

Holy Family Catholic High School

Virgins Lane, Thornton, Liverpool, Merseyside, L23 4UL

Inspection dates

31 October–1 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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, particularly in Key Stages 4 and 5. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stages in their lives.
- The sixth form is good.
- Teaching is good, especially in Key Stages 4 and 5. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. They have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully to meet the needs of most students so that they make good progress.
- This is a caring, supportive school. It makes a good contribution to the welfare of its students. As a result, students enjoy coming to school and say that the school helps them to keep safe.
- The new headteacher is building well on a tradition of good leadership. He has quickly inspired the school to be ambitious for further improvement. As a consequence, members of the school community are very clear about what they need to do to achieve this.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3, lacks challenge and does not give students enough opportunity to learn independently.
- Marking does not always help students to improve their work.
- In the sixth form, achievement in mathematics is outstanding. It is good in most other subjects but weaker in a few such as chemistry and biology.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons, of which two were joint observations with members of the leadership team.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of students and a representative of the local authority. An inspector also observed some students reading.
- Inspectors took account of 19 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and a letter sent to the inspection team by a parent during the inspection.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and considered a range of information provided by the school regarding, for example, students' achievement, minutes of governing body meetings, records relating to attendance and behaviour, the school's self-evaluation of its work, and information on the setting of targets for teachers.

Inspection team

Joan Bonenfant, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Woodhouse

Additional Inspector

Pamela Hemphill

Additional Inspector

Zahid Aziz

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Holy Family Catholic High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is greater than the national average and increasing. The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, children of parents serving in the armed forces and for students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is lower than the national average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is lower than that found nationally.
- A small number of students attend work-related training away from school with some at a local college of further education.
- The school's recent GCSE examination results met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expected for students' attainment and progress.
- The former headteacher retired in July 2012, after many years' service to the school, as did the former Chair of the Governing Body. This has resulted in some changes at leadership level. The current headteacher is acting, as is the current deputy, although they have both worked at the school for a number of years. The new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in September 2012.
- A Section 48 inspection of the school took place at the same time as this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students in the sixth form achieve as well in all subjects as they do in mathematics by:
 - making regular checks on their progress
 - identifying when they are falling behind
 - providing extra help if needed.
- Improve further the rate at which all students make progress by:
 - ensuring that teaching in Key Stage 3 is at least as effective as it is in the rest of the school
 - increasing the level of challenge in lessons and providing students with more opportunities to work independently of the teacher
 - making sure that all marking gives clear guidance to students on how to improve their work and that teachers check that students follow this advice.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Achievement has improved since the previous inspection. In 2011, students taking GCSE examinations and other qualifications had made significantly better progress than other students nationally in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- In 2012, the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics improved further. However, students made slightly weaker progress in English. The school has tackled this by giving students more time to concentrate on English.
- Detailed information presented by the school provided firm evidence to show that students make good progress in most subjects, including English and mathematics. In lessons observed during the inspection, students' achievement was often good and, in some instances, outstanding.
- All groups of students make progress that is at least as good as other students nationally. The school has introduced one-to-one tuition and provided extra staffing to help students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. As a result, these students do well across many subjects and their scores in English and mathematics are better than the national average for this group of students. In the past, some higher-ability boys made weaker progress than other students. The school took action and in 2012 this group of students made much better progress.
- Students who enter the school with weak literacy skills get extra support. This has improved their reading and writing.
- Some students study courses at the local college of further education and a small number follow work-related training at places away from school. The school monitors the progress of these students carefully and they achieve well, with most students going on to further study or employment when they leave school.
- In the sixth form, students' achievement has improved over time and is now good in the majority of subjects. In a few subjects their progress is not checked regularly so that staff can identify those who are falling behind and put in extra help if needed. Students who study work-related courses also achieve well.
- Students are well-supported and well-taught in the sixth form. As a result, a high proportion of students complete courses successfully.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most teaching is good and there are pockets of outstanding practice. Teachers have high expectations and good subject knowledge. Good teaching over time has been a key factor in improving students' achievement.
- Teachers plan lessons that build well on students' knowledge. Teachers check students' progress regularly, providing extra help to those who are falling behind. This helps students to make good progress. Teaching assistants are used well to support students.
- Teachers are good role models for their students. Students respect their teachers. As a result, relationships are friendly and purposeful, and this supports students' learning effectively.
- Teachers ask probing questions that extend students' understanding. Students respond well and listen attentively to their teachers and each other. For example, in one outstanding Year 11 Spanish lesson, the teacher's questions made students think carefully how to express themselves accurately in the foreign language. The lesson was brisk, dynamic and intellectually demanding. Students had lots of opportunity to practise their speaking and listening skills and, as a result, they made excellent progress.
- Teachers set challenging targets and students are keen to do well. The school's policy to enter some students early for GCSE examinations has sometimes been helpful in motivating them to meet or exceed their targets. However, the school does not enter higher-ability students for early entry in mathematics because it is felt that this does not prepare them well to continue with the subject at A-level. The school is ambitious and wants to encourage these students to be

'mathematicians for life'.

