



St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108534
LEA Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number 277999
Inspection dates 24 January 2006 to 25 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Brian Dower

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Benton Park Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Newcastle upon Tyne
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Tyne and Wear, NE7 7PE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 2668813
Number on roll	943	Fax number	0191 2668813
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Rev Dennis Kellett
Date of previous inspection	1 March 2004	Headteacher	Mr John Foster

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 24 January 2006 - 25 January 2006	Inspection number 277999
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's is a voluntary aided Catholic school. The majority of students are Catholics, but the school also welcomes students of other faiths. The area served has social and economic disadvantage and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The majority of students are white British, but around 19% have minority ethnic heritages. Standards on entry to Year 7 and to the sixth form are average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national picture.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. This judgement is the same as the school's evaluation of its work and the school's previous designation as underachieving no longer applies. Leadership and management are satisfactory because the measures now in place to secure improvements are having a positive impact on standards.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 have improved and now meet national expectations. Underachievement has been reduced since the previous inspection. The school's evaluation of students' progress indicates that this year's performance targets will be met. The unsatisfactory teaching seen at the last inspection has gone. Teaching is satisfactory overall and some of it is good, but it requires greater rigour and pace to motivate and inspire students to exceed expectations. The passivity seen in some lessons needs to be confronted and some students challenged to think more for themselves. Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, but too many of them lack the confidence to work independently. Students are positive about their school and the instances of poor behaviour which have been of concern to them and their parents are now managed effectively. Pupils feel safe and secure and they have opportunities to contribute to the local and wider community. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school has the capacity to improve and it gives satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school judges the quality of provision as satisfactory and inspectors agree.

Students make satisfactory progress and they attain average standards. The curriculum has recently been broadened to appeal to students of widely differing abilities and interests. Students enjoy their work and nearly all complete their studies and continue to university. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although teachers have good subject knowledge, there is not a wide enough range of approaches to promote independent learning skills, and many students are too heavily reliant on their teachers. The school acknowledges there is scope for the students to contribute more widely to the work of the school and the wider community. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school makes effective use of assessment data to track students' progress and give additional support when weaknesses are identified in their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards by raising students' expectations of themselves.
- Improve achievement by more rigorous and challenging teaching and by giving students the confidence to work independently

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards attained in 2005 at the end of Year 9 were close to average and were an improvement on what was attained in 2004. Achievement was satisfactory. The standards reached at the end of Year 11 in 2005 were better than in 2004 and were also close to average. Achievement was again satisfactory. Girls' attainment across all subjects improved significantly on that of the previous year, as did that of the most able and least able boys. This improving trend was seen in the work being done now. Standards are average and challenging targets are in place. The school's analysis of the quality of current work shows improvement on the 2005 results. Inspectors found that the students' learning in lessons was satisfactory overall and that they were making the expected rate of progress. This was so for all groups, including students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with learning difficulties. In the sixth form standards are average and achievement and progress are satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of students are satisfactory, a judgement which differs from that of the school which sees this aspect of its work as good. Students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is satisfactory. They are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and take part in sporting activities and outdoor education. They feel safe in school and most enjoy their work. Students know that any incidences of bullying will be dealt with effectively and can identify recent improvements in school behaviour management routines. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory, although a small minority of pupils have poor attitudes towards learning and can be disruptive. Attendance rates are below average, but the introduction of an alternative curriculum and work placements are helping to improve this. Students make contributions to the community through fundraising for Make Poverty History and their involvement in city-wide work on the Holocaust. They are encouraged to take responsibility by involvement in the peer mentoring system, the work of the school council or by becoming pupil monitors. The preparation for students' economic well-being would be better if standards were higher. Students start to develop workplace skills through Enterprise work and visits which are facilitated by links with the Education Business Partnership. Students in the sixth form are mature and responsible young people who are involved in community fundraising and who act as learning mentors to younger pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are now satisfactory. The school has been successful in tackling the unsatisfactory teaching seen at the last inspection and current practices are

