



St Gregory RC High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 101563
Local Authority Brent
Inspection number 286110
Inspection dates 18–19 September 2006
Reporting inspector Emma Ing HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Donnington Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Kenton
Age range of pupils	11–18		Harrow HA3 0NB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02089078828
Number on roll (school)	1000	Fax number	02089091161
Number on roll (6th form)	163		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Alloysius Frederick
		Headteacher	Mr Martin Earley
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	18–19 September 2006	286110

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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 Gregory's Catholic Science College is an average-sized comprehensive school serving a wide area of North West London. Students come from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds and an above average proportion speak English as an additional language, many travel some distance to attend the school. The school's intake includes rather more boys than girls. Attainment on entry is broadly average and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. The school was designated as a specialist science college in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The students of St Gregory's, together with their parents, are proud of their school and are happy with all that it offers. One parent commented of her son 'He just can't wait to get to school in the mornings' and, of the many students that inspectors spoke to; all expressed their enjoyment of school life. Students work hard in lessons and join in with activities outside lessons such as clubs, sport and community work. Their behaviour around the school is exemplary. They explain that they are well cared for and they feel safe in their school.

The school sets clear and high expectations of students both in terms of their behaviour, the effort that they put into their schoolwork and the academic standards to be reached. These are shared with parents effectively.

Lessons are well planned to support learning. Steps have been taken to help students understand their targets and what they need to do to improve, but most lessons are strongly directed by the teacher and students are not widely encouraged to become independent learners. Nevertheless, good progress is made by students from their entry to the school in Year 7 until their GCSEs. Standards at both key stages are good. By the age of 16, most students attain five or more good GCSE passes. In most year groups there are some who are not able to reach this level. The school has made efforts to encourage them to continue attending school and to find them some alternative courses. It has not, however, devised methods to respond flexibly to such students' interests and aspirations and does not offer a wide enough curriculum to meet their needs. A few of these do not find their way into education, employment or training after the age of 16.

About half of Year 11 chooses to leave St Gregory's in order to attend courses at other schools and colleges. For some, this is because the school does not offer courses at a suitable level. Those that do stay make average progress but a high proportion goes on to study at university.

The leaders of the school are committed and have in place very good systems aimed at securing improvement. In many areas they have achieved success and there is no doubt that this is a good school with some very good features. Leadership is strong but very centralised with little opportunity for middle managers to take a leading role in school-wide issues. Whilst self evaluation and performance management are consistently in place, many of the targets that leaders set for themselves and others lack sharp focus and cannot be incisively monitored. Leaders have not found innovative solutions in order to establish the school as outstanding. Nevertheless the school has demonstrated its good capacity to make improvements.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has a good sixth form. Particularly strong features are the attitudes and personal development of the students. Sixth formers are mature, articulate and very

positive about the school; relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students are well cared for and are given very helpful guidance and support. A very large proportion goes on to university when they leave.

The sixth form is well led and managers have carried out a number of actions to develop and improve this aspect of the school's work. Although these changes have already had a positive effect in a number of areas, they have not yet had a full impact on examination results, which are only broadly average. One focus for development has been the quality of teaching in the sixth form and this has clearly had an impact. Teachers plan and deliver well structured and interesting lessons; students respond well and show good progress in their learning. The sixth form curriculum is, however, rather limited and does not offer a sufficient breadth of courses. In particular, the range of vocational and applied courses is very limited. This and a number of other factors mean that many students do not stay on in the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop leadership within the school by sharpening the targets set by leaders for themselves and others and by giving middle managers wider opportunities to contribute to the leadership of the school.
- Review the curriculum offered in the light of the needs and aspirations of students and develop a more flexible range of courses to offer to students aged 14–19.
- Support students to become more independent and responsible for their own learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students make good progress in both Key Stages 3 and 4. The prior attainment of most year groups is broadly average, but as a result of the good progress made by students, standards at the end of both key stages are above average.

A recent focus on stretching more able students has had a marked impact on the standards reached by this group, particularly in Key Stage 3. It is now the case that all groups of students make good progress in English, mathematics and science at this level.

At Key Stage 4 students are meeting challenging targets. They made good progress in 2006. The school recognises that a number of students need to be supported to ensure that a greater proportion gains a good pass in both English and mathematics. The work of the school to achieve this has already made a difference and fewer students are missing these important goals.

Most students in the sixth form stay on to complete their courses. Attainment is broadly average and the progress made by students is satisfactory. Many sixth form students go on to university.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of students at St Gregory's is outstanding. They enjoy and have a great affection for their school, as reflected in good attendance and punctuality. They are bright, well-behaved and enthusiastic both within lessons and throughout the school. They appreciate the clear boundaries that are set for them about behaviour. One student explained, 'School is strict, in a good way'. The spiritual and moral development of students is very strong, reflecting the Catholic values of the school.

