

St Damian's RC Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106270
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	287462
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Henry Moreton

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	794
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Fr Myles Sheahan
Headteacher	Mrs F Ashton
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2001
School address	Lees Road Ashton-under-Lyne Lancashire OL6 8BH
Telephone number	0161 3305974
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Damian's RC college is a specialist science college of average size, mainly serving students from four local Roman Catholic parishes. Students are mostly of White British heritage. Very few are from a minority ethnic background or have a first language other than English. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The college receives an average number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college holds Investors in People status and the Silver Healthy Eating Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement of students in Key Stage 4 and in performance in science.

Although standards are broadly average, in 2006 students made inadequate progress by the end of Year 11. This was also the case in 2004. The targets set for Year 11, including those for the science specialism, were missed by a significant margin. Results in the national tests in Year 9 were more positive and show satisfactory achievement with the students reaching average standards. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory because of the extra help they receive. College leaders are addressing the underperformance in Years 10 and 11 by holding managers and teachers to account, but the quality of learning varies too much from subject to subject.

Students' personal development is good. Relationships and behaviour are good and students attend school regularly. They have good opportunities to experience the world of work. Students know about healthy eating and keeping fit and feel secure within the college. Parents are mostly supportive but there are a significant minority who feel that the college does not keep them informed well enough, including about how their children are progressing. Care, support and guidance are satisfactory, as is the curriculum.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors support the college adequately through their commitment. Under the leadership of the headteacher a range of actions has begun to tackle underperformance. Strengths and weaknesses have been identified and systems established to ensure that on-going monitoring and evaluation are rigorous. There have been significant changes to the leadership of subjects and the senior management team is in a more stable position than it has been for some years. Whole college assessment procedures have been put in place and are beginning to show some impact on classroom practice.

The improving picture at Key Stage 3 and the quality of some teaching provides evidence of a satisfactory capacity to improve. As a result of better use of data, managers at all levels have a clearer picture of current attainment. Interventions to remedy underachievement are beginning to have an impact, raising the expectations of both students and teachers. In spite of prudent financial stewardship and improved management at all levels, the college gives inadequate value for money because of the current underachievement of students at the end of Key Stage 4.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11
- Improve performance in science
- Improve the consistency of teaching so that pupils' learning improves
- Improve communication with parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards are broadly average but students' achievement is inadequate. Students enter the college having reached standards that are in line with national averages. In 2005, national test results at the end of Year 9 were average. In 2006, there was some improvement and targets for mathematics and science were met, and those in English were exceeded. Boys and girls performed similarly. However, this positive picture has not been built on in Years 10 and 11 where many students currently underachieve.

Standards attained by students at the end of Year 11 have fallen since the time of the last inspection and are now below what similar students are expected to achieve in other schools. GCSE results in 2006 were below average and well below the school's targets which were based on students' previous attainment. This was also the case in 2004. In 2006, the proportion of students obtaining 5 or more GCSE passes at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, was well down on the 2005 results. Results in science were particularly poor given the college's specialist science status. Although boys' and girls' attainment were both below their targets, underachievement was most marked in the case of boys. In contrast with the rest of the year group, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress. There is, however, evidence of some improvement taking place. The current Year 11 students give positive indications of future success through the initial results in some of their GCSE courses, including English and religious education. This, together with evidence from lesson observations and the much improved use of data to track the progress made by students, indicates that the college is beginning to successfully tackle underachievement but has yet to resolve the inadequate progress pupils in Years 10 and 11 have made.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. The college's ethos is reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of students who say that they feel safe and secure. As a representative group put it, 'this is a college where most teachers are kind, and students usually enjoy their work.' Students talk confidently about the benefits of eating healthily and taking regular exercise. There is some pupil dissatisfaction with queuing and the level of litter around the site. The college council is being renewed but students do not act as chair or secretary, limiting their personal development. However, students are given other opportunities to develop their self-confidence by acting as peer mentors and prefects.

The number of exclusions is low due to positive behaviour management and use of the 'Ambrose Suite', which is used successfully for a number of student support programmes. The effective promotion of good attendance and punctuality has resulted in levels of attendance that are above the national average.

