

St John's Catholic School

Rochester, Road, Gravesend, DA12 2JW

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Despite some improvements in results reached in national tests since the previous inspection, not enough students gain five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics.
- Although improving, the proportion of students making or exceeding the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics is not high enough.
- Recent efforts to improve teaching have not succeeded in raising its overall quality since the previous inspection consistently enough. Students' learning across the school in Years 7 to 11 is, therefore, not consistently good as a minority of lessons lack challenge and teachers' explanations and discussions last too long.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, supported by senior staff, has made some improvements to teaching, such as the way in which teachers use information on pupils' progress to identify and remedy underperformance.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress because they are well taught and are well prepared for their next stage of education, training or work.
- Students typically behave well. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development builds their self-confidence and self-esteem. Students enjoy supportive relationships with their teachers and with one another.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors spent over 20 hours observing 47 lessons taught by 44 teachers, of which six were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at students' books and information on students' progress.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and school staff. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- There were 42 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 45 responses to the staff questionnaires which were analysed during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents including the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement, safeguarding and health and safety documentation, minutes of governors' meetings and anonymised information on teachers' performance and pay.

Inspection team

Paul Metcalf, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Jennifer Bray	Additional inspector
Roger Garrett	Additional inspector
Valerie Houldey	Additional inspector
Philip Storey	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St John's Catholic School is a large voluntary aided mixed Catholic school for students aged 11 to 18. Approximately three quarters of the students are White British with significant numbers of Pakistani, Indian and African students. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is well above national average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for specific groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals) is above the national average. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average. The proportion of students with less severe special educational needs is below the national average.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A very small number of Years 10 and 11 students are supported on alternative programmes at off-site vocational centres.
- The school gained specialist status for the visual arts in September 2007 and was re-designated in July 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the proportion of students who make rapid progress in English and mathematics in Years 7 to 11 by ensuring that teaching challenges students more, especially those who are capable of completing harder work.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in Years 7 to 11 by:
 - cutting down on the time that students listen to teachers talk in lessons and giving students more time to complete their work and learn on their own
 - providing a variety of activities that are more rigorous, and challenging in extending students' learning
 - ensuring that lessons and activities are better matched to students' previous learning and cater more effectively for the spread of ability in the class
 - bringing greater consistency to the quality of teachers' marking and ensuring that students are given the chance to reflect and act upon teachers' comments.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because not enough students gain five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. The proportion of students making expected, and better than expected, progress in English and mathematics is not high enough. Progress has been slower than is typical nationally, but it is not inadequate as it is improving. The school's assessments indicate that the current Year 11 are on track to reach closer to average standards by the end of the year, as an increasing proportion are closer to making expected progress.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and improving. Despite entering the sixth form with below average levels of skill, they make good progress as a result of the greater focus on spotting any underperformance so that individual students have specific help quickly to improve their learning.
- Detailed school records, as well as evidence from lessons, books and discussions with students confirm that disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar, and sometimes better, progress than other students because of the extra help they receive. Students who speak English as an additional language and those of minority ethnic heritage make similar progress to their peers.
- The attainment and progress of students who are supported by the pupil premium funding are improving as a result it being used effectively for staff costs, counselling support and one-to-one tuition. The funding has been successful in engaging students, supporting literacy and ensuring that the gap between these students and all students in the school is closing as measured by their average points scores for GCSEs.
- The development of literacy is comparatively strong as the school quickly identifies students who need additional help with their literacy skills when they join the school. Such students are supported effectively. The development of numeracy across different subjects is a weaker aspect of provision.
- The very small number of students following courses at off-site vocational centres achieve well. Their attendance and progress are monitored closely by the school.
- The school enters students early for GCSE examinations, but any student not achieving their target grade is re-entered so this does not have any adverse effect on their potential grades.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement as inconsistencies in its overall quality mean that it is not yet consistently good. Teaching is more effective in the sixth form, where a greater variety of teaching methods help students to learn more effectively.
- In some lessons, the work does not take sufficient account of students' previous understanding or level of achievement. Not enough teaching takes account of the spread of ability in the class to challenge students' learning effectively. While most teachers mark students' books regularly and give advice on how to improve, this is not consistent. Opportunities to reflect and act upon teachers' comments were less evident from students' past work.
- Despite these weaknesses, the quality of teaching is starting to be more effective and occasionally students benefit from some outstanding teaching. In the most successful lessons, teachers have high expectations of what their students can achieve. They regularly question students to judge whether the work has been understood so that the class can move on. Teachers' knowledge of their subject and examination requirements is usually strong. Teaching assistants are used well to support the learning of individual students in the class.

