



St Alban's Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124864
Local Authority SUFFOLK
Inspection number 293133
Inspection dates 26–27 February 2007
Reporting inspector Lindsay Hebditch HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Digby Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Ipswich
Age range of pupils	11–18		Suffolk IP4 3NJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01473 726178
Number on roll (school)	921	Fax number	01473 718628
Number on roll (6th form)	172		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Dr Erica Joslyn
		Headteacher	Mr Dennis McGarry
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	26–27 February 2007	293133

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Alban's Catholic High School is a medium sized comprehensive school. It is the only Catholic secondary school in Ipswich and attracts students from a wide area. Students entering the school are generally of above average ability. Most students are of White British background. The proportion of students who receive free school meals or have a statement of special educational need is low. The school has maintained specialist technology college status since September 1994. Most students join the sixth form on completion of their GCSE courses.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Albans is an outstanding school which provides an excellent standard of education for its students. It lives out its mission, 'to be a living Christian community in which effective learning takes place'. The outstanding achievements of its students are underpinned by a profound understanding of the Catholic values that are part of everyday life for the school. This makes the school a calm, safe and happy place for students. The personal development of students is outstanding. They enjoy coming to school and recognise how well it is preparing them for future adult life. Older students have been active in promoting healthy lifestyles and contributing to the well-being of the local community. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is excellent. Most aspects of teaching are outstanding, although the school recognises that in some subjects the rigour and consistency of the day to day marking of students' work could be improved. Students throughout the school receive excellent support from their teachers both formally and informally. This helps them to achieve their potential and make wise career choices. Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides assured and effective leadership and receives excellent support from the senior leadership team and the school's governors. Standards have continued to improve since the last inspection. Performance targets are met and frequently exceeded. The school's specialist status in technology has been used effectively to support developments in other aspects of the curriculum. Parents have high expectations of the school and a small minority feel that their views should be considered more fully. The school is accurate in its own evaluation of the quality of its provision and has outstanding capacity to improve still further. It provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form provision is outstanding. The highly effective teaching enables students to make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and reach standards in their GCE, AS and A-level subjects, which are well above the national average. A particularly strong feature of the sixth form is the extended curriculum which provides opportunities for students to take additional GCE A-level examinations in critical thinking and general studies. The majority of students also take and enjoy courses in key skills. Their levels of functional literacy and numeracy are high and they are well prepared to progress to higher education. Consortium arrangements with other schools are developing to widen the choice of courses still further. Pastoral care is outstanding. Students are well supported by their tutors and say that the targets they are set help them to make progress. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The sixth form continues to grow in size, placing a strain on the accommodation in the sixth form centre.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the arrangements for consulting with parents

