



John F Kennedy Roman Catholic School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117557
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280117
Inspection dates 2 March 2006 to 3 March 2006
Reporting inspector Dr. Barbara Hilton LI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Hollybush Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		HP1 2PH
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 266150
Number on roll	1073	Fax number	01442 250014
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Margaret Steed
Date of previous inspection	15 May 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Bernadette Jenkins

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 2 March 2006 - 3 March 2006	Inspection number 280117
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The John F Kennedy Roman Catholic School is a specialist technology school and is popular. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average. Relatively few are eligible for free school meals, but more come from minority ethnic backgrounds than the average, nationally. All speak English fluently. The proportions with special educational needs and with statements are below average. Few students join or leave the school other than at the usual times. Partnership arrangements with other local schools and a college extend 14-19 and sixth form opportunities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the school is outstanding. The school recognises its considerable strengths but cautiously judged its own effectiveness as good. Results at the end of Year 9 and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are consistently high and represent very good progress. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding because the care, guidance and support provided for students are excellent. Teaching and learning and the curriculum in the main school are good. Leadership and management by the headteacher, governors and senior staff are excellent and have successfully steered improvements since the last inspection. Excellent relationships and very high expectations are backed by detailed planning. Specialist technology status has had considerable impact on developments. Standards have risen significantly and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons has greatly improved. Provision for gifted and talented students is a key feature of provision. Design and technology courses are wide-ranging and very popular. Links with partner schools are exemplary, benefiting greatly provision for older students. The school provides very good value for money. Its capacity to improve further is good, because of the excellence of its leadership and students' attitudes, and developments in teaching, learning and the curriculum.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school's sixth form is effective. Standards of attainment are average and in some subjects above average. Students make good progress overall. Retention rates are well above average and a high number of students progress to university education. Teaching and learning are good and the majority of students achieve their predicted grades. However, individual targets are not sufficiently challenging for the students in all the subjects. Curricular provision through the West Dacorum Partnership for Learning is exemplary with a wide range of traditional and vocational courses, but a few students choose courses which are not well matched to their abilities. Support and guidance for the students' personal development are high quality. Students enjoy the many opportunities provided in the sixth form. They develop very well-rounded personalities. The sixth form is led effectively and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all sixth form students enrol on courses that suit their needs and abilities and further raise their achievement by setting consistently challenging targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' progress up to GCSE is very good. Results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are well above national averages, both overall and in each of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. High standards are consistently maintained. Results have risen further since the last inspection, when they were already well above average. As a specialist school, an extensive range of opportunities supports high achievement in technology subjects and improved use of data has focused efforts to raise standards overall. Challenging targets are effectively used, especially in the main school, so that all groups of students achieve notably well. Achievement is particularly good in mathematics, as well as in business studies and history. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved substantially since the last inspection and are good. Students on the vocational course in horticulture achieve very well, in terms of academic achievement and the responsibilities they undertake. Sixth formers achieve well on the whole. Results at Advanced level are generally average or above, and particularly good in art, sociology and design and technology. A small number of students with modest GCSE results continue studying subjects they like but find Advanced level difficult, and underachieve. Virtually all stay for the full length of their courses and progress onto further or higher education or gain employment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Attendance continues to be good. The school's strong Catholic ethos pervades its daily life and contributes greatly to students' outstanding spiritual development. Teachers develop students' self-confidence very effectively. Students' belief in themselves and 'can do' attitude help them to achieve high standards. They are very aware of moral and social issues and address others with a great deal of respect. They behave exceptionally well during lessons and at other times. Bullying is very rare. Students say teachers manage any such incidents with great care. They learn about other world faiths, religions and cultures and are exceptionally well prepared to take their place within contemporary British society. Students thoroughly enjoy their time at school and are keen to make the most of the many opportunities, including the extensive extracurricular programme. They work hard and their enthusiasm helps them to make rapid progress. Students fully understand the importance of adopting a safe and healthy lifestyle. The school was recently accredited as a Healthy School. Year and school councils are very well established and students have been a driving force behind numerous improvements to school life. Students' impressive personal qualities, and very strong basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, are preparing them exceptionally well for their future lives and the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school rightly judges teaching and learning to be good, and it is more consistently so than at the last inspection. The focus on improving teaching and learning, which includes increased monitoring by senior staff, has had positive impact on overall quality. Students respond readily to teachers' high expectations; they try hard, take pride in their work and so progress rapidly. Excellent relationships create a very positive learning environment. Teachers have good subject knowledge and ensure that lessons are well planned with clear objectives. Explanations are apt and move students on in their learning. Many teachers are using ICT effectively in lessons. Teachers have a real appreciation of how students learn and cultivate their study skills effectively. Students readily ask questions and share their understanding. Work is well matched to their abilities. Marking is frequent and supportive so that students know how to improve. Teachers are increasingly using detailed assessment information to set targets for improvement although this practice is not fully consistent across the school. Students with learning difficulties receive good support in lessons. Teaching in the sixth form is good. In the very best lessons students are supportively challenged and encouraged to become independent learners. Successful teachers ensure that students understand the requirements of the examination. Students generally achieve the targets set for them based on their prior attainment. In some subjects expectations are raised and more demanding targets set in order to raise the achievement of students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Inspectors confirm that the curriculum in the main school is good and much improved since the last inspection. In the first three years the National Curriculum is broadened with drama, dance (in the Physical Education curriculum and as an extra curricular activity) and extensive opportunity to use ICT, which is much strengthened since the last inspection. All students study French and a second modern language is introduced in Year 9, but the time allocated for this is low. A good range of subjects is offered in Years 10 and 11 which, reflecting the school's specialist status, includes extensive choice of technology options. Appropriate time is given to personal and social development that includes regular guidance, for example, in careers. Very good opportunities are provided for students who are gifted and talented. A major development is the partnership with other local schools to widen opportunities both within the usual timetable and also through activities after school. Considerable flexibility is offered to meet the varied interests, aspirations and abilities of students aged 14 to 19. Significant numbers of students pursue vocational courses by attending college one day each week. Courses in ICT and horticulture are provided in school but applied GCSE options are limited by the restricted accommodation. Subject opportunities are greatly extended after school, for example, with opportunities for

