



# St Gregory's Catholic High School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 111454  
**Local Authority** Warrington  
**Inspection number** 288965  
**Inspection date** 17 January 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Jane Austin HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Cromwell Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Westbrook, Warrington
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Cheshire WA5 1HG
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01925 574888
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	954	<b>Fax number</b>	01925 243816
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mrs L Flynn
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr S Clarke
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 December 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–16	17 January 2007	288965

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

St Gregory's is a popular secondary school of average size, serving students from relatively advantaged social circumstances. The percentage eligible for free school meals is very low. Most students are White British. There are 18 students at the early stages of learning English, some of whom are recent arrivals from Eastern Europe. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. St Gregory's was awarded specialist humanities status in September 2005 and focuses its specialist work on English, religious education and drama. The school holds the Investors in People award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

St Gregory's is a good school with some outstanding features. It lives out its motto, 'One family..inspired to learn.' Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of the highest order and is underpinned by the Catholic values that are part of everyday life for the school. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. During their time at the school students grow into confident, mature young adults ready and eager to take advantage of life after compulsory schooling. They enjoy school, as shown by well above average attendance levels. 'I love it here. The teachers push you hard but they really care for us and help us if we find something difficult' was one student's expression of her satisfaction. This combination of high expectations and well gauged support, together with good teaching, leads to good achievement overall. However, there are some variations in this picture, with recent figures indicating that achievement for the most able students is no better than satisfactory.

Standards are consistently high. By the end of Key Stage 3 the proportion of students reaching the expected level in the core subjects is very high when compared with national averages. At Key Stage 4 there is a sustained trend of students attaining standards that are well above average. Performance is particularly strong in English, which is the school's main specialist subject. This is linked to the emphasis placed on the development of literacy skills and a love of language and literature. Students have an additional literacy lesson each week in Year 7. In addition, throughout Key Stage 3, they follow a 'reading for pleasure' scheme that fosters their independence as learners. A good range of activities, visits and visitors enrich students' learning across the curriculum. In addition, many students take advantage of the broad selection of extra-curricular activities on offer. These range from public speaking, a justice and peace group, sports and music. For the most able students there is a Year 10 course in critical thinking as well as a number of interesting and challenging extra-curricular events. However, activities for the most able do not in themselves form a coherent approach to ensuring they achieve consistently well in all aspects of their schooling.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. All staff make valuable contributions to ensuring this is so. It is no wonder that students report how safe they feel in school and how much confidence they have in the support they receive. The Augustine Suite makes exemplary provision for students with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. It is a haven of peace and security which the students value highly. As a consequence, they achieve well.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. He is an astute leader of change and has successfully established a culture of continuous improvement throughout the school, supported practically by the successful development of leadership capacity well beyond the senior team. As a consequence, responsibilities are widely and efficiently dispersed. School self-evaluation is accurate, so development planning to address priorities is well-founded. The school has dealt effectively with the issues raised by the previous inspection and has outstanding capacity to improve.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Make coherent provision for the most able students so that their achievement is consistently good.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards are high. Students enter the school with attainment that is above average and reach standards that are well above average by the end of Key Stage 4. The trend in achievement is good overall, although there has been a slight dip recently. The school has worked successfully to improve achievement at Key Stage 3, from well below average to well above average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Based on a thorough analysis of results, the school's current focus is rightly on further improving the progress made by its most able students.

In the 2006 Key Stage 3 national tests, 93% of students attained the expected level in English, 91% in mathematics and 85% in science. In addition, the proportion reaching the higher Levels 6 and 7 was well above average. At Key Stage 4, 77% of students gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, with 69% including English and mathematics among their five passes. This figure is very high compared with the national average. The same is true of results in English, the school's main specialist subject, where 90% of students gained good GCSE passes in both language and literature.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Assemblies and retreats encourage them to reflect on their own approaches to life. They show a true understanding of right and wrong. Behaviour is good and students are welcoming and polite to each other and adults. Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. Large numbers participate in the school's sporting activities and make healthy choices from the lunch menu. The school council gives students a real say in the development of the school, for example, by being closely involved in the design of the new dining hall, of which they are rightly proud. Many older students act as mentors to Year 7 students in English and mathematics, freely and selflessly giving up their time in the mornings before school. Students' high standards in the basics of literacy and numeracy, together with their high levels of maturity, mean that they are very well prepared for their future economic well-being.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, as the school accurately judges. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and is sometimes outstanding. Teachers prepare their lessons carefully. Most make sure that they include a variety of activities to keep students motivated and interested so that they make good progress in their learning and achieve well. Teachers have good subject knowledge: they use this to good advantage in asking challenging questions to make students think for themselves. This helps students become inquisitive and eager learners. Students approach their lessons with positive attitudes because teachers are sensitive to their needs and have high expectations. As one student said, 'Teachers give us a real 'can do' attitude. They encourage us to work things out for ourselves.' In the few lessons where teaching is less effective, teachers dominate and do not encourage independent learning. Consequently, students' interest and involvement in their own learning deteriorate.

Teachers mark students' work regularly. Their comments in exercise books are informative and indicate clearly to students what they need to do to improve their work.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum is well matched to the needs of students and meets statutory requirements. It reflects the school's specialist status in its strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills. At Key Stage 4, students have a suitable range of options to choose from, including a number of vocational GCSE courses. Through subjects such as physical education, personal and social development and religious education the curriculum supports students well in making healthy and safe lifestyle choices.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Highly effective transition arrangements are in place to ensure that pupils joining St Gregory's from primary school do so successfully. Very good working relations with local sixth form colleges mean that students are well prepared for further study: a very high proportion of students go on to further education when they leave school. Support and guidance for students' academic development are good. Students know their targets and what they need to do to achieve them.

Policies and procedures for safeguarding students are all in place and regularly reviewed. Appropriate checks are made on adults working in the school.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides strong, thoughtful leadership and is well supported in this by the deputy headteachers. High quality training and effective support has enabled middle managers to gain the skills required to contribute effectively to the school cycle of self-evaluation. This provides the school with an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development. The acquisition of specialist status has been a powerful vehicle in developing leadership skills and capacity. It has been the catalyst for well led and successful improvements in classroom practice and the process of setting targets. Helpfully, further developments are planned to establish a consistent whole school system to improve the regular tracking of students' progress.

Governance is good. Governors are committed to the school and provide a suitable level of challenge, for example, with regard to examination results. Efficient systems are in place to keep governors abreast of, and involved in, developments in the school. The school provides good value for money.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you very much for making us welcome, and giving us your views, when we visited your school recently. We would like to share our judgements with you.

We believe that St Gregory's is a good school with some outstanding features. It enables you to develop the confidence and maturity needed to succeed when you leave school. Examination results are very good indeed and particularly in the school's specialist area of English. These high standards in literacy help you do well in all your subjects. Almost all of you make good progress during your time at school. However, the most able amongst you could make better progress and we have suggested that the school draw up a coherent programme which will help you to do so.

Teaching is good: you rise to your teachers' high expectations and enjoy the challenge of thinking for yourselves. Teachers ensure that you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to meet your targets. Many of you take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities the school offers. You also contribute to school life through volunteering and we were impressed to see that some of you help Year 7 students with their English and mathematics before school. The staff take your views seriously. The school council recently made a valuable contribution to the design of your attractive new dining facilities.

The care and support provided for you is outstanding and rooted in the school's Catholic life and values. You told us that there is always someone you can approach for advice and help. The Augustine Suite does an excellent job for those of you experiencing some difficulties with learning.

We were very pleased that so many of you are proud to be students at St Gregory's. We hope you continue to work hard and wish you every success in the future.