



St Joseph's College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131301
LEA Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 282194
Inspection dates 7 December 2005 to 8 December 2005
Reporting inspector John Evans HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	London Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Trent Vale
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 5NT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 848 008
Number on roll	806	Fax number	01782 745 487
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Michael Phelan
Date of previous inspection	2 October 2000	Headteacher	Ms Roisin Maguire

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Joseph's College is a selective Catholic school in Stoke-on-Trent. It has expanded rapidly over the last seven years and is now heavily oversubscribed. There is an entrance examination in order to gain admission. About three-quarters of the students are practising Catholics, the rest are practising members of another Christian denomination or another faith. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is very low at 3%. The percentage of students with special educational needs is also very low. There are 275 students in the sixth form, three times the number at the time of the last inspection in 2000. About 30% of students join the sixth form from other schools in the area. The school is designated a specialist science college with a subsidiary specialism in mathematics.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school is good with some outstanding features, and this matches the school's own assessment. As might be expected in a selective school, the standards reached at the end of Years 9 and 11 are very high. Students make good progress throughout the school because learning is extremely well organised and the progress of individual students is closely monitored.

There is a culture in which teachers collaborate and support each other strongly and good practice is readily shared. Teachers are well motivated and plan their lessons thoroughly to meet the needs of all students. The curriculum is good and students participate enthusiastically in an excellent range of extra curricular activities.

Within a learning community which strongly values each individual and holds high aspirations for them, students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. This feature of the school is strongly supported by the very high standards of care, support and guidance provided to students.

The headteacher and senior managers demonstrate outstanding leadership and have ensured that standards have continued to rise throughout a period of rapid expansion. The weaknesses identified in the last inspection have largely been addressed successfully and several, such as the quality of teaching and learning, have been turned into strengths. The school recognises that standards in mathematics require further improvement and standards in GCSE science are also not quite as good as they should be. The progress made so far towards the targets set for the specialist science college is only satisfactory. There remains a need to sharpen further the school's assessments of its overall academic performance, which currently focus only on the end of each key stage. The school provides very good value for money and its capacity to continue to improve is very strong.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. Standards reached in GCE A-level courses are above average overall, and well above average in many subjects. For most students this represents very good progress from their attainment on entry. Sixth formers are articulate and highly motivated. They provide excellent role models for students in the main school. In 2005, most students made particularly good progress in English literature, biology, French, music and business studies. A small minority of students did not make adequate progress in psychology and general studies, in the latter case because they put less effort into this course than into their other subjects. In most subjects, good quality teaching, well structured courses and students' mature attitudes and effort lead to high academic success. The sixth form is well led and managed. Confident teaching, careful monitoring of progress and sensitive encouragement are key features of success: students feel that teachers know and guide them very well. In 2005, 98% of the students who completed A-level courses went into higher education or further training.

What the school should do to improve further

• Develop more creative approaches to teaching mathematics to engage students more consistently and raise standards. • Continue to raise the level of GCSE performance in science and accelerate progress towards meeting the targets set for the specialist science college. • Ensure that managers have a more precise understanding of the progress being made by students in each year.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

As the school's intake is largely based on selective academic ability, standards on entry are well above those normally found. Students then go on to make good, and quite often outstanding, progress during their time in school. The school reached nearly all its challenging academic targets in 2005. It is alert to a slight weakness in students' achievement in mathematics and science, especially amongst the highest ability students, and is implementing effectively a programme of positive improvement.

The good overall academic progress throughout the school is the result of a powerful combination of thorough teaching, the close monitoring of individual students' progress and effective management. It is especially because students show a strong commitment to work, concentrate exceptionally well and thoroughly enjoy being at this school.

The 2005 GCSE examination results were the school's best ever for the proportion of entries, some 43%, achieving the top A* or A grades. In both 2004 and 2005 students tended to do best in English and religious studies. They tended to do worse in double science, though not the three separate sciences, and in French.

An unusual feature of the school is the good level of boys' achievement. Here, boys achieve slightly more than the girls and make noticeably better progress than boys do nationally. Available evidence suggests that the magic ingredient is the school's success in sensitively valuing and encouraging every student.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students really enjoy attending school. They enjoy the majority of their lessons, the range of other activities available to them and the friendly, supportive atmosphere. Attendance is well above the national average and exclusions are rare. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent; students are respectful, polite and tremendously supportive of each other. A very high proportion of students remain to continue their studies in the sixth form, where their personal development continues to be exceptional.

The school provides a very safe and secure environment. Bullying is very rare indeed, but students are very confident that any that did occur would be dealt with instantly and effectively. Most students adopt a healthy lifestyle. They have a good

understanding of the healthier options to choose from at mealtimes and a high proportion participates in extra curricular sports and exercise. There is an outstanding range of opportunities for learners of all age groups to contribute to the college community and to the community beyond. For example, many students run breakfast clubs and reading schemes in primary schools, support the elderly and the needy and are very active in raising funds for an extensive range of charities. Students' views are heard and acted upon via an effective school council and sixth formers carry out a substantial range of responsibilities in a relaxed and mature way. The school's strong religious ethos provides for excellent spiritual development and students' practical application of their faith is commendable. Their moral and social development is excellent and their cultural awareness is promoted effectively within subjects and through the wide range of cultural activities the school provides. Opportunities to undertake short secondments in businesses, work placements and the Young Enterprise Scheme help students to develop insights and skills which will support them well in their later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is consistently good and often outstanding in most subject areas, but satisfactory overall in mathematics. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and develop very productive relationships with the students, who are almost always eager to learn. Students are given good opportunities to contribute in lessons and to take responsibility for their learning, and the majority responds very well. The school's emphasis on lessons having clear learning objectives that are shared with students is bearing fruit. Most lessons are planned very well, using a good range of activities, and many make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to explain and illustrate concepts. In outstanding lessons, particularly in the main school, the pace of learning is rapid. Students of different abilities are challenged individually, questioning extends them to a deeper level and the enthusiasm of the teacher shines through. Some mathematics lessons lack pace and enjoyment.

