

St James' Catholic High School

Great Strand, London, NW9 5PE

Inspection dates 27–28 February 2013.

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a thriving and well led school. The drive, passion and commitment of the headteacher are at the heart of its success.
- The school has made significant improvements since the last inspection. Student achievements have continued to rise because of the high expectations and shared ambitions that school leaders and managers have for the school. Leadership, including governance, is good and improving.
- This is an extremely welcoming place. Students' behaviour is excellent, as shown in the high levels of concentration in lessons and in the way students take responsibility for their own learning. They are polite, friendly and helpful. They show respect for staff, visitors and each other. Their attendance is high and exclusions are low.
- The school has excellent links with its local and wider community.
- Teaching is good and improving. Students are taught well by dedicated teachers who are committed to supporting their learning. As a result, they achieve well and leave with good examination results.
- Teaching continues to improve. Newly qualified and more experienced staff gain from high quality feedback about their work, valuable training and development opportunities, and very clear advice about how to improve their teaching further.
- Students eligible for additional (pupil premium) funding get similar results to other students.
- There are many opportunities for students to attend clubs and extra classes in addition to lessons during the day.
- The sixth form is good. Students are well taught and are making good progress from their starting points to achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. In some lessons, work is not pitched at the right level for everyone in the class. More able students in particular are not pushed hard enough in some lessons.
- All leaders must raise their expectations further and strive for greater consistency as they work to support students secure better than expected progress. Results in some subjects, notably science, are not strong enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 41 lessons, of which 20 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, they made a number of shorter visits to year assemblies and tutorial sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the school leadership and management and groups of staff.
- Members of the inspection team held meetings with three groups of students representing all age groups in the school. Discussions also took place with students informally.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and other members.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including the school's own evaluation of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan and statistical information about students' achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- There were 181 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 86 responses to the staff questionnaires. Additional comments were received from parents and carers.

Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jamie Clarke	Additional Inspector
Jo Davey	Additional Inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional Inspector
Sandra Teacher	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St James' Catholic High School is a larger-than-average-sized 11 to 19 mixed comprehensive school. There are more boys than girls in the school.
- The school has specialisms in science and sport and is a Fairtrade School.
- Almost two thirds of the students are from White British, Irish or other White or mixed White background. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is well above the national average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is in line with the national average. This funding is provided by the government to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are in the care of the local authority and children of service families.
- Around 5% of the students are disabled or have special educational needs. The proportion of students supported by school action is well below average, but the proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with national averages.
- All provision for students on alternative programmes is arranged by the school.
- The school is a lead organisation for 'Challenge the Gap' and shares best practices that support groups to achieve better in schools within the National Challenge partnership.
- The school exceeds current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and raise students' attainment so students achieve better GCSE grades which are consistently and significantly above the national average in all subjects by ensuring that:
 - all teachers make even better use of information about students' progress to match tasks more closely to the needs of every student in the class, especially the high attainers
 - students act on the feedback given in all subjects and are able to demonstrate that they have understood the steps required to secure the improvements needed and are seen to act upon them.
- Improve leadership and management to consistently outstanding levels so that all teams apply the best practice seen on inspection to raise teachers' expectations of students and ensure students make consistently rapid progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with attainment that is generally better than national averages. Performance indicators for the period of 2010 to 2012 show that, by the end of Year 11, attainment is above the national averages and that the gap is growing with an increasing proportion of students achieving the higher A* to A grades.
- Examination results in the key measure of five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics have improved significantly over the past few years. Detailed information held by the school indicates that it is on track to maintain and continue the improvement in results this year and the upward trend is set to continue.
- Students achieve very well in English, often making better than expected progress. Much has been done to strengthen the teaching in mathematics. This work has been very successful and results are improving with all students securing the outcomes expected of them and many now achieving even better than this.
- Leaders have a rigorous approach to raising achievement and, whilst GCSE results do not show students making equally good progress in all subjects, the current assessment shows that performance in other subjects is catching up. Achievement in science is improving, but it is still not strong enough.
- Some students are entered early for GCSE examinations, but only when they are deemed to be ready. If they do not achieve their expected grades they are given further opportunities to achieve their goals.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are making better than expected progress because the school supports their needs very effectively; for example, through the alternative provision offered and the extensive targeted support provided by classroom teachers and support staff. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language also achieve well.
- All groups of students who are eligible for pupil premium funding make good progress and achieve well in English and mathematics. Average point scores at GCSE show that the gap in achievement between these students and their peers is smaller than the national gap and is reducing year on year. Funding is used in a variety of ways to support students. The extra monies have been used wisely to provide a range of support to help these individuals to achieve well and participate fully in the learning opportunities made available to them. The school's work is externally recognised as an example of best practice.
- Students read and write well. They are articulate and can express themselves confidently.
- Achievement in the sixth form has improved and students progress well in many of their A-level and vocational courses. The progress of sixth form students is carefully monitored and support is quickly and effectively put in place for anyone who is under achieving. Students are making good progress from their starting points this year.

