



Office for Standards  
in Education

## **Inspection Report**

### **SACRED HEART HIGH SCHOOL**

Unique Reference Number: 108536

LEA: Newcastle

Inspection Number: 269310

Inspection Dates: 25 – 27 May 2004

Reporting Inspector: Paul Curry HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 12 (3) under the same act

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## INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Sacred Heart Catholic High School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by five of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

### Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

### Description of the school

Sacred Heart Catholic High School is a voluntary aided 11-18 Roman Catholic comprehensive school for girls in the west of Newcastle with over 1300 pupils on roll, including 226 students in the sixth form. Nearly 20 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. The percentage with special educational needs is below the national figure. There are approximately 10% of pupils who do not speak English as their first language. The level of attainment on entry is above average and the school is popular and oversubscribed. The school gained specialist technology college status in September 2003.

## **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL**

This is a very good school. The school knows itself well, plans effectively for improvement and benefits from inspiring leadership. As a result, students' achievements at all levels are continuing to improve and compare very favourably with other schools in the city as well as all schools nationally and those which serve similar communities. Inspectors agreed with the school that the Sacred Heart ethos and values effectively promote the pursuit of academic excellence while at the same time ensuring high standards of care, support and spiritual guidance. The behaviour of pupils and their attitudes to study are excellent, and attendance is above average. Pupils make a positive contribution to the community through a broad range of extra-curricular and other voluntary activities. The quality of teaching is very good with a wide variety of stimulating and challenging learning activities. The curriculum is well matched to the needs of different groups of learners.

**Grade: 1**

### **Effectiveness of the school's sixth form**

The school's self-evaluation states that the sixth form provides a broad range of academic and vocational courses at different levels. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. A successful 'brighter future' programme at level 1, run in conjunction with the neighbouring Catholic high school for boys and Newcastle College provides students with an introduction to different vocational subjects. This enables them to make informed choices about further levels of specialist study or employment. The curriculum at advanced level has been extended to offer students a wider choice of subjects. Achievements have improved since the last inspection and now significantly exceed national benchmarks. The standards of teaching are high with most lessons observed during the inspection judged as very good. Wider activities are well supported and include community service, critical thinking and a 'buddy' system where sixth form students act as mentors to younger pupils. A new purpose-built sixth form centre offers excellent facilities for teaching and independent study.

**Grade: 1**

### **Improvement since the last inspection**

The school has sustained the high quality of its provision since the previous inspection, and has been successful in improving standards and addressing the small number of weaknesses identified. The curriculum has been broadened to offer more flexible pathways which allow the combination of vocational and academic study. The small number of weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been rigorously addressed. Standards in ICT have been significantly raised both in terms of achievements and the quality of teaching and learning. Training has been provided for all staff which has successfully supported the wider development of ICT across the curriculum. The resourcing deficiencies in science and mathematics have been rectified. Good progress is being made towards the completion of an ambitious accommodation programme which will enable the school to consolidate its provision onto a single site from September 2005. A more systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data is supporting the detailed monitoring of the school's performance.

**Grade: 1**

## **Capacity to improve**

The school's self-evaluation is comprehensive and largely accurate, and it provides a good platform for celebrating achievements and addressing an agenda for change. The leadership of the school provides a clear vision for future priorities which aim to ensure it is amongst the best nationally with even more ambitious targets for the quality of teaching and the standards to be achieved. Governors are equally ambitious for the school and properly hold managers to account to deliver the priorities and targets in the school improvement plan.

### **Grade: 1**

#### **What the school should do to improve further**

This is very good school and can improve even further by continuing to:

- improve performance in a small number of subject areas
- secure more challenging targets for the performance of learners in relation to their prior levels of attainment
- develop and implement more consistent approaches to the marking and assessment of pupils' work
- undertake a more rigorous approach to the evaluation of learning.

## **ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS**

The school's self-evaluation identifies a range of evidence to indicate that the standards achieved are very good. Inspectors judged that this aspect is good, based upon recent results, but recognised that the very good quality of education and the school's approach to its own improvement are steadily raising performance. The standards reached in 2003 were above the national average at both Key Stage 3 and GCSE. These results are very good when compared with those in schools that serve similar communities. However, pupils at Key Stage 3 and GCSE perform broadly at, or very slightly above, the levels predicted by their prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. This is because when pupils come into the school in Year 7 they have higher attainment than normal for pupils from similar communities. The school has been successful in improving achievements. The rate of improvement in the results at Key Stage 3 is in line with the national trend and at GCSE it is better. At GCSE there is variation in the quality of results for different subjects, but no major subject area is more than half a grade better or worse than the average for the school as a whole. Pupils with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs achieve as well as others. The school has very good systems for predicting outcomes in national tests, but targets could be even more challenging.