improving standards. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they have established good working relationships in the classroom. Instances of poor student behaviour are managed well. The monitoring and assessment of students' work is now done effectively. Students are not always clear, however, about what they must do to improve their work. Students learn best when actively engaged in varied and demanding tasks and this was seen in a Year 11 Drama lesson. The students explored the power and range of the human voice when used in a range of contexts. They relished the challenging nature of the tasks they were set and their work was of a very high standard. Although there is good teaching, there is not enough to motivate students to aim high and exceed expectations. Many lack the confidence to work independently. Where lessons lack pace or challenge, or do not involve students actively, progress is less rapid and the teaching, although satisfactory, is not bringing out the very best in them. Teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 are satisfactory because teachers know students well and plan lessons to meet their individual needs. However, many students are too heavily reliant on their teachers. There is not a wide enough range of approaches to promote independent learning skills.

Grade 3

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and has recently been improved. The curriculum provided meets the needs of all its students, including those in the sixth form. Good provision is made for pupils with English as a second language and a personal and social education programme covers aspects of personal development, citizenship, careers and health education. Students in the first three years of the school are provided with courses covering the National Curriculum and religious education; their work is also enriched with drama. For Year 10 students the school has developed a curriculum model which has broadened choice to meet the needs of students who have different learning needs. There are, for example, courses in performing arts, business administration and health and social care for those students who are suited to vocational study. Additional vocational opportunities are provided in liaison with a local college. The school does make satisfactory provision to develop students' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. The range of extra curricular activities and visits to extend students' knowledge and understanding of their work is limited.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory for students across the school, including those in the sixth form. Students are well supported through the pastoral system and by learning mentors who work with individuals and are available on a drop-in basis for students with emotional and social difficulties. An effective system for monitoring academic and personal development in order to identify potentially underachieving students is in place. There are strategies to ensure such students receive appropriate support. Students do not always receive the guidance they need, however, on how to

work independently and to take responsibility for their own learning. Students' transition from primary schools and their progression to higher education and training are managed effectively. Careers education and guidance are satisfactory. All students, including those on vocational courses in the sixth form, have opportunities for work experience. The progress of vulnerable pupils is monitored and they are well supported. Child protection procedures are satisfactory and there are effective systems in place to ensure the health and safety of all who work in the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent changes in the senior leadership team and the commitment of governors to redress past underachievement in the 11 to 16 sector of the school have strengthened the drive to raise standards. This has resulted in improved attainment in the 2005 test and examination results and in the standard of work being done now. For that reason the school's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. The school has a realistic picture of its weaknesses and what it needs to do to bring about change. It takes the views of students and parents into account when deciding development priorities. The challenge facing leaders and managers is to evaluate, at regular intervals, how well they are doing on the road to improvement and to act if the upward trend falters. This has started to be done successfully, for example, in holding individual teachers to account for the performance of their classes. December's improved Year 11 trial examination results in English and mathematics are also an indication that these new strategies are having an impact. The tracking of students' progress is now effective in identifying and tackling underachievement. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are aware of the task ahead and they are closely involved in turning things around and giving students a better deal. Leadership and management in the sixth form are satisfactory and students progress and achieve at expected levels. The school is adequately staffed but needs to expand its senior leadership team. There is an appropriate range of good quality resources to support students' learning and the school gives satisfactory value for money.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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26 Jan 2006

Dear Students

We would like to thank you for the welcome we received and the time many of you gave to talk to us when we came to inspect your school. We would like to inform you of the outcome of our visit.

We found that you are making satisfactory progress in your work and that your school does many things well.

You have a positive attitude to work and you show respect for each other and for the adults who work in your school.

You have the personal qualities which will enable you to succeed in life.

You are well cared for and feel safe from any form of intimidation or bullying.

Your teachers and the inspectors found two things to work on to make your education even better.

Give you the confidence and belief in yourselves to attain higher standards.

Ensure that all teaching stretches you and makes you think for yourselves and be more independent.

We would like to wish you and your school every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Brian Dower

Lead Inspector