



St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114326
Local Authority Durham
Inspection number 289879
Inspection dates 13–14 February 2007
Reporting inspector Stephen Quinlan

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	North End
School category	Voluntary aided		Durham, County Durham
Age range of pupils	11–18		DH1 4NG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 384 8575
Number on roll (school)	1437	Fax number	0191 386 1134
Number on roll (6th form)	276		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Graham Oak
		Headteacher	Mr Simon Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	13–14 February 2007	289879

© 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 five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Leonard's School is a large Roman Catholic comprehensive school on the outskirts of Durham City. Nearly all the students have English as their first language and come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. On entry to the school, the results achieved by children are above average.

St Leonard's was awarded technology college status in 1999.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The inspection team agree with the school's judgement that St Leonard's is a good school. Its caring and inclusive ethos is underpinned by the school's 'Christian Mission' which is securely focused on students achieving high standards in both their academic and personal development.

St Leonard's is a friendly and cheerful place. Students are welcoming, polite and helpful. They demonstrate respect for adults and for each other. Attendance is good and students report that the good behaviour, seen around the school during the inspection, is commonplace. Students feel happy and safe and are proud of their school. They know that bullying will be taken seriously and they have the confidence to talk to staff when they are anxious.

The new headteacher has established a clear vision for the school; to make the school outstanding, whilst sustaining the inclusive, caring ethos. The leadership team is focused on raising standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of students. Leaders at the middle level have been encouraged to operate independently. Most subject leaders are effective in raising standards but, in some areas, monitoring and evaluation are not good enough to identify and improve weaker practice. The governing body provide appropriate support and challenge to the school leadership. They have overseen the improvements that have taken place since the last inspection. They have a strong sense of purpose and carry out their duties conscientiously.

The standards reached by students, on entry to the school, are above average. During their time in school, most students make very good progress and standards at the end of Year 11 are outstanding. These high standards are achieved because students are committed, enthusiastic learners. Their teachers are knowledgeable and dedicated and the majority of lessons are taught well.

Parents have confidence in the school and it is oversubscribed. The overwhelming majority of parents who returned the questionnaire expressed support for the school. One parent's comment sums up the views of many, 'My children are all very different and yet I am delighted that their various needs are being met'.

The school operates a traditional curriculum to meet the expectations of students and parents. It is introducing a wider choice of vocational options to better meet the needs of all learners. There is a broad range of enrichment activities available to students at lunchtime and after school. These are appreciated by students and their parents and contribute to a lively, enjoyable atmosphere at lunchtime.

All students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from good care, guidance and support. Students are set challenging targets to achieve and the school is effectively developing a system to ensure that all departments track the progress of students towards these targets.

The impact of the specialist college can be seen best in the improved facilities for information and communication technology (ICT). This has led to improved use of ICT

across the curriculum and the creation of new courses for the wider community. The use of interactive learning materials has contributed to improved standards and achievement for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The track record of the school, combined with the impetus provided by the new leadership team and the evident sense of purpose shown by students and staff, indicate that its capacity for further improvement is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

At the end of Year 11 a large majority of students choose to continue their studies in the sixth form. During their time in the sixth form, learners achieve good standards and make good progress. At the end of Year 13 most learners move on to university or further education. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, characterised by good pastoral care for learners. The curriculum provides a broad range of GCE AS and A2 courses with a small number of vocational options. Teaching and learning is mostly good and some of it is outstanding. There are good opportunities to contribute to the school community, including taking a leading role in the school council and working as prefects. The new sixth form block provides excellent specialist accommodation with good facilities for independent learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation, in areas where it is weaker, to raise standards further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

All groups of students are making very good progress because the attitudes of students are excellent and most teaching is good. Students come to the school with standards that are above the national average. In the 2006 Year 9 tests, the proportion of students achieving the expected level, and better, was well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. School data indicates that the progress made by students in Key Stage 3 in 2006 was very good.

