

St James' Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101364
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	286045
Inspection dates	17–18 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Gill Close HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1110
6th form	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr C Wicks
Headteacher	Mrs A O'Shea
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001
School address	Great Strand Colindale London NW9 5PE
Telephone number	020 8358 2800
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Age group	11–18
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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

Students come from a wide area within and beyond the borough of Barnet, with a quarter living nearby. They have a range of socio-economic backgrounds and an average proportion is eligible for free school meals. Half of the students are from minority ethnic groups. One sixth of the students speaks a first language other than English, of whom a very small number is at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is above average as is the number with a statement of special educational need. Attainment on entry to the school has risen and is above average. The number of students in the sixth form has increased since the last inspection. The school became a specialist science and sports college in September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school in which parents and students express great confidence. The quality of teaching and support is good and enables students to make good progress overall. This progress is strongest as students approach the GCSE examinations because of the school's thorough focus on preparation for assessments, which enables the students to reach above average standards. Most teaching is good or better, but some does not involve students actively enough in work that is matched to their needs. This contributes to students' satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 and in some subjects.

Students' personal development and well-being are excellent. Particular strengths are the students' high attendance, respect for others and participation in community activities. The school's strong Catholic ethos and commitment to care and inclusion underpin the good support that helps students benefit from the curriculum and relate well to all members of the school community. This enables students with learning difficulties or disabilities to make good progress. All students welcome the support from teachers and tutors, which is informed by the improved use of data, but data have not been employed to identify underachieving students early enough to help them make good progress throughout their time in school.

There are good features in the curriculum, such as provision to meet individual needs and a wealth of enrichment activities. Nevertheless, it is satisfactory overall because, for students in Years 10 and 11, there are restrictions in the range of courses in design and technology and in languages, less than the recommended time for physical education (PE), and statutory requirements in information and communication technology (ICT) are not met.

Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher has successfully engendered a keen impetus across the staff and introduced new systems which are leading to improvements. Senior and middle leaders are involved well in monitoring, evaluating and planning, which are effectively identifying the main areas for improvement and appropriate actions. However, they are not sharply enough focused on students' progress to raise this quickly in the areas where it is satisfactory. The improvements the school has made demonstrate its good capacity for continued improvement.

The school has used its specialist status well to benefit the students and the community, for example through increased physical fitness, participation in the leadership programme and provision of ICT resources. The school has met its specialist status targets.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has a good sixth form. Current students are achieving well overall as they are making progress that is consistently at least as expected and in some subjects it is better. They reach broadly average standards, having started their courses with a wide range of attainment. Students' personal development is outstanding. Their attendance is high. They work hard and willingly take responsibility, for example in their enthusiastic help for younger students in gaining basic skills.

Teaching is good. Students praise the help and encouragement given in lessons and outside, especially as external examinations approach. They respond effectively to questions but are not always encouraged strongly enough to be proactive in discussions or in seeking to secure their understanding. The good curriculum offers wide choices of A and AS level subjects, and

a popular sports leadership course, although vocational options are limited. Care, support and guidance are good with much input from teachers and tutors to aid students' progress, informed by increasing use of data. Good guidance is provided in preparation for university but students would like more comprehensive careers information.

The sixth form is well led and managed. Leaders have a clear sense of purpose and high expectations of work and commitment from students. Self-evaluation is thorough and has contributed effectively to improvements in students' progress. Although there are good resources for independent learning, the accommodation places restrictions on the expanding sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- focus development planning, evaluation and monitoring more closely on students' progress
- use assessment more effectively to track students' progress and intervene as soon as necessary
- raise the quality of teaching to ensure it meets all students' needs and involves them all more actively in their learning
- increase the breadth of the curriculum to better meet students' needs and aspirations, and ensure that statutory requirements in ICT are met.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students make good progress to reach above average standards by the end of Year 11. Standards at Key Stage 4 have risen markedly, particularly in the proportion obtaining five grades A* to C at GCSE, and are above average. At both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 standards have risen since the last inspection. The school has evidence that students are on track to make better progress than last year. They are making satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 and good progress in Key Stage 4. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities are currently making good progress.

Students in the sixth form make good progress overall. There is variation between subjects and courses, with satisfactory progress in some and better progress in others. Students enter the sixth form with a range of prior attainment and reach broadly average standards. In the 2006 A level and vocational examinations, standards were broadly in line with national averages, with attainment at AS level being better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their enjoyment of school is evident from their excellent attendance and extremely positive attitudes. They feel particularly safe and well cared for. They get on very well with each other and adults. They share the school's ethos and have a strong sense of community.

The good behaviour of students makes a valuable contribution to the school's calm atmosphere. Students say there is rarely any bullying and, when there is, there are good systems in place for support. Students' spiritual, social, cultural and moral development is excellent. They make an outstanding contribution to the community within the school and beyond, which has contributed to their good preparation for the future. Examples of this are the work of the

school's environment group the e-squad, the way views are expressed through the successful school councils, and students' involvement in charity activities, work experience placements in local businesses and the leadership skills programme.

The majority of students have a secure understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and many take enthusiastic advantage of the opportunities offered to them to increase their physical fitness, which has improved since the school became a specialist college. However, there is not the recommended time for PE in Key Stage 4 and sixth form students do not all have the opportunity to participate in physical activities. The Healthy Families project has been extremely successful in encouraging many students and parents to adopt an active lifestyle. The school has achieved the Healthy School award. Healthy food options are being taken by the majority of students at break times and lunchtime.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, enabling students to achieve well in tests and examinations. There is a good rapport between students and teachers based on mutual respect. Teachers are very successful in creating a classroom environment which motivates students to work hard and take pride in their work. The majority of lessons include a variety of teaching styles which enable most students to make good progress.