In the sixth form, results in advanced level academic and vocational subjects compare favourably with national averages for all schools. Pass rates at GCE A level have improved considerably compared to the previous year, particularly in the proportion of high grades awarded. Data which compare grades at GCE AS/A level with those predicted by students' prior GCSE performance show, overall, students are now achieving above expectations in most subjects.

### **Grade: 2**

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The school correctly judges pupils' personal development to be very good. Attendance is higher than average. Pupils arrive on time for school and during the day for lessons. Their behaviour in class and around the school is excellent. The number excluded from school is very low. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They have very positive attitudes to their work. They try very hard, for example, when working on their own and in small groups.

Pupils are friendly and courteous. They form mature, supportive relationships with each other. They respect one another's views and the different perspectives of other faith groups. They respond very well to opportunities provided for their spiritual development. They learn how to make independent moral decisions. They understand the need for a healthy lifestyle with the school council, for instance, recently securing the addition of healthier options for lunch. The school has started to develop a more coherent plan for coordinating the extensive range of opportunities for pupils' personal development.

Pupils are actively involved in the life of the school and make the most of the many opportunities provided to contribute to the wider community. Many of them, for example, rehearse with dedication for public concerts, and all are regularly involved in raising funds for a wide range of charities.

**Grade: 1**

## **QUALITY OF PROVISION**

Inspectors agree with the school that the overall quality of provision is very good. The quality of teaching is a particular strength, a judgement which confirms the school's own evaluation as demonstrated by its internal observation programme. The lessons observed during the inspection successfully met the needs of all the pupils and included a wide and stimulating range of challenging activities. In the sixth form, teachers used particularly imaginative approaches to revision activities. Teachers had high expectations of their pupils and supported individuals well to enable them make good progress. Learning mentors also gave very good support to pupils of all abilities to help them understand how to improve the quality of their work. They were particularly successful in supporting those who might otherwise fail to complete their schooling. The process of setting targets is central to the school's procedures for helping pupils to understand and reach the standards of which they are capable. The targets set are based on a range of information and drawn up in discussion between the pupils, their personal tutors and their parents. The school recognises that the process can be improved to achieve greater consistency in the way that departments mark and grade pupils' work.

The curriculum provides very good opportunities for pupils to study a range of academic and vocational courses. It is extremely flexible, as pupils in Key Stage 4 and students in the sixth form, in consultation with their teachers and parents, follow a curriculum that suits their particular needs. These courses also feature different modes of assessment. One example is the ASDAN award, which is based on a number of short modules and assesses pupils' practical capabilities and key skills on a frequent basis. This is a significant factor in enabling some pupils to receive appropriate credit for their achievements. Economic well-being is extensively promoted in technology and science subjects through involvement with industry and other work-related learning activities.

There is a broad range of well-supported extra-curricular activities that cater for a very wide variety of interests. These range from playing musical instruments to kick boxing.

Many pupils also undertake enrichment activities such as gaining an insight into higher education. This is particularly important since many of them are the first in their families to consider going to university.

The care and welfare of pupils is very good. The high regard for pupils by staff and the school's formal procedures ensure that everyone is and feels safe. Pupils know who to confide in when they have problems. There is very good support for vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers and those whose attendance is unsatisfactory. The school is very effective in safeguarding pupils at risk of being bullied. Teachers and support staff identify individuals about whom they are concerned and monitor their progress regularly. Child protection procedures are effective, with very good links with outside agencies to ensure that pupils at risk receive specialist support. Older pupils receive good advice from their teachers about their future life choices and have access to careers specialists, although there is insufficient routine support for students in the sixth form.

**Grade: 1**

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The school has assessed its leadership and management as very good. Inspectors agree with this judgement. The headteacher and senior management team successfully communicate and exemplify a clear vision, firmly based on the principles of the Society of the Sacred Heart. They have a broadly accurate analysis of the current position of the school, on which they base detailed future improvement plans. These have appropriately embraced different key national strategies, for example Key Stage 3 and Excellence in Cities. Actions are implemented rigorously and are monitored at frequent intervals. Senior managers provide tenacity and determination to their roles, for example, in securing ambitious improvements to the accommodation of the school.

The performance management of teachers is thorough and has been successful in establishing a consistently high level of practice. Middle managers play a key role in leading improvements. Those who are less effective receive an appropriate balance of challenge and support. Increasingly effective use is made of management information, and the link between the analysis of assessment information and its use in planning for improvement is being further developed. There is a regular and effective programme for evaluating the quality of teaching and the school recognises the need to focus more sharply on learning. A thorough programme of induction is provided for new teachers. The school values all the members of its community highly, regularly seeks their views and serves them well. It has implemented its policy on race equality and monitors its impact.

The school provides a welcoming learning environment. It is clean and tidy with extensive displays of pupils' work. It is appropriately staffed with well-qualified teachers and has sufficient resources to support the curriculum. There is an extensive range of very good links with other providers, including the neighbouring St Cuthbert's High School, Newcastle College and other Sacred Heart schools.

**Grade: 1**

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