

St James' Catholic High School

St James Way, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 6PZ

Inspection dates

22–23 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils shine at this school because they benefit enormously from being part of the 'St James family', a supportive and caring community. They are happy and safe in school.
- This is an improving school. Pupils learn well and make excellent progress because teaching in English, mathematics and most other subjects is consistently good.
- Pupils, including the most able, are challenged by their work because most teachers have high expectations of pupils and plan work which is hard enough for them.
- Disadvantaged pupils now make similarly strong progress to other pupils in school, and to other pupils nationally, because leaders regularly review the use of pupil premium funding to provide effective support.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same good progress as their classmates because additional funding is used well to provide excellent support from teachers and teaching assistants.
- Pupils' conduct is exemplary. They show high levels of respect for each other and for their teachers and teaching assistants.
- Pupils are taught the skills needed to become thoughtful, self-confident citizens, able to express their views and opinions. This, together with a range of high-quality qualifications, means that they are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school, reflected in their good attendance, typically at least in line with the national average overall.
- Attendance is low for a few disadvantaged pupils who also have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders carefully check the reasons for absence to find out if there is anything else they could do to help these pupils to attend school more often.
- Most subject and other leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching and learning in their area to make sure that no pupils, or groups, are disadvantaged by inconsistencies.
- Governors know the strengths of the school and where there are further improvements still to be made. They continue to develop their skills in holding leaders to account.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further, so that all pupils make consistently strong progress across all subjects and in all year groups, by sharing the strong and effective teaching, learning and assessment practice available in school.
- Further improve the effectiveness of leaders at all levels, including governors, by ensuring that rigorous monitoring takes place regularly, weaknesses are tackled quickly and these actions are checked to make sure they have had the desired outcome.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have successfully introduced a more ambitious culture in the school based upon high expectations. Pupils live up to leaders' vision for them to shine because of the culture shift leaders have brought about from the historic focus on 'passing an exam' to making sure that all pupils make good progress and achieve their potential.
- Leaders have continued to maintain the good standard of education seen at the last inspection. Previous areas for improvement were swiftly tackled after the last inspection and leaders continue to adopt a proactive approach to tackling new and emerging weaknesses identified from their monitoring.
- Leaders have successfully maintained a happy and supportive learning environment in which all members of the 'St James family' care for each other. As a result, pupils work exceptionally well together and this supports the good, and improving, progress that they make.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school, because leaders create numerous rich and varied opportunities for pupils to develop the skills they need to become caring and responsible citizens in modern Britain. Although the school building presents constraints on space, a high priority has been given to pupils' spiritual development through creating a sacred space for prayer and spiritual reflection.
- The well-designed curriculum effectively meets the needs of pupils who start in the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are typically well above the national average. Pupils follow a strongly academic curriculum. Virtually all pupils study a modern foreign language, with some pupils choosing to study a second language. Pupils are encouraged to develop their other talents through a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, such as debating, choir, sports, music and art, which they enjoy.
- The pupil premium funding is used well to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, their progress is very similar to that of other pupils in the school and other pupils nationally. Similarly, additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities successfully removes barriers to their learning so they make as good progress as their classmates. Excellent support is provided for these pupils from teachers and teaching assistants.
- The Year 7 literacy catch-up funding is used effectively to identify weak readers when they start in school and to provide additional support to successfully help them to improve their reading and develop a love of reading a wide range of books. Year 7 numeracy funding is used less well and there is no clear strategy in place to support these pupils' weaker numeracy skills when they start in the school. However, most of these pupils go on to overcome these weaknesses and do well by the end of Year 11.
- Staff are proud to be a member of staff at this school and say that they feel encouraged, challenged and supported by the professional development opportunities available to them.
- Leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their area. However, inconsistencies exist in the quality of monitoring by a few subject

leaders. Although leaders give teachers advice on how to improve their practice, some targets are not sufficiently sharp enough and further checks to make sure that teachers have acted swiftly on this advice are inconsistent. Systems are not developed well enough to make sure teachers and leaders reflect on, and improve, their own practice and ensure that effective practice is shared to support colleagues and tackle inconsistencies.