- Improve the rigour and consistency of the marking of students' work

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Achievement and standards are outstanding. Students enter the school with attainment which is generally above average and make excellent and consistent progress in Key Stage 3. Test results in English and mathematics are particularly impressive for students of all levels of ability, based on their starting points. Very high standards are maintained in Key Stage 4. The proportions of students who achieve at least five GCSE grades A*-C has improved to a figure which is significantly above the national and local authority averages. The school has an excellent record of setting and achieving challenging targets for students which are based on a careful analysis of their potential, so there are no significant differences in the progress of different groups of students. This emphasis on how well students of all abilities can learn and the celebration of their achievement instils tremendous pride in students, staff and parents alike. The school fully meets all of its targets in relation to its specialist status in technology. Sixth form students make excellent progress and consequently reach standards which are well above the national average in most GCE, AS and A level subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding and their behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. Students acquire a deep understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. They respond enthusiastically and generously to charity appeals and to requests to pray for and offer help to those less fortunate than themselves. They also develop an excellent understanding of cultural diversity. A new Fair Trade business initiative is contributing significantly to students' awareness of personal finance and helping to develop their workplace skills. Students are keenly aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles, and through the School Council have had an impact in recent healthy eating developments. An imaginative gardening project which is growing vegetables for school meals is helping younger students to think more deeply about the food they eat. Bullying is rare and students are confident that any incidents would be dealt with promptly and fairly. Attendance, which was good in 2005, declined in 2006 to close to the national average. The school understands the reasons for this and is confident that the broad range of measures it has introduced to improve attendance will enable it to match or exceed its former standards. Sixth formers take their responsibility to act as role models to younger students extremely seriously and are maturing into sensitive, confident and highly articulate young adults.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Standards observed in lessons are high. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge and skills to make their lessons stimulating and challenging. They extend students' understanding through skilful and probing questioning and are quick to praise the perceptive responses they frequently receive. Many teachers use learning resources, such as interactive whiteboards, to help students grasp complex ideas and concepts. Students respond positively to the challenge and make enthusiastic learners. As a result they learn quickly and well. Students receive regular feedback on their progress in lessons and through interim assessments. They are set clear performance targets which are closely matched to the requirements of National Curriculum tests and external examinations. Students value these targets but in some subjects, although work is marked regularly, teachers' comments do not provide sufficient information on how students could improve their work. Teaching assistants give very good support to students with learning difficulties.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's curriculum is good. It meets students' needs well, enabling them to make good progress and achieve high standards. The school's specialist status in technology has had a positive effect on the curriculum and is reflected particularly well in the areas of design technology, information and communication technology (ICT), science and mathematics. In Years 10 and 11 the wide range of optional subjects available to all students caters well for their individual needs and interests. Work related learning is being promoted through good links with local businesses and the Suffolk Chamber of Trade and in lessons in personal, social and health education. The combined programme of personal social and health education, citizenship, economic and careers education and 'learning to learn' is proving successful, but demanding to teach in the time available for it. Participation in sports, music and enterprise activities is good. There is a good range of extra curricular and enrichment activities, although some students would like more. In the sixth form, students are able to choose from a good range of GCE, AS and A level options. Opportunities to follow vocational courses in the sixth form are increasing, and are proving very popular with students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support of students are outstanding. There is a very strong sense of Christian community which pervades the daily life of the school and students feel safe and secure within it. The rigorous attention to the needs of every individual student is at the heart of the school's work. The radical reorganisation of pastoral support with heads of key stages and student support managers is enabling the school to provide students with an even better standard of personal and social support and excellent academic monitoring.

There is very good provision for students with learning difficulties and for helping pupils with weak basic skills to improve. Vulnerable students receive excellent support and there is very good liaison with outside agencies. Arrangements for safeguarding students are robust and the school ensures students' welfare and safety through careful attention to risk assessments. Parents are regularly informed about their child's progress, and students receive very good guidance about their future options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The leadership and management of the school and sixth form are outstanding. There are high expectations for all aspects of the school's work which are shared by all staff. This sustained focus on whole school improvement has helped to create a very successful and popular school which has moved steadily from the very good standards observed at the previous inspection to the current outstanding ones. The headteacher provides assured and effective leadership and is supported by a strong senior leadership team. Together they have successfully developed highly effective management systems that fully meet the needs of a growing comprehensive school. School planning is sharply focused and monitoring and review procedures are rigorous. Self evaluation is accurate. Performance targets are met and frequently exceeded. Teachers praise the school for the opportunities it provides for their involvement in the running of the school and personal and professional development they receive. Morale in the school is high. Governance is outstanding. The many long standing governors understand their role in monitoring performance and holding the headteacher and his staff to account. They have been central to the school's sustained growth and development over many years. The school has used its additional funding as a specialist college wisely, and ICT facilities in particular are well used to support teaching and learning. New buildings have considerably enhanced the learning environment but the school recognises the need to continue efforts to expand accommodation and resources to cope with its growing school population. The school provides excellent 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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

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	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
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	1	
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?	1	1
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	1
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	1	
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

1 March 2007

Dear Students

St Alban's Catholic High School, Digby Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 3NJ

I'd like to tell you what our inspectors thought of your school when we visited it earlier this week. We met and talked to many of you during our two days at the school, watched as many lessons as we could and looked at the quality of your work. We also got a lot of responses to our questionnaire for parents. Please pass on our thanks to them for taking the trouble to reply.

I am sure you will be delighted to know that we think that St Alban's Catholic High School is an outstanding school. The excellent achievement of students in the school is underpinned by a deep understanding of the Catholic values that are part of everyday life for the school. The school is a calm, safe and happy place for students. You told us how much you enjoy school and how well you feel it is preparing you for adult life. Teaching is outstanding and the support that you get to help you to do your best is excellent. Standards at the school are improving all the time. The sixth form is also outstanding. Students achieve excellent results in their GCE, AS and A level subjects and enjoy a similar quality of support to that of younger pupils.

We identified two things that the school could do to help it improve further.

These were:

- Improve the arrangements for consulting with parents
- Improve the rigour and consistency of the marking of students' work

Keep up the excellent work, and thanks for your help.

Lindsay Hebditch HMI