



St Mary's Catholic College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119778
LEA Blackpool
Inspection number 280657
Inspection dates 24 January 2006 to 25 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Jim Bennetts

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	St Walburga's Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Blackpool
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		Lancashire, FY3 7EQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01253 396286
Number on roll	1231	Fax number	01253 305475
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr B McVittie
Date of previous inspection	1 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr S P Tierney

Age group 11 to 19	Inspection dates 24 January 2006 - 25 January 2006	Inspection number 280657
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic College has 1,076 pupils in the main school and 155 students in the sixth form. Pupils joining the college have a range of ability similar to that found nationally and they live in social circumstances which are similar to those found across the country and characteristic of seaside towns. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and none are at an early stage in learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national figure, although there are fewer with a statement of special educational need. St Mary's Catholic College considers its role as a faith community to be central to all its work. Since 2003, it has been a specialist school for mathematics and computing.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors and the college judge overall effectiveness to be good. Pupils make good progress: the 2005 results are the best in the college's history and compare well with the national and local picture. The college has improved over the last few years and action taken since the last inspection has been effective. Effective assessment and the tracking of pupils' progress are helping to raise achievement, particularly in Year 10 and Year 11, although more could sometimes be made of routine marking to inform progress. A more appropriate curriculum has been put together for those who thrive better with a vocational approach and the sixth form curriculum has been extended. Senior managers have held subject departments to account, and given robust support where necessary. A major redevelopment project has enhanced the college greatly. Pupils' attitudes are very positive and their behaviour is generally impressive; the college is vigilant about their welfare. There have been palpable improvements in all aspects of the college's work. Senior managers and governors are keen to secure further improvements. The recent track record of improvement shows that the school has very good capacity for further improvement. Attendance is lower than that in most secondary schools. The school gives good value for money.

not applicable

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Inspectors and the college agree that sixth form provision is good. About a third of pupils from Year 11 stay into the sixth form and are usually joined by a few from other schools. The curriculum comprises mostly academic courses leading to AS and full A level examinations, extended recently with the introduction of psychology, although a vocational course in travel and tourism has also recently been established. Many Year 11 leavers enrol on vocational programmes with other providers nearby. There is a good enrichment programme, which includes community service, such as well conceived input by art students at a children's home.

Standards across the curriculum were well above average in 2004. Results in 2005 were weaker and low outcomes in general studies affected the overall picture adversely. Business studies has particularly high results and is very popular; history, English and art and design also have a good track record. While most students make strong progress in their main subjects in relation to their attainment at GCSE, the college is aware that the tracking of possible underperformance could be improved. Students enjoy sixth form life and value the opportunities for socialisation. They feel that there are ample means for their views to be aired and they appreciate the support that the college gives them as individuals.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise attendance.

- Sustain support for the few departments where organisation needs strengthening, and raise the quality of teaching in the minority of classrooms where teaching is sometimes satisfactory rather than good.
- Build on the existing systems for assessment and the tracking of progress, by strengthening the database from which targets are set, promoting more widespread high quality marking of pupils' work, and extending the system robustly in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Though the college judges achievement and standards to be satisfactory, in view of recent improvement, inspectors judge them to be good.

Pupils joining the college have a range of attainment that is similar to that found nationally. Averaged over the last three years, GCSE results have shown that pupils make at least the progress generally expected. In 2005, 60% of pupils had at least five GCSE results at grade C or better and 96% had at least five lower grades. This compares favourably with the national picture and is considerably better than the standards generally achieved in the borough. It is a distinct improvement on 2004, with a 14% increase in the proportion gaining five good results: the best in the college's history.

National tests in Year 9 show that steady progress is made throughout the college. Good progress was apparent in the great majority of lessons seen. Boys and girls of all abilities make generally good progress: boys' and girls' results in Year 9 are identical; at GCSE girls do better to the same extent as nationally. Large disparities that were evident in the past have been overcome.

