



The John Henry Newman Roman Catholic School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117585
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290883
Inspection dates 20–21 September 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Hitchin Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Stevenage
Age range of pupils	11–18		Hertfordshire SG1 4AE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438314643
Number on roll (school)	1051	Fax number	01438747882
Number on roll (6th form)	287		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs.A Simmons
		Headteacher	Mr. M J Kelly
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	20–21 September 2006	290883

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average and is popular with parents, notably so in the sixth form. Many pupils come from outside the local area and their socio-economic background is representative of the whole of north Hertfordshire. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Attainment on entry is above average and the proportion of pupils who join or leave the school other than at normal times is low. The pupils are predominately of White British heritage, with few pupils from a minority ethnic background. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a Statement of Special Educational Needs is below average. The school achieved specialist status in the Arts in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that gives outstanding value for money and has made very good progress since the last inspection. Self-evaluation is outstanding, although senior managers' views on a number of areas of provision are more modest than the judgements given by HMI in this report. The school is keen to further improve the quality of learning and the breadth of curriculum opportunities through the context of the schools very recently granted specialist arts status. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior managers' ambitions for the pupils and the school as a whole are impressive. The pupils are guided towards healthy lifestyles by effective physical education provision and high quality school meals that are popular with pupils. Procedures to maintain the pupils' safety are being revised to meet the more demanding requirements of new legislation. Achievement is impressive in almost all curriculum areas and the enjoyment pupils derive from their lessons is very obvious. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and new initiatives such as 'Musical Futures' is helping to extend the range of opportunities. The pupils' excellent attitudes to learning, to one another and to the well-being of their fellow human beings, both locally and internationally, would compare well with any school in the country. Their contribution to the community is excellent. The outstanding academic challenge, care and guidance available helps to produce well-mannered articulate young people, with the skills to secure their future economic well-being. Senior staff have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have taken action to address those areas in need of development. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is robust and, as a result, the quality of teaching is outstanding. Assessment information is used effectively to inform management decisions, guide pupil progress and monitor the effectiveness of provision. A measure of how the school's effective performance is monitored, evaluated and improved is to be found in the impressive manner in which it has exceeded the challenging targets set by the governing body and the local authority (LA) for the last three years. The 2006 provisional results detail the continued impressive improvement in standards. Pupil performance in the core subjects at Key Stage 3, in all subjects at GCSE and at advanced level is well above the LA and national average. Pupil progress is outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. This consistent improvement in achievement is an important measure of the quality of teaching and learning provided over time. Despite this success there is a relentless drive by senior managers to improve the education of every child. The school's capacity to make the improvements required and which the senior leaders have already identified in the school development plan is outstanding.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school's sixth form is good with some outstanding features. It has an excellent reputation among parents and students. Standards of attainment are good in almost all subjects. A combination of consistently high quality teaching with high quality guidance and support means that, overall students make good progress during their

