

St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108870
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	288215
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1554
6th form	437
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Waugh
Headteacher	Mr Simon White
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2002
School address	Biddick Lane Washington Tyne and Wear NE38 8AF
Telephone number	0191 2193810
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Robert's is a much larger than average school which has had specialist Humanities College Status since September 2005. It has a very large sixth form with over half of these students coming from other schools. It serves an area with a broad socio-economic mix in and around the town of Washington. Students enter the school with above average standards. The numbers of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well below average. The vast majority of students are White British and there are very few who have English as an additional language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. St Robert's has a Sports Mark award and Healthy School and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Robert's is a good school as stated in its own accurate self-evaluation. It has improved markedly in the last two years because good leadership and management have resulted in rising standards and good achievement in the main school. The headteacher has energetically and successfully communicated his vision for the school to the whole staff. Senior staff, subject leaders and heads of year work very well to a common purpose and assist the headteacher in a relentless drive towards improvement. This is exemplified by the promotion of better teaching and learning, and improved student achievement whilst retaining existing strengths in the school's work.

Standards are above average and achievement is good. Test results in Year 9 in 2006, work seen during the inspection and the results of examinations and assessments completed by current students in Years 10 and 11 all confirm that students make good progress. Standards and achievement in mathematics have risen markedly in the last two years but students' achievement in science lags behind that of other subjects.

Students and parents speak highly of the school. Parents' comments included; 'the school has excellent pastoral care and is very receptive to parental questions and concerns', 'every child is valued at this school and individual needs are met' and 'extra support has been outstanding, this is all due to caring staff and strong leadership'. A very small number of parents had concerns about homework, about classes which did not have a permanent teacher and about some lessons which did not interest their children.

Teaching and learning are improving and are now good. Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching in the main school carefully and staff are given good opportunities to improve their skills. The good curriculum is enriched by the school's status as a specialist Humanities College and by its close links with employers and business partners.

Students' personal development and the care, guidance and support they receive are good. The safety, well-being, enjoyment and achievement of each student are at the heart of the school's work. The Catholic ethos of the school, with its commitment to prayer and reflection, has a strong impact on students' personal development.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory with some good features. Good leadership and management are now leading to improvements in attendance, in students' personal development and in the percentage of pass grades in A Level examinations. Clear priorities have been identified for further improvement. Students reach standards which are average and given their broadly average starting points their achievement is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In some lessons they are good and one lesson seen was outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers are very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects and the use of varied activities and resources captures students' interest even when they are revising for examinations. In other lessons, where students have few opportunities to learn independently and think for themselves, the pace of learning is slower. The school has good plans to monitor teaching and learning in the sixth form but this has not yet had the same impact on improving teaching and learning as in the main school. The school recognises the need to encourage the use of more varied teaching methods in order to increase the proportion of good lessons further. The sixth

form accommodation has improved since the last inspection but some teaching rooms have limited resources to support independent learning.

Students' personal development is good. They enjoy helping younger students and are generous in raising money; for example, to sponsor a school in Tanzania. They have good opportunities to work with local businesses and are well prepared for further education and the world of work. Students feel they are well cared for and that their voice is heard. However, not all students are clear about how targets are set for them and the quality of the academic guidance they receive, although improving, is not yet consistent across all departments. The satisfactory curriculum offers a wide range of academic courses and is now developing a broader range of vocational choices in order to better meet the needs of all students.

Although inspectors feel the school was over generous in its evaluation of the sixth form as good, senior school leaders correctly identified that determined leadership and management of the sixth form are now bringing about improvements and there is good capacity to improve further.

The sixth form gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in science.
- In the sixth form, increase the proportion of good or better teaching and improve the consistency of academic guidance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are above average and achievement is good. Achievement and standards are now rising rapidly, particularly in mathematics. This improvement is the result of the relentless focus the school now has on improving teaching and learning in order to raise achievement.

In the 2006 national tests at the end of Year 9, students reached above average standards and their achievement was good. Students achieved best in English where the school's challenging targets were exceeded. Targets were met in mathematics but not in science. Results in mathematics were a marked improvement on those of the last two years. Students make slower, although satisfactory, progress in science. Pupils' work seen during the inspection indicates that current standards in Year 9 are above average.

Achievement at Key Stage 4 has improved and is now good. Work seen in lessons and results of tests taken by students in Years 10 and 11 indicate that standards, particularly in mathematics, are rising and are now much better than previous GCSE results would suggest. This is a result of improvements in teaching and learning and better tracking of students' progress.