Over the last two or three years, the college has introduced and refined measures to monitor pupils' progress in relation to challenging but sensible targets based on tests taken when they join the college. Where pupils have been identified as at risk of underachieving by teachers' regular checks, they have been given close support by senior staff to aid their personal organisation and resolve with learning. Pupils speak highly of help in pacing their revision for GCSE and getting coursework completed to a proper standard. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those in personal circumstances where it is not easy to get to grips with schooling, have been particularly well supported. In the sixth form, students generally achieve well, particularly those who start from a strong GCSE base.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The college and inspectors agree that personal development is good. Most pupils enjoy coming to school, although attendance figures, which are below the national level, do not fully reflect this despite vigorous efforts by the school. Relationships are good and pupils get on well with each other. They say they feel secure and know how to deal with incidents of conflict or bullying. They are confident that such issues will be

tackled swiftly, and especially appreciate the support of trained peer mentors in the student care team.

There is an unequivocal code of behaviour. Whilst this has resulted in a higher than usual number of exclusions, pupils understand what is expected of them. Strategies to support those who are becoming disaffected, (for example, the progress unit in Years 10 and 11), are having a positive impact on attitudes and motivation. Behaviour overall is good in and out of lessons, and the college is an orderly, harmonious community. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is nurtured by the school's faith dimension. This distinctive Catholic ethos underpins pupils' very strong spiritual and cultural development.

Effective year and school councils represent pupils' views and contribute to improvements; pupils greatly value this. Healthy living is actively promoted through improved school meals and opportunities to participate in sport and exercise. Pupils have a good understanding of their responsibilities to the wider community; for example, through extensive charity fundraising. They are being prepared well for adult working life and the development of their literacy, numeracy, and computer skills is thorough. As a result, pupils become increasingly mature and confident young people as they progress through the college. Pupils' very positive views about the college are strongly endorsed by the vast majority of parents.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The college judges teaching as satisfactory. Inspectors found it good overall, with two thirds of lessons good or better. In good lessons, teachers set work that interested and stimulated pupils; expectations about what pupils could achieve were high and the pace, brisk. In weaker lessons, teachers did not set work of sufficient interest or challenge; sometimes they talked too much, expecting pupils to listen for too long. When this happened, pupils became bored and switched off. Teachers work hard to provide good role models for pupils and treat them with respect. Consequently, relationships are positive and helpful in motivating pupils to learn. Teachers know their subjects well; what they teach is accurate and well informed. Marking and assessment vary in quality. Marking is painstaking and helpful, with detailed comments showing pupils how to improve. But some books show little more than ticks or grades. The college has good systems for gathering and recording accurate and relevant data from test and examination results. There is very good practice in using this in setting targets for pupils and sharing these with them, though this is not consistent across the college. After substantial changes in staffing over the last few years, things are now fairly stable. There are good opportunities for continuing professional development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The college and inspectors judge the curriculum as good. There is now a range of relevant vocational courses in Years 10 and 11, and the sixth form has made a start with this. Successful work related learning for about a fifth of the pupils in Years 10 and 11 is secured through effective links with Blackpool and Fylde College. Work experience is substantial and effective. There is good quality work related learning for all. Pupils with learning difficulties and those who need help in learning English are very well supported. As a specialist school for mathematics and computing, information and communication technology (ICT) facilities have been greatly improved, 'virtual learning' has widened opportunities, and initiatives in partner schools and the wider community have gone well. The well planned personal, social, health and education (PSHE) programme effectively covers sex and drugs education as well as promoting skills in citizenship and personal relationships; it develops pupils' awareness of the world around them and their values within a caring Catholic ethos. Recent extension and restructuring of the school day ensures a proper allocation of time for all subjects; all statutory requirements are met. An innovative approach with ICT allows those who have met requirements to move on to wide ranging enrichment activities in Year 11. Extensive redevelopment of the school buildings has enhanced provision for many subjects, with excellent ICT suites and learning resource centre. There are satisfactory opportunities for extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the college that care, guidance and support are good. There is a high level of concern for, and commitment to, pupils' welfare. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds feel they have a trusted adult to whom they can turn to with any problem. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust; requirements for child protection and health and safety are firmly in place. The school works effectively with parents and others to ensure that all needs are met, especially for the more vulnerable. Links with feeder primary schools have been strengthened and good liaison helps pupils settle quickly into Year 7; a joint focus on younger boys' literacy has been productive. Pupils are given well informed and balanced guidance with options and when making career and post-16 choices for St Mary's sixth form or other colleges. Effective links are maintained with parents through regular progress reports and parents' evenings. But vigorous attempts to emphasise the need for good attendance are not yet leading to the necessary improvements. The vast majority of parents are very satisfied with the college; they and their children appreciate the care provided by staff. Academic progress is closely tracked in Years 10 and 11, and this has helped to raise performance. Pupils know their targets and how to improve their work at this stage; those likely to do less well than they should are identified and effective support is provided. Tracking progress in Years 7 to 9 is less effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The college and inspectors agree that leadership and management, including that of the sixth form, are good. Leaders recognised that there had been some underachievement leading to the 2004 GCSE results; they have taken strong action to rectify this. Close monitoring of the work of departments, improvements to the curriculum and better tracking of students' progress, particularly in relation to coursework completion, have led to a significant improvement in results in 2005. The senior team has a clear view of the school's main strengths and weaknesses and systems for self-evaluation form a sound basis for further improvement. The monitoring of teaching and learning is leading to improvements in classroom practice. Governors are experienced, know the school well and provide effective support to the headteacher and others. They are not afraid to hold the school to account. Issues from the previous inspection have been dealt with successfully and the school has dependable capacity to improve further. Resources are effectively deployed and financial management is secure. The school has good links with parents, other providers and external agencies, which further enhance the range of opportunities for its pupils.