- Although teachers often plan interesting activities for students to follow, too often teachers talk for long periods of the lesson, so that students are too passive and not as involved as they might be in their work.
- Teaching in humanities and the development of students' social and cultural development is a strength within day-to-day teaching. Students benefit from a wide range of stimulating activities that motivate them to learn. For example, in an outstanding religious education lesson, students sensitively discussed then debated issues concerning sex and marriage. Opportunities to develop students' moral and social understanding as well as using their literacy skills to record their opinions were encouraged by the teacher whose relationships, knowledge and very clear and short explanations contributed to students' outstanding learning and progress.
- Teaching in the sixth form is typically good over time. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and lessons are well planned and structured. For example in a Year 12 physics lesson, students worked collaboratively on a set of problems with minimal input from the teacher so that they developed a greater sense of independence in their learning. This led to students discussing more complex scenarios before sharing their findings with the rest of the class.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good overtime and students say it is sometimes outstanding. On occasions, in day-to-day activities, students' concentration diminishes when teachers talk too much. Students are courteous, polite and friendly. They enjoy working together and are keen to learn. Relationships between students and staff are supportive and harmonious, reflecting the school's strong ethos and the promotion of equality of opportunity. Students say that they value the efforts of the school to make them tolerant of people who are different.
- Students' attendance is above the national average and pockets of persistent absenteeism are being reduced by the concerted action of the school and other agencies with families in the community. Punctuality is good. The school operates a 'zero tolerance' policy towards unacceptable behaviour which is understood by students and contributes to their good behaviour. Permanent exclusions are rare.
- Students say that bullying of any form is very unusual and that, when it occurs, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students say that they feel very safe in school. They can explain what constitute potentially unsafe situations and how to avoid them. They are knowledgeable about the threats posed by internet use.
- Students' mature attitudes, good behaviour and respect for others are testament to the school's strong and successful focus on developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The very large majority of parents and carers who expressed their views through Parent View agreed that students were well behaved and that their child was happy and safe in the school.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because students' achievement at the end of Year 11 is not good enough and teaching has not improved sufficiently since the previous inspection.
- Senior leaders and managers have recently stepped up the rigour with which they check upon the work of the school. As a result, students' achievement is improving and there has been an increase in the amount of more effective teaching. These recent changes for the better confirm the school's capacity to continue to improve.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body have an accurate view of the

school's overall performance and the school's strengths and weaknesses, but plans for improvement lack focus and it is not easy to identify which priorities are the most important.

- Leaders and managers have raised expectations for staff. This is reflected in targets to improve staff performance which are more challenging and are now based far more closely on improving students' progress and achievement. The link between teachers' performance and levels of pay and promotion is starting to aid improvement as staff training is more closely matched to their needs.
- The school works closely with parents and carers. It provides effective support for those families facing challenging circumstances. Although there was a very low response to the online questionnaire, large numbers of parents and carers attend parents' evenings and communications with home use a variety of different approaches to make parents and carers feel more involved.
- The range of subjects offered meets students' needs in most respects. It is broad and offers an appropriate range of courses, including GCSEs, BTECs and non-accredited courses, for students' varying needs and abilities. The curriculum is accessible, relevant and appropriate to all so that the proportion of students who leave school entering further education, training or employment is very high.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and well supported by assemblies and tutor time. Students told inspectors that those from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together and students show respect for beliefs different to their own. The school promotes understanding of different cultures through international partnerships and ensures that all groups are fully included. Discrimination of any sort is not tolerated by staff or students.
- The local authority has provided support to the school in identifying and helping to remedy weaknesses as well as supporting teaching and the work of the English department.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements and checks on staff appointments and health and safety are carried out conscientiously.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors fulfil their statutory duties. They are ambitious to help the school, but recognise that there is still much more to be done to help the school to improve to good or better levels of performance. They are aware of the schools' strengths and weaknesses, but have had mixed success in challenging the school to improve more quickly. They are involved in decisions on salary progression and its link to students' performance. Training has ensured that governors are aware of how the pupil premium funding is used and targeted to support and improve achievement for students entitled to benefit from the funding.

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	118933
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	405826

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,088
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nora Naughton
Headteacher	John Stanley
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 November 2010
Telephone number	01474 563 742
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