- In tackling areas for improvement from the previous inspection, leaders introduced a new marking and assessment policy. In some subjects, teachers follow the school's policy consistently well, and pupils make better progress as they respond to the detailed feedback given by their teachers. However, inconsistencies exist in a few subjects where teachers do not follow leaders' high expectations of marking.
- Although pastoral leaders keep records of incidents of poor behaviour and where pupils are temporarily excluded, this information lacks precision because the reasons for the exclusion or sanction are sometimes unclear. It is therefore difficult to see if sanctions, including exclusion, are making a difference to the poor behaviour being tackled.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and know where there is still work to be done to tackle weaknesses. Processes used to manage the performance of teachers are used well because governors use a wide range of information, including pupils' progress from external examinations, to decide which teachers are moved up the pay spine if they are eligible.
- Governors are knowledgeable and suitably skilled and regularly review their own training needs to make sure that their knowledge is up to date. As a result, they provide a good balance of support and challenge for leaders and hold them to account for their work in school improvement.
- Governors gather the views of pupils and parents to improve the school further. They use pupils' comments well when reviewing leaders' monitoring of teaching and actively seek the views of parents such as at parents' evenings and other events in school. As a result, they know that pupils are well supported and are kept safe because they have accurate first-hand knowledge of the school's work.
- Following the recent governing body restructuring of committees, greater priority has been given to improving standards in the school. Governors carefully monitor the progress being made by pupils in key stage 4 but do not know enough about the progress being made by pupils in key stage 3 because leaders do not provide them with this information in the same detail as for pupils in key stage 4.
- Although governors know about the impact of the spending of the pupil premium funding, they do not know enough about how the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding is used, or the difference this is making, particularly for pupils who start in the school with weak numeracy skills.
- Governors were not aware that the school website did not meet requirements at the start of the inspection, although they say they had carried out these checks. Some policies and other information were woefully out of date, such as the school's information report for parents of pupils who have special education needs and/or

disabilities. These were updated during the inspection and parents now have access to accurate information.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective because leaders have successfully developed a culture in the school whereby all staff understand their responsibility to make sure pupils are safe and well cared for. Safeguarding records and information are detailed and maintained securely, including information on pupils with medical needs.
- Staff have received training in recent changes to safeguarding guidance and they know how to make a referral if they have a concern about a pupil. They know the signs to look out for that may suggest a pupil is a victim of extremist or radical views.
- Pupils are taught about a range of threats and dangers such as substance abuse and they know how to keep themselves safe when using social media, for example. This is because safeguarding is well supported through citizenship, personal, social and health education (CPSHE). School leaders access support from outside agencies where necessary, such as through MOSAIC, a service providing support for young people on drug- and alcohol-related issues.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Information from leaders' quality-assurance processes and from first-hand inspection evidence shows that teaching overall is strong and effective, leading to the majority of pupils making good progress, particularly in key stage 4.
- Pupils typically make good progress because teachers have strong subject knowledge, which they use well to plan interesting and challenging work for pupils. Teachers ask questions which make sure that pupils think more deeply about their responses and consequently they have a good understanding of the work they are doing and explain their work well.
- Teachers monitor pupils' achievement carefully using assessment information. They use this well to identify any gaps in learning and provide highly tailored support to help pupils who need to catch up and also to support their revision for tests and examinations. Pupils appreciate this help and say that teachers willingly give their time to help them to improve, including providing help with homework at lunchtime.
- Teaching assistants support pupils well in lessons, including low-ability pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, who need extra help. They encourage pupils to ask questions to deepen their understanding and avoid telling pupils the answers, instead making sure that they can work things out for themselves.
- Pupils in alternate year groups study French or German. Current Year 7 pupils study French, whereas pupils in Year 8 study German. Teachers do not build on the prior learning of pupils who had the opportunity to study French in their primary school. All pupils start at the same point and consequently progress slows for pupils who already have some understanding of French. By the end of Year 11, most pupils go on to overcome this slower start and make average progress at the end of key stage 4.
- Where teaching is less effective, pupils typically succeed and make good progress

despite these weaknesses. This is because pupils have excellent attitudes to learning, they are curious and want to achieve their best. Pupils readily ask each other for help, and friends willingly provide this support. Some pupils could achieve even better with more effective and consistently strong teaching.

