

St James' Catholic High School - A Specialist Humanities College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106142
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	287429
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	John Dunne

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	780
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Dennis Donohue
Headteacher	Mr Charles Lowry
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2001
School address	St James' Way Cheadle Hulme Cheadle Cheshire SK8 6PZ
Telephone number	0161 4869211
Fax number	0161 4866607

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Inspection number	287429

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

St James' Catholic High School is smaller than average. It became a specialist humanities college in 2004. Students come from a mix of mainly prosperous but also less advantaged areas. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The majority of students are White British and the proportion who do not speak English as their first language is low. The school is the local Catholic school designated for physically disabled students and, as a result, the number of students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is twice the national average. Attainment on entry to the school is above average. The school has achieved a number of awards. These include the Healthy Schools Award, the Specialist School and Academies Trust 60% and 70% clubs and St Ann's Hospice award for the best school in Greater Manchester for fundraising.

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 which is improving and has a number of outstanding features. Standards achieved throughout the school are high in almost every subject. In English the standards are extremely high. The humanities college status has enabled this department to pioneer changes to the way they plan and teach lessons. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning in English is excellent because all learners are actively engaged in interesting and challenging activities. Although the cycle of monitoring and improving teaching needs to be more frequently applied, the school has begun to share the practice in English with other subjects, where it is beginning to improve standards further.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership and vision are central to the school's success. Middle and senior managers share this vision and are effective in assessing performance and holding people accountable for the work they do. They work together as a highly committed and united team. This ensures that students have all the support they need and, as a result, the vast majority of students make good progress. The school analyses its performance accurately and involves parents and students in its self-evaluation. As a result, leaders are successfully identifying what needs to be done to improve - for example the need to raise the achievements of the most able students at Key Stage 4. There is a clear focus on raising standards and this led to significantly improved examination results in 2006 in most subjects, but not in design and technology.

The curriculum is good. Students and parents think that it provides the right blend of opportunities and value the school's decision to ensure that nearly all students learn a foreign language at Key Stage 4.

Students' behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school. They demonstrate mature attitudes and navigate difficult parts of the building safely and sensibly. Relationships between adults and students are very good.

Good teaching and very effective support enable the overwhelming majority of students to achieve well. The high level of care given to all is an outstanding feature, particularly the support and care from both students and adults, for physically disabled students.

Students' personal development is outstanding because of the quality of care and guidance they receive. Students have a highly developed sense of what they should be doing to be good citizens. The school places the embedding of its Catholic ethos very high in its priorities. It goes to great lengths to provide opportunities for students to attend retreats and other religious activities. The school is very successful in actively involving many students in a wide range of community projects and charities.

The significant improvements in the last three years, seen in rising results, more opportunities open to students and the positive atmosphere, are appreciated by the overwhelming majority of students and parents who hold the school in high regard.

Governors share the vision of the headteacher. They are well informed about the school and the areas where it needs to improve. The school provides good value for money. All of the areas for improvement, identified in the previous inspection report, have been dealt with successfully. The school has good capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rigour and frequency of monitoring of teaching.
- Disseminate the outstanding aspects of teaching and learning in English across all subjects.
- Improve standards achieved by the most able students at Key Stage 4.
- Improve standards in design and technology.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students achieve well and standards are high. They have improved significantly over the past three years; examination and test results were well above average at Key Stages 3 and 4 in 2006. Work seen during the inspection confirms that this improvement has been maintained and the vast majority of students are making good progress.

When students join the school their levels of attainment are higher than the national average. From this starting point they make good progress, and at the end of Key Stage 3 standards are significantly higher than those nationally. Standards in the 2006 tests in English were extremely high. The most able students are making outstanding progress in English and good progress in mathematics and science.

Standards have also improved at Key Stage 4 and the percentage achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE is significantly above the national average. The percentage achieving five A* to C grades including mathematics and English is also significantly higher than average. Similarly to Key Stage 3, standards and progress in English at GCSE are outstanding. This is mainly due to the improvements in teaching and learning resulting from initiatives enabled by the school's specialist humanities status. Within this improving picture, standards in design and technology in 2006 were low. The school is dealing with this and standards are beginning to improve.

Most students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress due to the very good support they receive from skilful teachers and teaching assistants. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve equally as well as those who are White British. The school has accurately identified the need to improve the attainment of the most able students at Key Stage 4.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students say that they feel safe and secure and enjoy school. This is evident in their good attendance and outstanding behaviour in lessons and around school. The vast majority of students demonstrate mature and responsible attitudes. They speak knowledgeably about the benefits of healthy eating and regular exercise, and a large majority choose healthy food. The school council provides students with a developing voice in the life of the school. Individuals and groups are very keen to support younger students, for instance, by reading with them and taking on the role of prefect. A large number of students take up the many opportunities offered to become involved in community activities and this provision is a strength of the school. These include opportunities to work with students who have learning or physical disabilities. Students value this and many go on to undertake voluntary work of this kind in their own time.