The quality of teaching is good

- There has been a relentless focus on raising the quality of teaching in the school. The result is that teaching has significantly improved, is typically good, and sometimes outstanding.
- Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and plan lessons well so that learning moves at a good pace. They have high expectations of their students' work and behaviour and encourage the students to work in pairs or small groups. As a result, relationships are good and promote very effective learning. For example, in a drama lesson, students worked on a piece exploring the expression of emotions. They were actively engaged because they recognised that their teacher was committed to supporting them achieve their best.
- In a small minority of lessons improvements are still required. In these lessons teachers do not

make enough use of available information on students' learning to match their teaching to the needs of all students in the class. This is particularly the case when the teacher does not plan carefully enough to ensure that the most able students can move ahead more quickly or attempt harder work from the start of a lesson. In some lessons teachers missed the chance to use practical activities to consolidate learning. Students are quick to point out that they learn more when they have to apply and use the skills they have learned in practical activities.

- Teachers work closely with teaching assistants to provide extra help to those students who most need it. Support for disabled students, those with special educational needs and for individuals known to be eligible for the pupil premium is of a very good quality. Students' progress is regularly checked and relevant support provided. As a result, these students make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Teachers are good at telling students how they can improve their work when they speak to them, but the quality of written marking is too variable. Even when marking is thorough, teachers do not always check to see if students are acting upon the advice given. Opportunities for self- and peer assessment are sometimes missed.
- Sixth form students demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning, particularly when teaching is aimed at developing their reflective and analytical skills. Students are increasingly more confident when applying their skills, knowledge and understanding to new learning and real life scenarios.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Attitudes to learning are exemplary. Students are attentive and self-disciplined learners in the classroom. Their behaviour in their social areas is excellent and they move purposefully around the narrow corridors of the building between lessons. Students are respectful to staff, visitors and each other. Behaviours observed during the inspection are typical of those seen in the school over time.
- Students spoken to during the inspection were adamant that behaviour is very good and they do not tolerate behaviours that disrupt their learning. Examples of students correcting themselves and each other were observed.
- Students feel very safe and secure. They were very aware of the different types of bullying that can take place. All consider that bullying is extremely rare, including cyber bullying, and believe the school deals with it quickly and successfully when any incidents take place. Discrimination is not tolerated.
- Parents and carers support their children's views and a very significant majority believe them to be happy, safe and free from bullying at school. Inspectors agreed with this view and members of staff strongly agreed that the behaviour of students was excellent.
- Relationships between staff and students are very positive and supportive. The focus on high quality teaching has ensured that students engage in their learning and are largely self-managing in the classroom. Staff have been trained in appropriate approaches in managing students' behaviours. As a result, incidents of poor behaviour are extremely rare, with a range of effective intervention strategies that have resulted in very low levels of exclusions.
- Teachers are generous with their time and students benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Extensive support programmes are available to individuals before, during and after school.
- The support and care offered to students by all the staff are a real strength of the school. The Curriculum Access and Support Team (CAST) provides a wide range of very effective interventions.
- Assemblies, tutor time and the school's personal, social and health education all contribute well the students' strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students support many good causes through their charitable work.
- Attendance levels are high because students enjoy and value what the school offers them.

Attendance in the sixth form is good and rising rapidly, so attendance figures for the whole school are well above national averages.

The leadership and management are good

- The leadership of the headteacher is exceptional. She has been relentless in driving up standards and challenging underachievement. Senior leaders provide focused professional development for all staff to raise standards further.
- All leaders and managers, including those responsible for governance, have high expectations and ambition for the school and are now making a strong contribution to the improvement of the school. The impact of this work is evident in the rising standards in English and mathematics but has yet to show its full effect in some other subjects, including science, where improvements have been more recent.
- Morale is high and students recognise and appreciate the way in which staff are committed to their best interests. The school's success in securing improvements is reflected in many of the comments of staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire. As one teacher observed, 'The focus on teaching and learning has been incredible. I am proud to be part of this amazing school.' All staff want to do their personal best.
- School improvement targets are challenging and the school compares itself carefully with national and local benchmarks. The leadership teams have been remodelled to focus on the school's priorities, with budget planning also carefully taken into account.
- The work of each team is checked and monitored carefully. Effective action is taken quickly to ensure that any weaknesses are improved quickly.
- High quality processes are in place to maintain and improve the quality of teaching. Leaders visit lessons regularly to check the quality of teaching. They have a very accurate understanding of what constitutes good teaching and provide advice and training to help improve and develop best practice. Senior leaders take further action if their teaching does not improve.
- There are strong systems for managing the performance of staff and professional development is linked to their identified needs. Teachers are expected to teach well and pay increases are only given when their performance justifies it. There have been a large number of staff changes and new staff have been appointed who share high expectations for the students.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced at all stages and is reviewed regularly to meet the needs of students. It takes good account of students' aspirations and needs. It promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students well and provides equality of opportunity for all. High quality alternative provision is provided on site. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are extensive and very well attended.
- Safeguarding meets statutory requirements and all staff have received suitable training in safeguarding and child protection.
- Parents' and carers' responses to Parent View are very positive and an overwhelming majority would strongly recommend the school to other families.
- The local authority expresses real confidence in the school. It provides light support to the school as it recognises St James' as a good school which is rapidly improving.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is ambitious for the school. The governors take a strategic approach and challenge the school effectively. Training for governors has helped them to do this. The headteacher provides high quality, detailed and honest reports about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors in the school have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and achievement and strongly support school leaders in their drive for improvement. They are aware that both achievement and the quality of teaching are improving and make a clear link between appraisal and salary awards when agreeing pay scale progression for teachers. The governing body ensures that resources are used well to benefit students, including those eligible for pupil premium.

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	101364
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	400471

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,125
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neville Haneef
Headteacher	Niamh Arnull
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 January 2010
Telephone number	020 8358 2800
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