Teachers assess the progress of individual students accurately and students know how well they are doing. Most of the time teachers provide clear written pointers for improvement. Teaching is strongly focused on strengthening examination performance and students are given good opportunities to assess themselves and each other. Their work is displayed extensively throughout the school. Students are very well supported by parents in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good in both the main school and the sixth form. Sufficient time is now provided for languages and design and technology. Whilst neither personal, social

and health education nor citizenship are taught as regular timetabled subjects, they are delivered effectively through other subjects and targeted activity days. Students have generally good access to ICT across the range of subjects, but statutory requirements are not fully met because this is not adequately planned in Years 10 and 11. The school has widened its range of courses in Years 10 and 11 to include applied GCSE in science, in keeping with its specialist status, and a vocational course in ICT. Whilst there are no intermediate level courses in the sixth form, the school has broadened the range of advanced level courses to include psychology, sociology and theatre studies and a vocational ICT course. Whole school, extra curricular provision is very good. Students are allowed in school very early to use computers. Music and sports feature strongly. There are many trips abroad, theatre visits, community work and residential experiences, usually in keeping with the Catholic ethos of the school. Students respond very positively to the high quality of what is on offer.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The outstanding provision in this area is very much appreciated by students and parents. An in-depth and very well organised transition programme welcomes incoming Year 7 students into the school community and gives them excellent support. In each year group, students' individual progress is monitored very thoroughly. Challenging targets are set and students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and how they can improve. Sixth formers particularly appreciate the periods of supervised study in Year 12 that support their independent study skills. Advice and guidance on courses and careers, from Year 9 through to the sixth form, are comprehensive and structured to meet the needs of all students. Newly appointed pastoral managers provide valuable support on non-academic issues and the school makes good use of an appropriate range of external agencies. Opportunities for parents to make their views known to the school have been strengthened by the headteacher and are now extensive.

Health and safety procedures are securely in place and child protection arrangements are well organised and reviewed regularly. There are very good procedures in place to support vulnerable students. Excellent provision is made for the small number of students with special learning needs. Targets are set and reviewed very regularly and their progress is monitored very closely. Links with their parents are very good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding aspects. The headteacher and her senior team provide outstanding leadership, with high expectations for staff and students, within a highly caring environment in which every individual is valued and everyone's success is celebrated. Teachers are very committed and have high aspirations for themselves as well as their students. As a result, the vast majority respond positively to new initiatives and the sharing of good practice has become habitual.

A rigorous approach to lesson observations and performance management provides managers with an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Checking the effectiveness of assessment, however, does not take place sufficiently regularly to ensure that high standards are consistently maintained. Managers analyse students' progress in detail at the end of each key stage, but do not yet do enough to judge students' actual or relative progress in the intervening years.

Governors are very committed to the school. They are well informed about the performance of the school and individual subjects and this helps them to support and challenge school managers effectively.

Subject leadership is improving and is already very good in subjects such as English, science and religious education. Satisfactory progress is being made towards the targets set for the specialist science college and good practice in science is being effectively shared across and outside the school. The school is taking steps to improve the remaining weaknesses in mathematics.

The school's first self-evaluation involved all staff, but not parents or governors. It provides a largely accurate appraisal of the school's performance, although it understates some of the school's strengths. The continuously rising standards, quality of leadership and strong culture of high aspirations demonstrate a very good capacity to make this an outstanding school.

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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	1
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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	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

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	1	
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	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?	1	1

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	1	
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	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

St Joseph's College London Road Trent Vale Stoke-on-Trent ST4 5NT

9 December 2005

Dear students

Several weeks ago a small team of Ofsted inspectors visited your school. We would like to thank you for being so helpful, friendly and courteous towards us. Here are our main findings. We feel St Joseph's is a good school with some outstanding features, such as your own personal development and qualities. We were very impressed by how much you enjoy the school, and feel that your behaviour, attendance and positive attitude to learning are all extremely good. You achieve excellent results at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 and the standards achieved in the sixth form are better than average. This is because the school enables you to make good progress at each key stage, especially in the sixth form. Most lessons are very well planned by your teachers, who are mostly very good at making sure each of you is challenged at the right level. They have a good variety of activities and move at a fast pace to keep you engaged. The school provides very good care, guidance and support to all its students. Because the school is very well led and the leadership of most subjects is good, it has been able to maintain high standards and make further improvements even as the number of students attending the school has grown considerably. The inspectors feel that the school is very capable of improving further and if the following improvements are made, will be well on the road to becoming an outstanding school:

- Develop more imaginative and exciting ways of teaching mathematics so you find it more interesting and achieve higher standards.
- Continue to improve GCSE results in science and make more progress towards meeting the targets set for the specialist science college.
- Develop a clearer picture of how much progress is being made across the school in each year.

Thank you for the way in which you represented your school and yourselves so well during our time with you. We wish you well.

Yours faithfully

John G Evans HMI