GCSE results in 2006 were above average and students' overall achievement from their starting points when they entered the school was satisfactory. Almost three quarters of students gained five or more A*–C grades. This figure was an increase on 2005 results and exceeded the school's target. However, the numbers of students gaining five or more A*–C grades including English and mathematics was average. Students achieved best in history, drama and technology and least well in mathematics, science and geography. Boys and girls achieved equally well as did students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

In the sixth form, standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Over half of students who enter the sixth form at St Roberts join from other schools. Attainment on entry is broadly average. GCE A and AS results in 2006 were average. The percentage of students who gained pass grades rose from the previous year and this represented improved achievement. Students achieved best in design and technology and drama and least well in English language, law, psychology and business studies.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. The Catholic ethos of the school has a strong impact on students' personal development. They evaluate well their experiences on retreat at Ushaw College and Ampleforth Abbey. Their written comments show the strength of their awareness of themselves and of the world around them. Behaviour in the school is consistently good, putting students in a strong position to mature as effective learners. Attendance is significantly above national averages. Exclusion from school is increasingly rare. Students are quick to say they feel safe and well cared for, reflecting the positive comments of parents. They have a good understanding of their personal safety, the safety of others and of school risk assessments. In their work, students reflect on personal health issues, the contribution they make to the school community and preparation for their future place in society. Work on contemporary society and whole world issues show their commitment to racial equality and an understanding of the needs of others. Their informed decisions support fundraising for others.

Students say they enjoy coming to school and believe they are achieving well. This is clear in their positive response to learning. Students make a strong contribution in shaping whole school decision making; for example, in discussions about food choices and modifications to the well observed school dress code. Taking all these features into account, students are being very well prepared for their future economic and social well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are good in the main school and are leading to good achievement. In the sixth form, they are satisfactory. Teaching in the main school has improved recently because it is now being rigorously monitored and weaker practice is being identified and eliminated. Excellent opportunities for staff development are now allowing teachers to share good practice and update and sharpen their classroom skills. The best lessons reflect the school's emphasis on encouraging students to assess their own and each other's work and think for themselves. Where teaching is good, lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers ask probing questions, which extend students' understanding well. However, in some lessons where teaching is satisfactory, learning activities lack variety and resources are not sufficiently stimulating to fully engage students' interest so their pace of learning slows. Most students want to learn, respect their teachers and work hard. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are

well supported in lessons by teachers and teaching assistants. Students' work is marked regularly. Most students know what level they are working at and how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. In the main school, it meets students' needs well, enabling them to make good progress and achieve well. Students' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are developed well. The school's specialist status in humanities has had a positive effect on the curriculum of the main school with the addition of new courses and innovative resources in religious education, history and English. In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum has been extended, with the help of local partnerships with employers, to offer a very wide range of subjects and courses. These provide well for the needs and interests of individual learners. A number of work related learning opportunities have been introduced and these support the high proportion of students entering education, training or employment post 16. A wide range of visits and extra curricular activities support the agenda for students to enjoy and achieve well during their time at school.

Provision for outdoor and physical activities is particularly good; with the school being awarded Sports Mark status. The personal, social and health education programme now includes topics relating to bullying, race, drugs and health and safety and supports students' personal development well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. The school is a safe environment for students and the school is rightly proud of its anti-bullying policies and practices. Careful attention is paid to safeguarding issues and child protection, which meet government requirements. Good links with primary schools help students settle into Year 7 and prepare them well for entering such a large school. A team of specialists, including a social worker, offers outstanding support to students who find it difficult to cope in lessons. There are very effective links with parents and a range of local agencies that safeguard the needs of the most vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good careers guidance and support means that each student choosing options for Year 10 or Year 12 has a personal interview to help appropriate choices to be made.

In the main school, students' progress is monitored effectively enabling them to achieve well. However, form tutors are not yet fully involved in monitoring the academic progress of students in their classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management in the main school and sixth form are good. Morale is good because staff believe that they are individually valued and are being empowered with key responsibilities. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is good. Weaknesses are quickly identified and vigorously and effectively tackled. Improvements to standards, achievement, teaching and learning are all extremely high profile aspects of current developments.

Governors are fully and effectively involved in the work of the school. They monitor its successes and weaknesses carefully through their links with staff and subjects. The school runs very smoothly on a day to day basis and the atmosphere for learning is good. However, several rooms have deficiencies which affect the quality of provision and some are insufficiently inviting for learners. Good financial management ensures that the school runs within budget and a well managed specialist programme in humanities successfully enhances provision. The school provides good value for money. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and there is good capacity to make further improvement, for example in science, where standards are lower than in English and mathematics.

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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	3
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	3
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	

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	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	
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?	2	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?	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

14 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College, Tyne and Wear, NE38 8AF

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school last week. We would particularly like to thank those of you who spoke with us. We greatly enjoyed hearing your views and were impressed with your positive attitudes.

What we have said about your school in the inspection report:

- St Robert's is a good school and you achieve well
- teaching and learning are good
- your school gives you good care, guidance and support and provides good personal development
- the sixth form is satisfactory with some good features, students reach average standards and their achievement is satisfactory
- the Catholic ethos of the school has a strong impact on your good personal development
- your school is well led and managed.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- raise standards and achievement in science
- in the sixth form, increase the proportion of good or better teaching and improve the consistency of academic guidance.

Please continue to help your school improve even further by working with your teachers to achieve your very best.

Best wishes

Ann Wallis

Lead Inspector