



# St Francis of Assisi Catholic Technology College

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 104255  
**Local Authority** Walsall  
**Inspection number** 277117  
**Inspection dates** 29–30 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** David Martin HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Erdington Road
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Aldridge
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Walsall WS9 0RN
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01922 743696
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	903	<b>Fax number</b>	01922 740330
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	174	<b>Chair</b>	G Hanlon
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Headteacher</b>	Philomena Mullins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 December 2000		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	29–30 November 2006	277117

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school is a larger than average, oversubscribed Catholic secondary school with specialist status as a technology college. It draws students from a wide geographical area within the Archdiocese of Birmingham, with many students travelling in by bus. The school has a comprehensive intake that has broadly average indicators of disadvantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds and the great majority are from Catholic families. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average, although the proportion with statements of special educational need is more than twice the average. The school has an enhanced resource for students with dyslexia.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. There is excellent provision and achievement in the sixth form. Impeccable care, guidance and support for students lead to outstanding personal development throughout the school. Achievement in the main school is good in all respects and improving. Above all, the school is consistently good and often outstanding in all aspects of its work as a result of excellent leadership and management at all levels.

The school motto 'Nil Satis Optimum' is very apt, as the school really believes that 'only the best' will do. This might explain why, although the school knows its strengths very well, its self-assessment was more modest than the inspection findings. The headteacher leads from the front and by personal example, embodying the caring Catholic ethos of the school and a quest for continuing improvement. She is ably supported by senior staff, governors and all adults in the school in turning this vision into practice. The school's success can be partly explained by the attention to detail and thorough planning, evaluation and review at all levels. These have made considerable impact everywhere, but most notably in turning aspects identified as weaknesses at the last inspection into current strengths. The leadership has created a community and learning environment in which young people and adults alike can flourish. Everyone knows what they are expected to contribute and they feel valued and appreciated for their considerable efforts. At the same time they readily accept the responsibility for ensuring that improvements do indeed happen and for evaluating their impact. Governors play their part by holding the school rigorously to account.

The concern for the individual student underpins everything that the school stands for. The exceptionally high quality of care, guidance and support for students contributes well to their enjoyment of school and the standards they achieve. Effective additional care is given for students whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. The support for those who need additional pastoral care or help with their work is outstanding. Parents comment warmly about the quality of transition arrangements when students join the school, and inspectors noted the range of broader clubs, activities, visits and extensive charity work. The curriculum too is good and improving. For example, the school's very good provision to prepare students for the world of work and their future economic well-being has been refined further following a detailed audit of the effectiveness of current practice.

Another key factor in the success of the school is the high quality teaching, which is outstanding in the sixth form. Much is inspirational; in a Year 11 physical education lesson students used the computer to compare their badminton skills with those of a professional and so improve their own technique.

Despite the overall quality of the school and its many areas of excellence, true to its motto there is no complacency. The school already has plans to extend its curriculum further, encourage healthy eating and spread more widely the quality of teaching revealed in the very best lessons. By doing this, managers believe that achievement could be even better. Specialist technology college status has been a powerful force

in shaping the improvements seen since the last inspection. The school has made great strides and is well placed to improve even further.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

The sixth form has been growing and improving substantially in recent years and is now providing an outstanding education for its students. Students' achievements at advanced level in 2006 were the highest ever obtained in the school. There is convincing evidence that this excellent achievement is being sustained in present work. Standards are high, with much stimulating and intellectually challenging work in progress. High quality teaching is a major reason for success in the sixth form. Teaching is consistently good and much is excellent. There are particular strengths in many areas, including several subjects taught for the first time in the sixth form. Another reason for the increasing success of the sixth form is its first-rate leadership with very effective systems to support students and encourage high achievement. The school acknowledges that, at present, it does not provide fully a curriculum suitable for all potential sixth formers, but high quality guidance and advice enable students who do join the sixth form to follow courses that well match their interests and aptitudes. Consequently, almost all complete their courses successfully. Outstanding care and guidance ensure that students' personal development and well-being are excellent. They work very well with their teachers, enjoying very warm relationships with them. Students are very proud of their sixth form and hold it in high regard. They contribute excellently to the school and wider community in a range of commendable activities.

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

- Implement existing plans to: further improve teaching and learning and thereby raise standards in the main school; extend curriculum provision and the healthy eating initiative.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students achieve well across Years 7 to 11. They enter the school with standards that are slightly above average and they make good progress. At the end of Year 9, results in the 2006 national tests were above average in the three core subjects overall. There was some decline in English standards from the previous year, particularly for boys, and targets were missed. Targets were achieved in mathematics and science where results reached their best ever levels.

GCSE examination results dipped marginally in 2006 but were still significantly above the national average. Results were below the levels of the challenging targets but they still represented good progress. The strong emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills means that the proportion of students gaining five higher grades A\*–C that include English and mathematics is well above average. Religious education and

information and communication technology (ICT) are areas of strength. All groups of students make good progress and students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well. There has been a good improvement in standards since the last inspection.

In the sixth form standards are now significantly above average and achievement is outstanding.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. They say how much they enjoy the school and respect their teachers. Their enthusiasm for learning is clearly evident.