Students feel safe and know that there are adults who care for them in school. They are enabled to adopt a healthy lifestyle through the curriculum, extra-curricula activities and changes in the canteen. The school council provides students with an effective voice and has been good at making changes in the school. There is a prefect system and some mentoring done by older students, but there is scope for further development of this side of student involvement in the school. Students' cultural awareness is well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Nearly all of the lessons at this school are good. This is because they are well planned and organised and because teachers take into account the needs and abilities of individual students well. Teachers create a positive environment in the classroom, with clear structure and support for students. They often use skilful questioning techniques and probing tasks as part of their teaching, helping students to think more deeply about what they are learning. In an English lesson, for example, students were asked to match characters from a Shakespeare play with different visual symbols and explain their choices. Students with additional learning needs are well supported in lessons, with structured individual plans that clearly identify appropriate targets.

Students are, however, sometimes rather passive in lessons. There are limited opportunities made for them to learn independently and take responsibility for their learning. Where students are offered these opportunities, they respond very positively. This was seen in a very good PE lesson, where students planned and led a substantial part of the session.

Assessment is thorough and is used to plan teaching and to support learning. Students know and understand their targets and are clear about how to improve their work. Marking is clear and helpful.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum offered by the school is good. The formal curriculum is enriched by a variety of clubs and out of school learning which greatly benefit students. Students have opportunities to learn about the world of work but there are gaps in the financial knowledge of some.

Progress information from primary schools and additional assessment results are used to identify the needs of students at an early stage. A support programme in Year 7 is used effectively to help those students identified as having trouble with reading and all departments take responsibility for developing students' literacy skills.

At Key Stage 4 the school guides students into one of four pathways. Three of these offer academic options. The fourth provides some vocational options. However, although steps have been taken to broaden the curriculum for students at Key Stage 4, this does not yet fully meet the needs and aspirations of all the students and does not extend into the sixth form for those whose attainment is below 5 A*-C at GCSE.

Enthusiasm for the school's specialism in science is built up early through lessons run for Year 5 and Year 6 students and a science summer school. Good links with primary schools have been developed and are working well. Other curriculum areas have felt the benefit of the science college status as a result of the introduction of interactive white boards and other computer facilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care guidance and support of students is an outstanding feature of the school. The school has high expectations of its students, both academically and socially and support is in place to enable these to be met. Vulnerable students, those with special educational needs, or for whom English is an additional language, are effectively identified and care and support is given to enable them to make good progress. Careful target setting and tracking enables all students to be aware of their progress and achievement. The arrangements for safeguarding students and child protection are sound.

Links with parents are robust and valued by parents, one of whom commented, 'I have always felt welcomed in the school. Any concerns have always been addressed'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership of the school is very strong in terms of sustaining a positive ethos and in caring for and supporting the development of well-rounded and responsible young adults. Over time the academic performance of students has steadily improved and the leadership has secured a position whereby good progress is made in Key Stages 3 and 4. The school is a harmonious community and runs smoothly.

Good systems are in place to enable leaders at all levels to evaluate the effectiveness of their work but are not always used with sufficiently sharp focus to have full effect. Nevertheless the school has identified significant areas for improvement and made steps towards these. One of such area has been the development of the skills and roles of middle managers. This was effectively planned for and implemented, and the school is now benefiting from the work staff are doing in improving teaching and ensuring that learning is even more effective. There is scope for further developing these roles and the way in which staff can contribute more fully to the development of the school as a whole.

The governance of the school has improved since the last inspection. The governing body is now well organised and governors take an active role in planning improvement for the school and ensuring its success in the future. They monitor progress against targets but do not systematically monitor the impact of the actions taken by the leadership of the 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	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	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	3

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	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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
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 to below 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	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	2	
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

Thank you for looking after us so well when we came to inspect your school recently. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. If you would like to read more, you will find greater detail in the rest of the report.

We judged St Gregory's to be a good place to learn. What impressed us more than anything was the excellent behaviour and attitudes of you, the students. You were extremely friendly and polite and very willing to share your thoughts and ideas. The atmosphere around the site was exceptionally good and all the students that we spoke to were very positive about the school. We were also impressed by the way that staff care for you and help you to develop. Many of you spoke enthusiastically about the support that form tutors and others provide.

Teachers at St Gregory's plan and teach their lessons well and we could see that you enjoy learning. As a result, examination results are good, particularly at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. We did, however, think that there weren't enough opportunities for you to take a more active part in your learning and work more independently. We have asked the school to develop this area in the future.

Apart from this, we found that there were two key things that the school could do to improve further. Firstly, we were surprised that more of you don't stay on into the sixth form, particularly as you are so positive about the school. We think that one of the reasons for this is that the range of courses offered to you is rather limited. Whilst the school has increased the range of courses that you can follow in Years 10 and 11, more could be offered here too. We have asked the school to look at this to see what other courses they could offer at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. You will have a vital role to play in making these changes, as it is important for staff to get a clear picture of which courses would be right for you. Secondly, while we found that the school was well led and managed, we suggested some further improvements in this area. These will help St Gregory's move from strength to strength.

You have a very committed group of staff who are seeking to make a good school even better. We wish you well and look forward to hearing good things about you all in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Ing HMI