Incidents of bullying or aggression are few and are dealt with effectively. The very powerful and inclusive Catholic heart of the school underpins and promotes students' well-being and

self-esteem. As a result, students' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. The school ensures that students are given good opportunities to explore and understand other cultures and issues relating to living in a multicultural society, such as the recent multicultural day. Older students are enthusiastic in taking up a wide range of opportunities to engage in work experience projects and to find out about further education, all of which strongly supports their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and some aspects are outstanding. Teachers have very good relationships with students, who are extremely well behaved and willing to learn. Teachers have good subject knowledge and most lessons are well planned using a variety of resources and teaching styles. The best lessons have pace and challenge so that students are made to think hard. Students are asked to work independently, and questioning by the teacher is incisive so that students make good progress. This high quality of teaching and learning was seen, for example, in an outstanding English lesson in which the planning ensured that students' different learning styles were all well catered for. Precise questioning brought sophisticated responses from students who spoke to the class with confidence and thereby consolidated their own learning. Those lessons that are less than good lack enough challenge, have too much teacher talk and the pace of progress is slow. The school sets challenging targets for students and regularly checks their progress towards them. Most students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve. Teaching assistants are well deployed and have a comprehensive programme of professional development along with all members of the school's teaching staff. The school has developed a systematic approach to monitoring the performance of teachers. Identified underperformance is dealt with effectively. The sharing of good practice across the school is beginning to develop. However, the monitoring cycle needs to be more frequently applied and developed further to ensure that the best practice is spread effectively to all areas of the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. Consequently, the vast majority of students enjoy their education and this contributes to their good progress. A wide range of subjects is offered for Key Stage 4 students, which matches their needs effectively. The curriculum was formulated after consultation with parents and students and is responsive to local needs. It balances a broad academic provision with an appropriate vocational element. As a consequence, the vast majority of students went on to post-16 education or employment and training in 2006. Specialist status in humanities, which is built around English, citizenship and religious education, has greatly enriched the work of the school. There is a comprehensive and effective citizenship programme, which includes aspects of education for health and safety. The school's specialism has also enabled it to invest in computer resources and has helped staff to develop a wider range of teaching styles. The school offers a wide variety of good quality extra-curricular and enrichment activities and a majority of students choose to participate in these. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, including those for information and communication technology, but this provision is not yet mapped thoroughly enough across the Key Stage 4 curriculum. The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are

met effectively through the work of the core departments and support staff so that most achieve well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. A high priority is given to the care of students. Transition from primary school is smooth and students settle quickly as a result of the strong links and the comprehensive induction process. All child-protection procedures are in place and students feel safe and secure, always knowing that they have someone to help them when they need it. Procedures that track students' progress towards their targets are very good and the systems to assess students' levels of attainment as they progress through the school are very effective. Most students know how well they are doing and parents are kept fully informed. At a recent study skills evening, a targeted group of Year 11 students sat alongside their parents to listen to advice on how to revise for the external examinations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are exceptionally well cared for. Students who use wheelchairs are fully integrated into the life of the school and an outstanding feature is the way that all students work together within this caring community. 'Teachers can't do enough for you and students always look out for me,' said a Year 11 wheelchair user. Well deployed support staff ensure that the school is a fully inclusive place of learning and that all students feel fully integrated. This fulfils the school's mission statement ensuring that, 'every person in the school community feels supported in their spiritual, personal and academic development'. Students' well-being and the celebration of their achievements are at the centre of all that the school does and, as a result, students grow with confidence into mature young people who are well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The excellent leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by a committed leadership team, has enabled the school to improve rapidly over the past three years. There is a shared vision and focus for the work of the school, which has led to improved standards and outstanding care and support for students. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of performance is based on an effective analysis of data and has allowed challenge and support to be directed effectively. More recently, a shared process for assessing the quality of teaching has begun, with areas of strength, such as the outstanding English department, supporting the work of a number of other subject areas. The other core subjects, mathematics and science, are also strongly led and managed with a consequent improvement in standards and achievement. The headteacher and senior team have empowered heads of departments to lead and manage their areas decisively.

The experienced and effective governing body has a thorough understanding of the school's work and provides appropriate challenge and support as well as fulfilling its strategic functions well.

The improvement in performance, coupled with the commitment and effectiveness of managers and leaders at all levels, means that the school's capacity to improve is good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	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	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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
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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St James' Catholic High School, St James' Way, Cheadle Hulme, SK8 6PZ.

As you know, I visited your school recently with three other inspectors to see how well you were doing. We would like to thank you for your courtesy and help during the inspection. We saw a lot of lessons, talked to many students and teachers, and read what your parents said about the school. I am writing to you to tell you what we found out.

We judged that St James' is a good school. We were pleased to see that your standards of work and examination results have improved over the last three years. In terms of you, the students, these are the things that particularly impressed us:

- your excellent behaviour
- your mature attitude towards school and adults
- your care and consideration for others.

The leadership from Mr Lowry and the senior staff is very good and the way adults in school care for you is outstanding. The school is also outstanding in the way that it gives you so many opportunities to understand the Roman Catholic faith. It teaches you outstandingly well about becoming good citizens with good life skills.

There were a small number of aspects where we thought the school might do better still and help you to reach higher standards.

- Check up on lessons more often to make sure that all lessons are providing you with challenging and interesting activities.
- Continue to raise standards in design and technology.
- Make sure that those of you who have very high ability are stretched fully so that more of you can achieve the highest standard you can.

I wish you the very best for your future.