the school
 - increases the numbers of students making three and four levels of progress throughout all key stages.
- Ensure leaders and managers make effective and systematic use of data in order to improve the level of challenge to students and ensure they all make the best possible progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with higher starting points and attainment levels than those found nationally. The majority go on to make progress that compares favourably with national figures. At the end of their time at the school they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training and employment. However, achievement is not outstanding because students whose starting points are high do not consistently make the rapid and sustained progress that would enable them to attain exceptionally high results.
- The percentage of students achieving five A* to C passes at GCSE including English and mathematics was above the national average in 2012.
- Those students who require extra help or who have a statement of special educational needs make good progress due to the impact of specific interventions such as reading workshops and daily English and mathematics clubs. Students with learning or other difficulties are identified as soon as they enter the school. The school ensures they go on to achieve well because it carefully monitors their subsequent progress, ensures they take an appropriate blend of subjects and provides them with high quality teaching and other support.
- The very small number of students eligible for free school meals and in receipt of the pupil premium make satisfactory progress. However, for some of them progress is not yet rapid and sustained.
- Reading standards generally exceed the expected levels. The school's reading club and 'Reading Challenge' initiative are helping encourage more students to read widely and for pleasure and to develop their literacy skills. However, support for reading is not embedded systematically in all subjects.
- Students' skills in writing, communication and mathematics are good and were also evident across the many subjects observed during the inspection. In a Year 12 art class, for example, students took part in a high level discussion on art history reflecting on a recent gallery visit. Their observations revealed how much they had gained in terms of developed imagination and creativity.
- Students work well with each other, communicating effectively when working in pairs and when reporting back to the class.
- Learning and progress in the sixth form are good, both in the school itself and when students are taught on other sites. The range of academic courses and enrichment activities attract and maintain good numbers. Attainment on entry is above national averages and is sustained, with the majority of students going on to obtain good results in public examinations.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in most subjects is mainly good and in some cases outstanding. A good climate for learning has been established in all classes. However not all teaching is at the level of the very best and does not consistently ensure all students make rapid and sustained progress.
- The best teaching was exemplified by teachers' high order questioning, good subject knowledge

and regular checks for students involvement and understanding during the lesson.

- In an outstanding Year 7 mathematics lesson, for example, where students were engaged in exercises to calculate the surface area of different objects, the teacher moved around the class very effectively to check on how well students understood the problems. She refined her explanation of the task for those in difficulty, checked for understanding and encouraged students to use their whiteboards to show their answers.
- In other lessons, planning by teachers and teaching assistants whilst generally good enough to ensure students progress, does not always offer enough challenge to the more able.
- Most students know how to improve their work. For example, in a Year 8 drama class, where students were preparing to undertake a short performance, they carried out a self assessment exercise using criteria that listed required skills and techniques to judge their own performance, consider each others efforts and offer each other feedback for improvement.
- Parent surveys indicate that they consider teaching to be good.
- The school has provided literacy training to help teaching assistants improve the literacy skills and self confidence of students who are in receipt of free school meals and the pupil premium. This initiative is at an early stage, however, and it is too soon for its impact to be assessed.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and promotes good progress. The range of largely academic subjects offered meets the needs of the students and is enhanced by a wide range of additional activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Young Enterprise scheme. Notable features are teachers' good subject knowledge and excellent relationships which allow for informed debate to take place in class. The strong pastoral system offers good guidance and support and prepares the majority of students well for higher education.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students enjoy school and attendance is high. Students arrive promptly to school and to their lessons and have very positive attitudes to their learning. Participation in lessons is good and students treat each other and staff with respect.
- Permanent and fixed term exclusions are very rare occurrences at the school.
- Parents and carers and staff surveys and inspectors' discussions with students confirm that behaviour is good and the school is a safe place for learning.
- Students are made aware of how to stay safe through the 'Student Voice' scheme and through the school's effective personal, social and health education programme.
- Students report there are virtually no instances of bullying, either in the form of physical, homophobic or e-bullying and are well informed through Student Voice and an effective personal, social and health education programme; when and if they occur the school deals with such incidents effectively.

The leadership and management are good

- The newly appointed headteacher is given good support by the newly formed senior team and

governing body, who share his ambition for students' achievement and continued improvement.

- Since the last inspection the leadership team has introduced many improvements. These include improving the consistency of written feedback students receive so they know how they can improve further.
- The introduction of new arrangements for staff training and professional development and the sharing of good teaching practice already established in the school have led to better outcomes for many students, most notably in the Sixth Form.
- Variations in results for different groups of students in different subjects, particularly in English and mathematics or by students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, have been addressed and measures taken to close the gaps.
- Leaders monitor pupil achievement regularly and undertake frequent analyses of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. However, these analyses are not systematic enough to ensure self-evaluation is as well informed as it needs to be or to identify the scope to improve students' progress and achievement, particularly in the case of the more able.
- The school strongly supports students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development through its positive ethos, cohesive community and thoughtful teaching, which help students develop strong social skills. They are encouraged to be reflective about their responsibilities and to take part in a number of charity schemes. They regularly discuss 'social justice' themes and take part in debates which extend their thinking beyond their own lives and confront issues affecting mankind. They are given opportunities to develop leadership skills, such as when acting as 'volunteers' or when accompanying pilgrimages, which in turn exposes them to different countries and cultures.
- Teaching programmes meet the needs of the majority of students effectively and reflect the school's determination to support all its students equally and ensure they have an opportunity to succeed. Alternative provision for Key Stage 4 through the 'West Dacorum Consortium of Schools' includes courses in vehicle technology, construction, hairdressing and barbering. This is intended to broaden the range of courses available so that they better suit students' learning styles and abilities.
- The dual specialisms of technology and languages has upgraded information communication systems allowing students, parents and teachers to have constant access to student information and online learning through the Learning Platform. The school is also developing links with other schools so that it can offer additional language programmes and qualifications as necessary.
- The developing sixth form provides students with good quality information, advice and guidance on careers and further education as well as opportunities to lead as prefects. New systems to track and monitor students' progress have provided a more personalised approach to supporting students, which they value.
- Parent View returns and the school's own parent and carer surveys are overwhelmingly positive about the school.
- Statutory safeguarding requirements are met, including off site checks on attendance at alternative provision.
- The local authority gives effective support, for example by advising the governors on the recent headteacher appointment, staff development and the evaluation of teachers' performance.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- has been reorganised to improve governors' ability to challenge the school's performance, to undertake effective oversight of the headteacher's own performance and to improve their skills in observing teaching and learning in the classroom.
- has ensured the school has adopted the Teachers Standards and that its systems for managing teachers' performance relate pay to performance appropriately, resulting in improved teaching and students' achievement.
- ensures the efficient management of financial resources, including well targeted pupil premium funding, which was used to train teaching assistants in literacy and provide life coaching for Year 7 students.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117557
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	395653

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1115
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Heather Houston
Headteacher	Paul Neves
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2009
Telephone number	01442 266150
Fax number	01442 250014
Email address	admin@jfk.herts.sch.uk

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