- In the best lessons, teachers provide opportunities for students to work independently and think for themselves. This is not always the case, and some lessons are too dominated by the teacher, which does not always help students to practise what they have learned. Occasionally, lessons lack imagination and challenge, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Marking is of variable quality. Teachers do not always give students precise guidance on how to improve their work. Even when marking is thorough, teachers do not routinely check to see whether students are acting on advice given previously. As a result, marking does not always help students to produce work of a higher standard.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Students say that behaviour is good and the majority of parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire, 'Parent View' agree with this point of view. Students are friendly, polite and helpful. They work well together and show enthusiasm for learning.
- The school has effective policies to manage poor behaviour. If students are experiencing problems in their lives the school provides immense support so that they can still achieve well. Students say that bullying sometimes happens, but the school steps in to sort it out.
- Exclusion rates for all groups are very low and this supports the view that behaviour over time is good. Attendance was low in the past but the school has taken effective action and attendance has improved dramatically. Attendance is now slightly above the national average.
- Students for the most part arrive on time to school. They are occasionally late to lessons because they have to move around to different classrooms, which are sometimes a considerable distance apart.
- Students say that they feel safe in school and this was echoed by a majority of parents who responded to 'Parent View'. Students say that they know that they can talk to a member of staff if they have a problem and that they will get help to sort it out.
- Students say that the use of racist or homophobic language is extremely rare. If it does occur, students are confident that this will be challenged and dealt with successfully by staff. The school actively encourages all students to express their individuality and to appreciate that people are different.
- The school makes sure that students are aware of how to keep themselves safe both inside and outside of school. For example, the school works in partnership with Merseyside Police to restore bicycles which students can then purchase, only on condition that they have successfully completed their Cycling Proficiency test.

The leadership and management are good

- The school has improved well since the previous inspection. This shows that leadership and management have been effective over time at driving the school forward purposefully. Parents express confidence in the leadership of the school and this is echoed by staff and students.
- The new headteacher, well-supported by other senior leaders, has rapidly established an ambitious programme for the future development of the school. He has inspired all members of the school community and there is a tangible commitment to driving further improvement.
- The school has been successful in tackling poor performance. Teachers know that they are held to account for students' progress. Governors and senior leaders use information on students' progress and also on the quality of teaching to decide whether teachers should be paid more.
- The school has a detailed and appropriate training programme to improve the overall quality of teaching. If a teacher's lessons are not consistently good enough they are directed to extra training to attend to their needs so that they can improve. The school has strong and established links with other local schools to share good practice. This brings in new ideas.

- School self-evaluation is highly accurate and the school has a very clear idea of its strengths and weaknesses. This is because leaders at all levels regularly check on students' progress, look at students' books and visit classrooms. As a result, the school's development plan focuses sharply on the correct priorities.
- Across the school students can choose from a wide range of interesting subjects. The school takes a very flexible approach and makes sure that students study courses that are carefully tailored to their needs and abilities, preparing them well for their future. As a result, the number of students who do not go on to further education, training or employment is very low.
- The school makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, a recent visit to the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool was used in an inspirational way to enrich a Year 7 music lesson about 'The Blues'. Charitable work and assemblies help students to have empathy for people worse off than themselves, but students do not get enough opportunity to mix with young people of their own age from other cultures.
- There is a wide range of after-school activities and the school takes steps to make sure all students can take part, whatever their financial circumstances. The school involves and values all its students equally. Students are taught to challenge racism and discrimination. As one student commented: 'We don't bat an eyelid if people are different'.
- Procedures for safeguarding meet requirements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body brings a wealth of experience both in education and the wider world to support the school. Governors have a clear idea of the quality of teaching and they are becoming increasingly confident in challenging the school to improve further. The recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body is a former secondary headteacher. This has proved particularly helpful to the acting headteacher, who is new to the post, as the school receives only 'light touch' support from the local authority. Governors took robust action to remove a large budgetary deficit and the school is now solvent. Funds available for the pupil premium have been spent wisely on additional staffing so that students have been able to benefit from intensive support. This has led directly to these students making good progress.

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	104692
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	402958

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	792
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr G Van Cauwelaert
Headteacher	Mr M Symes
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2008
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