Students continue to make good progress as they move through the school. Standards at the end of Year 11 in 2006 are outstanding and show an upward trend since the last inspection. Overall, the performance of boys is better than girls. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades was 77%, well above the national average. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics was 72%; also well above the national average. The most successful subjects at Key Stage 4 are English, mathematics, science and religious education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is also good. The spiritual element is particularly strong, with the school's Catholic ethos having a profound influence on students' moral outlook. Students treat each other with respect, celebrate each other's achievements, and work well together in class. Students enjoy opportunities to engage in cultural and multicultural awareness events, charity fundraising initiatives and providing support for missionary work. Sporting activities and healthy eating encourage students to adopt a healthy lifestyle but the time available for physical education in Years 9, 10 and 11 is only one hour per week. The majority of students enjoy life at school, have good relationships with their teachers and participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. There are opportunities to contribute to the life of the school, through serving on year and school councils. Sixth form students act as prefects, helpers in tutor groups and provide support for vulnerable or anxious students. Students have many opportunities to develop teamwork and investigative skills in lessons, along with other projects preparing them for the world of work. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Attendance is good, there being little unauthorised absence, and a low number of exclusions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is mostly good throughout the school and some is outstanding. Students make good progress due to the commitment and expertise of the staff and the purposeful working atmosphere that is created in most classrooms. Most students are conscientious, motivated and hard working. Good relationships between teachers and students support their learning. The teachers' good subject knowledge leads to some inspirational learning experiences and most students enjoy their lessons. Teachers offer good guidance and students understand what they need to do to improve their performance. Questioning is used effectively to challenge students and to check their understanding.

Some departments are sharing good practice and improving teaching and learning by developing a wider range of teaching strategies and increasing the involvement of students in assessing their own progress. The use of self and peer assessment has a positive impact on learning, for example in English and modern foreign languages. In one sixth form lesson, a student commented that teaching techniques that develop learning, 'help us to go on where we could have stopped.' Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support, particularly when in smaller classes

and this helps them to make good progress. Good use of interactive whiteboards successfully engages and interests students in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum provided throughout the school is good and meets all statutory requirements. A wide range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum, further offering good opportunities for students to participate in sporting and community activities. The school has begun to provide more vocational courses to better meet the needs of all learners. Students following vocational courses have access to the specialist facilities at a nearby college, although opportunities for work-related learning are limited. The majority of students continue to study a foreign language at Key Stage 4. There is a good range of technology courses, reflecting the school's specialist technology college status.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care guidance and support are good. Of particular note is the process of introducing Year 6 pupils from primary schools to St Leonard's, which is outstanding. This helps pupils to look forward to joining their new school and feel secure when they start Year 7. The procedures for safeguarding students are in place. There is good support for vulnerable students, which includes peer support, a drop-in centre for meeting new friends and socialising, anti-bullying help and the services of a school counsellor. The school has good links with specialist external agencies to help students who require extra support. Students have good access to careers education and guidance and students benefit well from the advice and information available from the Connexions service. The system of setting targets for students and tracking their progress is effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The leadership team is focused on raising standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of students. The school's Christian values are used effectively to create a strong sense of purpose among all staff and students. The newly appointed headteacher has restructured the leadership team to suit the emerging needs of the school. Heads of department enjoy considerable independence in managing their subject areas. In the most effective departments, time is used well to improve teaching and learning and raise standards. However, this

is not yet commonplace because the monitoring and evaluation procedures in some departments are weak and those areas requiring improvement are not sufficiently recognised.

Equality of opportunity is promoted so that most learners achieve as well as they can, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school runs smoothly, resources are well utilised and the school provides good value for money.

Accommodation has been improved with the opening of the sixth form block, which has greatly enhanced the facilities for learning. The governing body understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and offers appropriate challenge and support to the leadership team. They have effectively monitored improvements since the last inspection.

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.

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

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	2
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	3	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	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	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	3	
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	2
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	2

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.

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	3	
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

St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School

North End

Durham

County Durham

DH1 4NG

15 February 2007

Dear Students

Thank you for your help during the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and I am grateful to members of the school council and other students who gave us their views on the school. I enjoyed your Year 9, Valentine's Day assembly and was encouraged to see so many students taking part. Please thank your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and let them know that all their views were taken into account.

Our main finding is that St Leonard's is a good school. You make good progress during your time in school and the standards you achieve at the end of Year 11 are outstanding. These high standards are achieved because you are committed, enthusiastic learners and your teachers are knowledgeable and dedicated. Most of the lessons that we observed were good. We were pleased to note that lots of you choose to stay at St Leonard's and benefit from the good education available in the sixth form.

We found a strong sense of community in your school, underpinned by Christian values. The atmosphere is friendly and it is clear that you are proud of your school. You told us that most of you feel happy and safe. The high proportion of students who continue with education and training, at the end of Years 11 and 13, helped to confirm our view that you receive good care, guidance and support.

When you read our report you will see that it contains just one area for improvement. We are asking the school to improve the way in which the work of some departments is monitored and evaluated. By doing this, we think the school will improve further.

My colleagues and I wish you well with your studies and your plans for the future.

Yours faithfully

Stephen Quinlan

Lead Inspector