bricklaying and to increase the single award GCSE in ICT to the double award. Special events are organised such as 'Technology Day' for higher ability students, 'Enrichment Week' with activities such as outward-bound courses, and 'Industry Day' to foster enterprise. Other popular activities within the extensive range of clubs include public speaking, astronomy and the Eco Club, and a strong Duke of Edinburgh Award programme. The sixth form curriculum is outstanding. An unusually wide range of courses is offered through the excellent partnership arrangement. The full range of extracurricular activities is available as well as extensive opportunities for taking responsibility within and beyond the school community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The welfare of students is given top priority and is excellent: members of staff work hard to meet students' needs. Rigorous procedures for health and safety, child protection and first aid ensure that students feel safe and are very well looked after. Links with external agencies are close. This very high standard of care helps students to enjoy coming to school, and to work hard and progress well. Systems for monitoring and reporting students' academic progress are thorough and very effective in the main school. Each term, teachers grade aspects of students' learning such as their effort and behaviour, along with their current target grades or levels. Students' progress towards targets is tracked carefully. Good teamwork helps to identify underachieving students who are offered additional support through the mentoring system. Students with learning disabilities are also well supported and their progress matches that of others. Students receive very good advice and guidance when choosing courses in Year 9. Careers guidance is very good. Every student in Years 10 and 11 is offered a personal interview with senior teachers and the Connexions personal adviser. In preparation for the sixth form, however, the guidance that students receive does not always move them into courses that best match their needs and abilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management by the headteacher, governors and senior colleagues have steered very considerable improvements since the last inspection. The impact of their efforts is outstanding in the main school, good in the sixth form and exceeds the school's own judgement, which is good throughout. Relationships are excellent. The climate for learning and support for students' personal development are outstanding, supported strongly by the Catholic ethos of the school. Students are respected as individuals and helped to do their best. The school monitors and evaluates its performance thoroughly. Overall improvement is managed very well, as reflected in the continued rise in Year 9 and GCSE results. Exemplary partnership with other local schools, colleges and businesses has resulted in an unusually good range of sixth form

courses, increased flexibility for 14-19 year olds and involvement in many projects. Specialist technology status has contributed substantially to course improvements through better use of data, partnership arrangements and ICT developments. Many opportunities are provided for students of all backgrounds and abilities, including the gifted and talented. Monitoring of teaching and the curriculum within departments is generally good but relatively little emphasis has been placed on the monitoring of cross-curricular developments, for example, citizenship and applications of ICT. Good account is taken of the views of students, parents and others connected with the school. Targets to raise achievement are used very successfully in the main school, and effectively in the sixth form. Staff are well qualified and well managed. Specialist equipment is appropriately provided, with computer facilities vastly increased since the last inspection. The school copes in cramped buildings, but proposals have finally been agreed to make long-overdue improvements to accommodation.

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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?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	1	
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

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

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?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
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 are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

Thank you for your welcoming and excellent behaviour when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers. Your comments have helped us to understand your school and what you enjoy and value about it. We thought that your school is outstanding, with a good sixth form. Notable strengths include: - Your progress which is very good, enabling you to achieve well above average results in Year 9 and at GCSE - Your personal development and well-being which are outstanding, because the school provides excellent care, support and guidance - Teaching which reflects high expectations and helps you to learn well - Excellent partnership arrangements with other local schools and a college, so that you can have a more flexible 14-19 curriculum and extensive choice in the sixth form - The very wide range of opportunities which have developed through your school having specialist status in technology - Outstanding leadership and management by the head teacher, governors and senior staff. As in nearly all schools there is something which could be better. The school needs to make sure that sixth formers enrol on courses which are always appropriate to their individual needs and match their interests, and that targets set for them are consistently challenging, so they can achieve even better.