The Catholic heart of the college supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is good. The great majority of students exhibit respect and tolerance for their peers, and for the staff. Older students have a wide range of opportunities to engage in work experience and to seek advice on further education and careers guidance, which effectively supports their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There is a significant amount of teaching with some strong features but these strengths are inconsistent across the college. In nearly all lessons, relationships are positive and characterised by mutual respect so that learning takes place in a harmonious atmosphere. Students make good progress where they are engaged by a range of strategies and a good mix of talk and task. This sustains their interest and concentration and they enjoy their work. Outstanding lessons have the added dimension of the teachers' enthusiasm for the subject being reflected in students' deep interest. However, in too many lessons there is limited dialogue and scope for letting students think for themselves or be involved in the development of ideas. Consequently, learning becomes passive and progress is slow. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements identify areas for improvement and, driven by a mostly new core of committed middle leaders, good practice is beginning to be shared. A system of tracking is now in place so that underachievement is identified at an early stage. Students' work is regularly assessed but the quality of marking is often superficial. It does not routinely pick up on poor work or always inform students about how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The college provides a satisfactory curriculum with some strong features. It makes a good contribution to students' personal and social development and due importance is attached to citizenship, enterprise and work related learning which adequately supports their economic well-being. Additional funding for the college's specialist status has enhanced provision by increasing the use of information technology across the curriculum. Courses are tailored to meet individual needs, including those of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective collaborative arrangements with partner institutions provide students with a very good alternative curriculum that sustains their commitment and interest in education. This is in addition to a good range of traditional and applied GCSE courses. The high proportion of students who continue into further education reflects well on provision and transition arrangements. Although the amount of time devoted to physical education in Years 10 and 11 is less than recommended, students are provided with a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, and a good proportion of students take advantage of these opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support for students are satisfactory. The pastoral support and welfare provision is of a high quality. The recent addition of student support officers has strengthened the care provision and this is complemented by an extensive range of external agencies and visiting professionals. Vulnerable students are particularly well supported by the college. Health and safety arrangements, child protection systems and appropriate staff training are in place. Assessment and tracking of students' performance are greatly improved but several parents told inspectors they are not well informed, including about the progress made by their children. The college has established satisfactory procedures to track the academic progress of students with the recently appointed progress managers keeping a careful watch on student performance.

However, these arrangements have not been in place long enough to have had a measurable impact on achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The impact of leadership and management in recent years has varied but is now more stable. Progress has been slow since the last inspection and some aspects of the school's work have declined. Progress in Key Stage 3 and recent improvements in monitoring and accountability reflect a satisfactory quality of leadership and management and provide evidence of the college's satisfactory capacity to improve. Weaknesses in teaching have been accurately identified and senior leaders are focused on raising standards, especially in Key Stage 4. Managers are making improvements to systems for evaluating performance. However, assessment procedures are not yet used well enough by all departments and teachers to speed students' rate of progress.

Although college judgements of some aspects of its performance have been too generous, managers understand what needs to be done to improve the school. They are self critical and are not complacent. The outcomes of monitoring are well used to support the professional development of staff with the result that subject leaders, for example, are clearer about how to raise standards. The leadership team is working with the local authority to provide support where necessary. The leadership and management of the college at middle management level have changed significantly over the recent past. There is a recognition of how poorly the college has performed recently and a determination to move forward. Development as a specialist science college remains slow and has not yet had enough impact on raising the achievement of students. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are determinedly supporting the college and are holding managers to account. Students report that they have some opportunities to have their say. The majority of parents are positive about the college, even though a significant minority are concerned about the way it communicates with them.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	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	3
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 the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St Damian's Roman Catholic Science College,
Ashton-under-Lyne, OL6 8BH

I am writing to you on behalf of the inspection team to thank you for your contributions to the recent inspection and to tell you about our main findings. You can access a copy of the report on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What we liked about the college:

- relationships between students, and between you and the staff
- the awareness of where it needs to improve and the commitment to improvement by all those we spoke to.

The college believes that it can improve significantly in the next year. We have asked the staff to:

- improve standards and achievement in Years 10 and 11
- improve standards in science
- improve the consistency of teaching
- improve how they communicate with your parents.

We have asked the college to ensure there is improvement in these matters as soon as possible by giving what is known as a 'Notice to Improve'. We believe that the college will be able to do this because we know that there have already been some changes for the better. Inspectors will be coming back soon to check on the progress made.

It will need everyone to play their part. Those of you in Year 11 need to pull out all the stops over the coming months to ensure that you reach your potential.