- Assessment at key stage 3 is still being developed. Teachers use the school's own system of levels to report attainment to parents. Although these relate to the new programmes of study, they may not reflect sufficiently high enough expectations in setting pupils' targets for the end of the year or key stage 3.
- The most able pupils are typically taught well because they are given work to do which is of appropriate difficulty. Teachers are focused on teaching the knowledge and skills that pupils need to enable them to attain grades A* and A in their GCSE examinations in Year 11. However, teachers are still developing their own understanding of assessment criteria for the new grade 9 and are not yet confident in this, leading to some inconsistencies in the levels of challenge for the most able.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Leaders make sure that pupils are cared for exceptionally well.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to be a successful learner. Pupils know what it means to be 'ready to learn' and are committed to arriving punctually at lessons, with their full equipment, including a reading book and homework completed on time. As a result, no learning time is wasted.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school, they say there are no bullies and are confident that they would be listened to if they shared a concern with a teacher or pastoral leader.
- Pupils enjoy their CPSHE lessons, which help them to develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, such as when using computers and social media; for example, they know about the dangers of sexting. Pupils say that their teachers care about them, and they feel valued because leaders give them a talk about how to make sure that they return to school safely after the school holidays.
- Strong links with global, national and local charities encourage pupils to help others and to deepen their understanding of tolerance and respect. Pupils have a good understanding of other British values, for example through their work on the general election and the European Union referendum, which increased their knowledge of democracy.
- Effective careers information and guidance is provided for pupils from Year 7 onwards. Year 9 pupils told inspectors about the information that they are given on different schools and colleges in the area where they could go for post-16 education. They know what subjects are needed for different careers, have an understanding of apprenticeships and can attend the 'careers drop-in centre' at lunchtime to find out more. For example, a recent information session was provided on architecture.
- Pupils have many opportunities to take on additional responsibilities in school. Pupils

from the spirituality group lead morning prayers for pupils and staff in the school's chapel. Other responsibilities include membership of the eco-group, acting as progress prefects who support other pupils in their learning, and as school council representatives.

- Parents have highly positive views of the school and confirm that their children are safe and happy at this school. They greatly appreciate the pastoral care and support provided.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This is because pupils readily respond to leaders' high expectations evident in the 'SHINE' ethos. As a result, they 'Speak politely, Have respect, follow Instructions, Never say never and Engage positively' in all that they do.
- Pupils' conduct is exemplary in lessons and around the school site. Pupils are enthusiastic learners who consistently demonstrate high levels of respect for each other, for their teachers and all members of the school community.
- Attendance overall is good and is typically at least in line with the national average. This is because pupils enjoy coming to school and they are happy here. Pastoral managers check carefully on the reasons why individual pupils are absent. A range of rewards and incentives, and support for families, is provided to help pupils to attend school more often.
- Attendance has been consistently low for the last three years for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and there is little sign of this changing. This is due to a small number of pupils with severe medical needs, who often miss school to attend medical appointments.
- Leaders have a 'zero tolerance' of some inappropriate behaviour, such as smoking, and pupils are excluded for this. The number of pupils who are excluded remains broadly similar over the last three years. There is no sign of this reducing and pastoral managers are unable to say if exclusion is successfully tackling this poor behaviour from this small group of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Key stage 4 outcomes in GCSE examinations demonstrate consistently strong progress over each of the last three years, in English, mathematics and across the curriculum. Progress overall is much better than that of similar-ability pupils nationally.
- Slower progress seen historically in humanities and in languages has been tackled and, as a result of the success of these strategies, pupils currently in the school are now making stronger progress in these subjects, particularly at key stage 4.
- Early-entry policy in languages has ceased. Pupils were previously entered for their GCSE examination in Year 9, before they were ready. As a result, they did not achieve their true potential. Pupils are currently making much better progress in languages.
- Teaching is improving in humanities because senior leaders are now supporting teaching in this area. Pupils say that some of the best teaching in the school is in