time in the sixth form. Most students achieve their predicted grades and a high proportion obtain a place at the university of their choice. The sixth form curriculum is good and provides a wide range of academic opportunities. Plans are in place to enhance the range of vocational courses in line with the school's new specialist status. Students are encouraged to participate in the Sixth Form Challenge but comment that they would appreciate some organised sports based activities. Students are very committed to the school and play an active role in many aspects of its daily life. They enjoy their time in the sixth form and speak very positively about the many responsibilities and opportunities they are given. As a result they develop as very well-rounded young people. One student commented 'there was no doubt in my mind about choosing the sixth form, I feel at home in the school and there are no regrets in my choice'. The sixth form is well led and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the professional feedback provided to teachers in order to extend the range of opportunities for outstanding learning. - Utilise the opportunities provided by the school's recently achieved specialist status to broaden and deepen the curriculum provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement and standards at age 14 and 16 years are outstanding. Pupils make outstanding progress in Key Stage 3 and exceed the school's ambitious targets. The 2006 provisional results for English, mathematics and science were 20% above the national average and nearly three-quarters of the pupils achieved the higher level 6. Pupils often attain outstanding results in mathematics. In 2006 half of the year group achieved the top two levels. The progress of a small number of lower achieving pupils remains variable, notably in science. Key Stage 4 results are well above the national average and have improved steadily for three years. Pupil progress in 2005 was 23% above the LA average. Pupils often make outstanding progress between Years 7-11 and achieve GCSE results that compare favourably with those of the most successful schools nationally. A measure of this success is that four fifths of students achieve five higher grade GCSE and more than one third of all examination passes are at the highest A or A* grades. Nearly three quarters of the pupils achieved five higher grade GCSE that included English and mathematics. This is an improvement on the position attained in 2005 which was, then, significantly above the national average. One in six pupils obtained at least nine A* or A grade GCSE in 2006. In the sixth form achievement and standards continue to improve and are above average. The 2006 provisional results of advanced level courses are impressive with more than half of pupils achieving A and B grades in almost all courses. Pupils were particularly successful in: religious education, economics, chemistry, drama, music, English literature, politics, physical education and sociology. The results from the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education in art were impressive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils are very articulate about their experience of the school, speaking extremely highly of the opportunities they have both in lessons and out of class to take responsibility, develop their personality and become mature, rounded citizens. The values of the school's mission statement powerfully underpin the work of the whole school. 'There is a great sense of community, collectively working together - I really enjoy being here,' is an opinion affirmed by a large proportion of pupils. The strong impact of assembly and worship is key to the excellent provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. Links with the parishes are strong and students involve themselves in many charitable projects, especially in supporting schools in Uganda, which includes charitable work closer to home. Personal development and well-being are outstanding and are supported by excellent out of school opportunities, such as the music tours, language exchanges, work experience and the Year 7 Friendship Day. New pupils are made to feel extremely welcome and older pupils feel well supported in their subject choices and careers aspirations. Pupils are engaged in a wide range of high quality sporting activities, and they respect and value the principles behind the school's move to set a strong example on healthy diet. Senior managers have vigorously addressed the issue of weak provision for health education which arose last year. The school is a very safe environment due to the mutual respect shown by all members of the school community. Senior pupils take a strong lead in developing initiatives for a safe and happy school. There are extensive opportunities for pupils to take responsibility in moulding the ethos of the school. The School Council is active and developing further into a parliament to give even greater pupil representation. Pupils are very highly motivated by the will to learn and view the increasingly robust system of academic review and target setting as a positive aid to fulfilling their ambitions to succeed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, teaching and learning are outstanding. Joint observations conducted with senior managers confirmed the accuracy of the schools evaluation of provision. The development of teaching and learning is acknowledged by senior managers and teachers as the key aspect in the school's continued success in raising standards. The cornerstone for this is the development and implementation of independent thinking and learning opportunities across all phases of the school. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are focussed, cooperative, hard working and make outstanding progress. A Year 10 pupil remarked that 'relationships with teachers are very strong'. Good examples of collaborative working were evident in all lessons observed. The teachers very good

subject knowledge was consistently evident. Their questioning skills were good and in almost all lessons pupils responded confidently to the questions and challenges set, using terminology and resources appropriately. Most pupils were prepared to ask their own questions and many teachers skilfully used these to individualise learning and to exemplify the lesson objectives to the whole class. The judicious use of ICT was in evidence where appropriate. Independent learning and critical thinking were key features where lessons were outstanding. The use of homework set to support and extend learning is very good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good and enrichment activities are outstanding. Provision is broad and balanced with some very good features in this very recently designated specialist arts school. The range of vocational provision is not extensive but development of the 'Musical Futures' project is just one aspect of the work that is offering a new vibrancy to the curriculum through specialist status. Pupils have equal access to a mainly academic curriculum that is relevant to their needs. Senior managers are now strategically broadening the curriculum provision by judiciously developing additional and appropriate vocational courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The school enjoys good, positive relationships with a range of individual secondary schools, particularly in relation to its specialist college status. There is a strong link with Stevenage Leisure to promote joint sports facilities. The school has an outstanding programme of high calibre enrichment activities including field trips, Duke of Edinburgh award schemes, cultural and language trips abroad and pilgrimages to Lourdes. These curriculum enrichment activities make an excellent contribution to the pupils' enjoyment and achievement and provide very good opportunities for them to work in teams. Of particular note within the curriculum is the very positive and continuing relationship the school has developed with Uganda where pupils and adults work extremely well together on a variety of projects. This link develops excellent global citizenship concepts and community practices which impact positively on the pupils' personal development and reflects the true ethos of the school. On a more local level, the support work of the pupils in the local community is excellent. The curriculum meets the statutory requirements including the provision for Religious Education and collective worship.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school excels in this area. All staff are fully committed to provide a 'Living Christian Experience' for all. One Year 10 pupil commented that, 'the school really tries to make a difference', others in the Inclusion Unit said, 'that staff treat them as individuals, help them with their work and that there is a strong sense of trust between pupils and staff'. These views are widely shared by pupils, parents, and inspectors who found the care, support and guidance for all pupils to be outstanding. The health and well being