Teachers display good subject knowledge. Their good knowledge and explanation of examination and test requirements helps students to assess and improve their work. Students feel well supported by their teachers through booster and revision sessions in preparation for their tests and examinations. Teaching assistants are well trained and managed to ensure that students with learning difficulties are well supported. As a result, these students achieve as well as their peers.

In the best lessons observed, teachers had high expectations, ensured a brisk pace, regularly assessed students' understanding through different levels of questioning, and included activities that students were given time to discuss together. This calibre of lesson generated understanding and rapid progress, as well as the kind of enjoyment not always seen in other lessons. In a number of subjects, teachers and students made effective and imaginative use of ICT and other resources.

Satisfactory lessons seen were generally well organised, but too much time was spent on whole class teaching at the expense of a variety of differentiated tasks to meet students' needs and involve them more actively in their learning. In some of these lessons, low expectations and lack of challenge led to passiveness and inhibited students' initiative and understanding.

The effectiveness of assessment varies. Much marking gives students constructive advice on how to move their learning forward, although some does not. There are good examples where students' assessment of their own work and that of their peers is used effectively to raise their awareness of standards achieved and how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory because it has breadth and balance, places appropriate emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy, and matches the needs of most learners. Good features include the quality of support provided for students with weak reading and writing skills which helps them exploit the range of opportunities for learning that the full curriculum offers. Also, vocational courses extend the range of the curriculum, including some offered at the nearby college. However, there are some aspects of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 that are not as strong. The range of courses in design and technology is limited, students can study only one language, and less than the recommended time is devoted to teaching PE. Provision for teaching ICT has improved since the school was last inspected. However, the school is not ensuring that all students in Years 10 and 11 are taught the ICT curriculum and is therefore not meeting statutory requirements. The sixth form curriculum is good because the range of A and AS level courses is broad although there is limited provision for vocational courses.

There is a wealth of well-attended enrichment activities that contribute greatly to the personal development of students. They include clubs that extend the thinking of gifted and talented students or provide helpful support for those finding it difficult to mix easily. Participation in Outward Bound ventures and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme has been very successful in building team spirit, leadership skills and overall confidence.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support for students' personal and academic development are good. Students appreciate the great deal of support they receive from the pastoral system and from subject teachers. Very good attention to health and safety matters ensures that students are in an environment where they feel particularly safe. Good care is provided for students with learning difficulties or disabilities, those recognised as vulnerable, and any groups who might be disadvantaged, such as those learning English as an additional language. These students are very well supported in one-to-one and small group settings although the needs of students with learning difficulties or disabilities are not always so well addressed when they are in classes. There are very good links with external agencies and parents to help students overcome their difficulties.

There have been recent marked improvements in the central recording of assessment data. Staff have used data effectively for students approaching national assessment, to identify those at risk of underachieving and provide support. The school has rightly recognised the need for earlier identification of underachieving students and greater consistency in making and using assessment. It has already introduced measures accordingly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher's strong leadership sets a clear vision for improved standards and personal development within the school's Catholic ethos. Staff share this common goal and work together very well towards it. There is notable energy and drive for improvement. Many good systems have been set in place and are having a good impact on student outcomes and staff expertise. The school has identified correctly its strengths and weaknesses by building effectively on analyses and the views of students, parents and staff in its evaluation. The issues requiring improvement are being addressed through well targeted action, although plans lack criteria for judging their impact on students' progress and personal development. Since the last inspection, senior and middle managers have made a more strategic contribution and are much more involved in evaluation and development planning. They monitor the quality of teaching regularly, but this could be sharper in its focus on students' progress and in identifying areas for improvement to be built on through subsequent professional development and evaluation.

Governors are very supportive of the school and have contributed effectively to the eradication of a budgetary deficit. There is room for them to provide sharper support and challenge to help the school move forward more rapidly. There are a few areas in which statutory requirements are not fully met.

The school has made improvements in all of the areas identified at the last inspection, although there is still need for further development in some. For example, the management of provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is now good. Together with other recent improvements, these demonstrate the school's good capacity to continue to improve.

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Annex A

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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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	3
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
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?	3	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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

4 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St James' Catholic High School, London, NW9 5PE

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited recently and for taking the time to tell us about your school. We found that your school is a good school. You make good progress to reach above average standards in Year 11. Your progress is much better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Those of you in the sixth form make good progress and reach average standards. Most teaching is good or better, but sometimes the work is too easy or too hard for some of you, or you spend too much time listening. On these occasions you do not have the chance to work together on activities and develop the responsibility to take the initiative in your own learning.

Your personal development is outstanding. In your very caring school, you show excellent respect for others and contribution to the school and wider community. Your outstanding attendance shows that you enjoy school. You appreciate the great deal of support you receive from the staff. We found that they are using assessment data effectively to keep track of your progress and give you extra help before tests and examinations. They have started to help you do even better by spotting sooner if you might not meet your targets, and we agree that this needs more improvement.

The curriculum is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. You participate keenly in a good range of enrichment activities but there are some restrictions in Key Stage 4 in the range of courses for languages and design and technology, the time for PE and access for all of you to the ICT curriculum.

The school is well led. The headteacher and staff work together very well and know how good the school is. They have recently brought about many improvements. To help the school become even better, we have asked it to:

- check your progress more thoroughly so that staff can help you sooner if you might not meet your targets or could do better
- make sure that more lessons help you to take the initiative in your learning and include challenging activities where you can work together
- provide more courses for languages and design and technology, more time for PE and access for all to the ICT curriculum in Years 10 and 11
- help you to do better by checking more closely how well the changes it introduces and the teaching contribute to your progress.

With our best wishes for your success at school and in helping the school to improve.

Gill Close HMI