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	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	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

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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St Mary's Catholic College

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FY3 7EQ

January 2006

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic College, Blackpool

Thank you for all the help that you gave us when we visited the college. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing the work that you were doing.

We think that St Mary's Catholic College is a good school; we found that it is good in all aspects of its work.

The 2005 results were the best the college has had and a marked improvement on those in 2004.

The arrangements for checking up on your progress, for making sure that GCSE coursework is complete, and for organising GCSE revision have been highly effective.

We saw 36 lessons; 20 were good and 3 outstanding. Books show that you generally take a pride in your work and what you are expected to do is suitably challenging. Some teachers take a lot of trouble to mark your work very thoroughly with advice about how you can improve.

Quite a number of things have been improved or sorted out over the last few years. There has been major renovation of the buildings. The range of subjects offered for those in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form has been broadened. Senior staff have done a lot of work with some subject departments to modernise teaching methods and improve the staffing.

From what we saw, you have very positive attitudes to school and behaviour in lessons and around the college is good. The college has firm policies on all aspects of conduct, with well understood sanctions when pupils do not do as they should. The great majority of pupils are very happy with school life and parents agree.

The college is very well run by the headteacher, senior staff and governors. You and your parents, almost without exception, strongly value all that the college and its teachers do for you.

Though the general picture is good in every respect, there are a few things that need to be done to make it even better.

The first is one for you to tackle. Attendance is lower than the national average. You cannot make progress if you are not in school. Of course, you cannot help being unwell sometimes. We can see that, in a holiday resort, where parents may work in 'the holidays' a few of you may have to take holidays in term time – but you need to persuade your parents to keep this to a minimum, particularly in examination years. But then, some of you now and again just don't feel like coming to school on certain days – and this can lead to embarrassment for your parents. A few of you need to do better on this.

Senior staff will build on their present good work in supporting improvements with teaching and the organisation of subject departments. The arrangements for tracking your progress will be further refined, particularly in lower school and the sixth form.

You are fortunate in being at such a good school. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Jim Bennetts

Her Majesty's Inspector