of pupils is paramount and staff ensure that all learning environments are safe and secure. Child protection procedures are robust and rigorously applied. The vetting of staff and adults working with pupils is thorough. Academic and personal development is monitored very effectively. Individual progress is tracked very carefully and personal targets are set for all pupils to achieve. Staff know their pupils very well and a wide range of strategies are used to monitor the well-being and personal development of all individuals. Particular attention is given to supporting pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. More vulnerable pupils receive extra support to raise their self-esteem and fully prepare them for adult life. The transition arrangements for the youngest pupils beginning school are exemplary. For instance, older pupils act as learning mentors to provide very effective levels of extra support and guidance for the younger ones. The gentle and calm manner in which sixth formers were observed to 'shepherd' lost Year 7 pupils was exemplary.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The impact of the careful monitoring and evaluation of provision is evident in the steady improvement in standards and the impressively positive attitudes to learning displayed by the pupils. The senior leadership team and the governing body are not satisfied with good or above average performance; their focus is on securing the best possible education and personal development for the pupils. Every child does matter in this school. Self-evaluation is excellent with careful analysis developed from robust evidence. The school development plan reflects agreed priorities and is a model of clarity. The headteacher and governors have rebuilt the senior management team in order to facilitate the progress sought in the development plan. The headteacher's belief in the importance of recruiting effective staff has led to the granting of 'Arts' specialist school status and to the consistent improvement in standards. Particularly impressive middle managers lead key areas of the curriculum or provision. The leadership and management of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are outstanding. Senior managers direct improvement and promote the well-being of learners through high quality care, guidance and support. The governance of the school is very good; governors are alert to the opportunities to further enhance standards and provision. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet government requirements. Resource management is very good and the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Financial management is outstanding and the school provides outstanding value for money.

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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?	1	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	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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	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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	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?	1	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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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

25 September 2006 Dear Pupils The John Henry Newman RC School, Hitchen Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 4AE As you will remember, an inspection team visited your school early in September this year. It is a particular pleasure to write to you and say how impressed we were with you and with your school. Your positive attitudes to learning are quite remarkable. As a result of all of this hard work the standards achieved have improved each year with the consequence that John Henry Newman is one of the most successful schools in the country. The care, guidance and support you receive are excellent. What was particularly pleasing to see was how you offer these considerations to others in Uganda and closer to home. The gentle and calm manner in which sixth formers were observed to 'shepherd' lost Year 7 pupils was exemplary. Thank you for contributing to the inspection. We spoke with many of you in class, around the school and as part of key interviews. You were full of praise for the school and the most common response was 'it's a fantastic place' and we agree. I was pleased to receive the letters and telephone calls from your parents. Although I was unable to speak to all of them, I have tried to answer their questions in the report, so please give them my thanks. In discussion with the headteacher and the governing body I have asked them to broaden and deepen the curriculum provision and learning opportunities around the new Specialist Arts School status. The headteacher will tell you how you can be involved in this process. I look forward to hearing about your future successes. David Jones Her Majesty's Inspector.