It is also reflected in the good levels of attendance. Students develop excellent relationships with each other and adults and these promote their good achievement. Behaviour is excellent. Students show a mature respect and consideration for both visitors and each other. They carry out responsibility diligently, looking after each other. The Buddy system is well used and appreciated by all. Sixth form students provide valuable help for Years 7 and 8 students with their reading. Students feel their views are regularly sought and acted upon, for example through the school council and the 'Student Voice'.

Students care about their school and they make a significant contribution to it and to the wider community, such as the local hospital. They are sensitive to the needs of those less fortunate than themselves and enthusiastically plan fundraising events for national and international charities. Students know the importance of healthy food and understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle but many still do not select the healthy options at lunchtime.

Students make excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are extremely well prepared for life in a multicultural community and have acquired many skills that will help them achieve economic well-being in the future. The citizenship programme offers good opportunities for reflection. Students are developing into citizens of whom the school and their parents can be proud. Personal development is enhanced by very good involvement in a wide range of clubs and activities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Good teaching throughout the school enables students to enjoy their education and to learn well. Few lessons are less than good and a significant proportion is outstanding,

particularly in the sixth form. Excellent relationships between staff and students are a very strong feature of the school. Teachers know their subjects very well and they use a wide variety of activities to maintain interest and enthusiasm in lessons. Since the last inspection access to ICT has improved considerably and it is used very effectively by teachers and students to promote good learning. The school has excellent systems for monitoring and tracking the students' progress and staff intervene swiftly when necessary. Students have a very good understanding of how well they are doing and what they must do to improve their work. Parents appreciate that they too are kept fully informed of progress. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive excellent support from teaching assistants and in the Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia) unit, enabling them to make very good progress.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is good with many very strong features. It has been evolving well in recent years with further developments scheduled for implementation. These will extend the growing range of vocational courses for the 14 – 19 age range to better meet the needs of particular groups of students. Curriculum links with other schools and colleges are relatively limited at present, but the school's technology college status has given strong impetus to curriculum developments through introducing new courses and bringing effective use of new technology to many classrooms. Very substantial progress has been made in the use of ICT throughout the curriculum. There are very thorough processes for reviewing the curriculum. As a result, adjustments have been made in full knowledge of what has worked well and what not so well.

Good arrangements are made to adapt the curriculum to meet individual needs including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. This is particularly well done for students who spend some of their time in the dyslexia unit.

There is a very good range of extra activities within and beyond the school day in sport, the arts and in the wider curriculum. These opportunities are much valued by the students.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

All staff are strongly committed to the care and support of their students. Consequently, students feel safe and secure knowing that any concerns will be dealt with promptly and efficiently. All child protection, health, safety and risk assessments are robust and are reviewed regularly. Students feel no threat from bullying because pastoral support is excellent. The 'worry/suggestion' box is well used. Because relationships are excellent, students learn to care for others. Exceptional support and guidance are provided for students with learning difficulties and disabilities and staff closely monitor their needs.

The Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia) unit is extremely well organised. Consequently, students gain confidence and make the same good progress as their peers. Teachers monitor academic progress regularly. All students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing because the 'traffic light' system, target setting and marking ensure this. Students are well prepared for their future study by developing skills in independently assessing the quality of their work and through the many opportunities for team work.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

The headteacher and governors offer the school an exceptionally clear and decisive vision and purpose. This purpose is shared by all staff and communicated well to students, parents and all those with an interest in the school. The senior leadership team takes a considered, measured approach to continually improving what the school offers to its young people and they ably support the headteacher. Middle leaders and all other staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are given many opportunities to drive improvements forward, both individually and in teams.

Planning is a particular strength at all levels and shows great attention to detail. Most importantly, plans are regularly reviewed and evaluated. Governors are involved throughout the process and will challenge the school on the rare occasions that its ambitious targets are not met. Governors have an efficient committee structure, visit the school frequently and gain first hand knowledge of the school through regular briefings from staff.

Financial planning and control are good and the school has efficiently managed specialist status and an extensive building programme. The school has undoubtedly an excellent capacity and desire to make further improvements.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	1
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	1

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team that visited your school recently. Your friendliness, helpfulness and willingness to share your own experience of the school helped us a great deal in our work and made the two days very pleasant indeed.

You will be interested to know what we found on our visit. Many of you told us how much you like your school and a typical comment was: 'We feel safe – it is more like a family than a school, we all like coming to school and meeting our friends.' We agree with you. In fact, we think you go to an outstanding school. Here are some of the things that we found to be particularly excellent:

- The adults who run your school care deeply for all of you and are very attentive to your changing needs as young adults, both in learning and personal growth.
- The standards that you reach in tests and examinations are good and improving year by year. The A-level results were particularly impressive in 2006.
- You are developing into mature young adults who care deeply for others in your own school and the wider community.
- You show respect for everyone, enjoy learning and growing together and are developing the important skills that will help you to contribute fully to society later in your lives.
- Teaching is almost always good in your school, and often genuinely inspiring. You respond to this good teaching with enthusiasm and interest and play your part in making learning fun.
- The leaders of your school, especially the headteacher, senior staff and governors, and indeed all staff, give great attention to detail. They continuously plan to make your school even better by providing more opportunities for learning and achieving.

We know that you appreciate your school as do your parents and carers, as shown in the responses they made to us. There is little that we can tell your headteacher about improving your school, as she and her staff already know what they want to do next to make things even better. However, we feel that some of you could respond more enthusiastically to the school's encouragement to eat healthily!

Once again, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable. We wish you every possible success in the future.