

St Peter's Catholic School and Specialist Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104119
Local Authority	Solihull
Inspection number	286862
Inspection dates	15 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Nada Trikić 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	1247
6 th form	239
Appropriate authority	Governing Body
Chair	Mr Michael Cusack
Headteacher	Mrs F M McGarry
Date of previous school inspection	18-22 March 2002
School address	Whitefields Road Solihull West Midlands B91 3NZ
Telephone number	0121 7053988
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. Evidence was gathered from: achievement and attainment information; observation of lessons; discussions with senior and middle leaders, talking to samples of pupils across all years; scrutiny of documentation provided by the school, and pupils' work; feedback and questionnaires from parents, and general observations throughout the day.

Description of the school

St Peter's School is larger than most secondary schools. It became a specialist science college in September 2003. The great majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds with Irish pupils forming the largest sub group. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is significantly below the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is also well below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Peter's School is providing a good standard of education. Leaders have made good use of its specialist status in science to improve resources and to extend and enrich the curriculum. As a result the curriculum is good and developing further to meet the needs of pupils. Pupils are very positive about increased opportunities to participate in practical work, and special themed events such as 'building rockets'. Opportunities extend to link primary schools which support a successful induction to the school.

Leaders have created a secure learning environment where pupils feel safe. This contributes to their good personal development and well-being, which is very well supported by parents. Pupils are positive about the school and appreciate the good care, support and guidance they receive. Provision for out of hours learning, including educational visits, is good and this enhances experiences, attitudes and motivation. Pupils feel their voices are heard through the school council, and enjoy taking responsibility as prefects, form captains, and peer mediators. They show awareness of the needs of others and take charity fund raising very seriously. These opportunities contribute to pupils' good awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. The majority of pupils behave very well and show respect for the school and one another. However, a very small minority do not consistently meet the school's expectation and this is an issue of concern for some parents.

Pupils enter the school with standards which are well above national averages. These outstanding standards are maintained at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, despite a dip in 2006. The academic progress that pupils make from joining the school to the end of Year 11 is judged to be good overall although there are differences between key stages. Progress in Key Stage 3 was satisfactory in 2004 and 2005, but by the end of Key Stage 3 in 2006, pupils made less than expected progress, especially in English. The school's analysis for current Year 9 pupils indicates that they will make satisfactory progress. Overall progress in Key Stage 4 has been consistently good in recent years, though progress varies across subjects. Current assessments for Year 11 indicate an improvement on this through the use of intervention activities to keep pupils on track. This pattern of progress can be explained partly by a period of staffing turbulence which school leaders have worked hard to minimise and have now addressed. Improvements have been made in the ways that progress is checked but this is inconsistent across the school. Targets are not sufficiently developed in order to ensure that able pupils are consistently stretched. The school is currently working on a centralised and accessible system to support greater consistency, supported by training.

Although some teaching is good, it is variable and judged to be satisfactory overall. In the best lessons pupils are engaged, have opportunities to work collaboratively on a variety of tasks, and respond to questions which deepen understanding and learning. In many other lessons the teacher's input is too long, which slows the pace of the lesson, and tasks are not tailored to meet the needs of all learners. There is little enjoyment and enthusiasm shown for these lessons although pupils are generally cooperative. The school's own view of the quality of teaching has been over generous. There are effective systems in place to monitor teaching but assessments lack sufficient rigour, and a strong enough emphasis on the progress

pupils are making. Marking does not always provide enough guidance on how pupils can improve their work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leaders are committed to improvement and are working hard to strengthen consistency through a department review process. The impact of this is yet to be seen consistently across the school. Currently the school is over reliant on end-of-key stage intervention programmes to address areas of underachievement. Although there has been some success here, leaders recognise the need for sustaining good progress across key stages. Leaders have been effective in developing innovative teaching and learning in science which is leading to improved achievement and standards in Key Stage 4. This is beginning to spread but is yet to impact widely across the school.

Leaders have identified broad areas for development but the long term improvement plan is not always well directed to focus sufficiently on the immediate priorities, with precise steps to measure progress. Senior and middle leaders are developing their capacity to make effective and consistent use of assessment information. Plans are well advanced for a centralised tracking system. It is recognised that this is a key area if the school is to set and meet challenging targets to secure even better progress. There is satisfactory capacity to improve.

Two hundred and ninety two parents returned the Ofsted questionnaire, many representing more than one pupil. Seventy percent agreed fully with the seven statements on the questionnaire. Disagreement focused on three main areas: seeking the views of parents and taking account of suggestions and concerns; taking account of children's views; and the behaviour of pupils in school. School leaders were made aware of these concerns and may wish to explore these further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Students enter the sixth form with standards well above the national average, and make satisfactory progress from these starting points. Pass rates are high and students remain committed to complete their courses. This is the result of good personal development, the care and guidance of staff, and the support of parents. Students show initiative and make a good contribution to main school activities, and charity events. The curriculum is good and is developing well to include vocational pathways to better meet the wider needs and interests of students. This initiative has been successfully led through the school's science specialism. Students are well prepared to progress to higher education.

Teaching is judged to be satisfactory overall although there is some good teaching where levels of challenge and pace support students' learning and progress. It is recognised that improvements in monitoring with a focus on student progress is required particularly for high-attaining students. The school's review and evaluation of student performance has focused particularly on standards. This has led to satisfactory academic guidance. It is now recognised that the setting of targets, and monitoring activities must focus on the progress students are capable of making and systems are changing to achieve this.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is an awareness of the priorities for improving consistency of teaching, and increasing rates of progress to strengthen provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of assessment information to set additional non-statutory targets, in order to secure even better progress.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching and learning to engage and challenge pupils as in the best practice.
- Improve the rigour of self evaluation, monitoring and planning across all levels of leadership.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	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	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage		
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	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	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
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	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	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	

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.



17 May 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of St Peter's Catholic School and Specialist Science College,
Solihull, B91 3NZ

Thank you for being so welcoming and friendly when we came to inspect your school recently. The pupils and students we spoke to were very positive about the changes that had taken place since becoming a specialist science college. You appreciate the new building, and extra resources which have allowed you to take more of an active part in lessons. You were particularly enthusiastic about the special events and themed days.

You told us that you feel safe in school, and that adults support and care for you very well. You were very positive about all the extra activities and visits, and appreciated that staff gave up time to extend your experiences. Those we spoke to felt the school council was working well and had led to some improvements in school, and gave opportunities to discuss issues such as uniform. Most of you behave very well but there is a very small minority who do not show respect for the school's expectations.

The quality of education provided by St Peter's is good in the main school, and satisfactory in the sixth form. The standards you reach are high. We believe that they could be even higher if you make more progress as you move through the school. We have suggested that the school looks at setting additional targets which will support you in making progress at a faster rate. From talking to you and observing your lessons we know that you learn best when you are involved in a variety of tasks with opportunities for paired, group, practical and independent work which is planned to challenge you and make you think about your learning. There are some lessons where everyone is set the same task which may be easy for some and too difficult for others. We have suggested that the school improves consistency across the subjects, and checks more carefully how the school is doing.

You, yourselves, can help by thinking about what you are learning in lessons and what you need to do to improve.

Our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić
Her Majesty's Inspector