humanities and their progress has improved rapidly as a result, particularly in history. There is still further work to do to improve outcomes for pupils in geography, especially for pupils in Year 8 and Year 9, where pupils achieve less strongly in geography than in history.

- Most disadvantaged pupils in the school make progress which is at least as good as that of others in the school and in some year groups and subjects they make better progress than their classmates because they are supported so well in lessons. Leaders, working with teachers, carefully monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils and additional help is provided at the first sign of progress slowing. Additional funding helps to pay for visits and school trips, and music lessons for pupils wanting to learn how to play a musical instrument.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from effective support from teachers and skilled teaching assistants in lessons. As a result, they make similar progress to that of their classmates.
- Outcomes for the most able pupils are improving and a higher proportion of pupils each year attain the top grades in their GCSE examinations. The needs of these pupils are well met in most lessons, although some teachers are still developing their own confidence and familiarity with the raised expectations at key stage 3 and the more demanding work required for success at key stage 4.
- Pupils are screened for their reading age when they start in the school and this information is used to plan targeted support for weak readers to help them to catch up. All pupils, including confident readers, have a reading book and were seen by inspectors enjoying the opportunity to read during form time.
- Pupils confidently express their views and opinions and take part in classroom discussion with maturity, listening well and reflecting thoughtfully on views that may be different to their own. As a result, their communication skills are very well developed and supported.

School details

Unique reference number	106142
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10017415

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	803
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Breckell
Headteacher	Tim Beesley
Telephone number	0161 486 9211
Website	www.stjamescatholichighschool.org.uk
Email address	office@stjameschs.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 April 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website as leaders took immediate and decisive action during the inspection to update policies that were missing or due for review.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and continues to provide dedicated provision for pupils who have physical disabilities.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, but with an above-average proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with a small number of pupils from a range of other ethnic groups.
- The school does not use any off-site alternative provision for pupils, as their needs are

fully met through the school's on-site curriculum. A very small number of pupils in key stage 4 are dual-registered with other schools in the area, as part of an extended managed move to help these pupils to complete their external examinations.

- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- During this inspection, inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects and year groups and carried out short visits to other lessons, including some observations carried out jointly with senior leaders. Pupils' work in books was checked, and inspectors talked with pupils about their work in lessons to find out what they were learning. Inspectors also visited an assembly and form time.
- The headteacher joined inspectors in a tour of the school and meetings were held with senior and other leaders, and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff.
- An inspector met with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. Records of minutes taken during meetings of the governing body were scrutinised, including the headteacher's report to governors.
- An inspector listened to a group of four pupils read, including some receiving additional support to help them to catch up.
- Behaviour of pupils was observed during lessons and also outside lessons, such as when pupils moved between classes or different areas of the school. Inspectors met formally with two separate groups of pupils to evaluate the quality of provision for the most able pupils and the effectiveness of support provided for pupils to help them to improve their attendance and behaviour.
- The views from 22 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online pupil survey, and 64 staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey were also considered.
- The views from 135 parents expressed during the last year on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered, including 77 written comments from parents. An inspector met with a parent who requested to speak with an inspector and views expressed in a further three letters to the inspection team were also considered, along with one email sent to Ofsted.
- A wide range of other documentation was reviewed, including information available on the school's website and information on pupils' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. The school's self-evaluation summary and development plan were examined, along with records on the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Denah Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Cooper	Ofsted Inspector
Dympna Woods	Ofsted Inspector
Annette Patterson	Ofsted Inspector
David Woodhouse	Ofsted Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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