



St Paul's Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105579
Local Authority Manchester
Inspection number 294311
Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007
Reporting inspector Derek Aitken

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Firbank Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Newall Green, Manchester
Age range of pupils	11–16		Lancashire M23 2YS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 437 5841
Number on roll (school)	746	Fax number	0161 498 2030
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Tommy Judge
		Headteacher	Mr Wiktor Daron
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	24–25 January 2007	294311

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school provides education and care for students, mainly from Catholic families, in an area of some social disadvantage in South Manchester. There is a diversity of minority ethnic groups in the school, although students are predominately White British. The number of students for whom English is an additional language, and who are at an early stage of learning English, is growing. Three tenths of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well above average. The school has a wide range of partnerships with educational establishments, especially Catholic schools and colleges in the locality.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that it is now satisfactory. Its strengths lie first and foremost in the high quality of leadership by the headteacher, supported well by his two deputy headteachers, and the pastoral care provided by the staff. The school evaluates leadership and management to be satisfactory but inspectors judge it to be good.

From a starting point of below average attainment on entry to the school students make satisfactory progress and, by the time they reach Year 11, standards remain below average. This satisfactory progress is due to steady improvements in the quality of provision. This is reflected in students' attendance, which is now average as a result of strenuous efforts to improve it. Most students feel safe, relationships with adults are good and behaviour has improved. These factors enable students to concentrate better on their learning and ensure more consistent progress. The school's new monitoring system identifies underachievement earlier and directs effective strategies to address it. Although standards are rising there is scope for further improvement, especially in Key Stage 4.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. The unwillingness of a significant number to become more actively involved in lessons and the lack of opportunities they have to learn independently hinder their progress. However, an increasing proportion of the teaching is good, contributing to the development of students' basic skills. While teachers do not use assessment information consistently well to plan to meet the needs of all learners, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported effectively by teaching assistants.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Improvements have been made to providing courses better suited to the needs of lower attaining students in Key Stage 4. Opportunities for other students to boost their achievement by following a wider range of vocational courses are limited. Students are well looked after and there are effective systems to ensure new entrants, for example those of Polish origin, settle in quickly. Students know their targets but, because marking is inconsistent and they are not fully involved in the assessment of their learning, they do not always know how to improve their work. The school listens to the views of students and parents and engenders a spirit of common purpose, but there are few opportunities for students to contribute directly to the work of the school. Most parents and carers are happy with the standard of education their children receive. The increasing effectiveness of leadership and management has been the key to securing better outcomes for students. The most important priorities have been established and implemented well. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Partnerships with educational and other establishments are effective. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. In view of the increased stability and quality at all levels of staffing, the capacity for further improvement is good. The school offers satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Key Stage 4 and ensure all students achieve as well as they can.
- Ensure all teachers make the best use of assessment data to plan work to meet the needs of all students.
- Involve students in the assessment of their learning so that they understand how to improve their work.
- Increase the range of vocational courses in Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of all students.
- Widen the range of opportunities students have to contribute to the work of the school in order to enhance their personal development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

From below average attainment on entry to Year 7, students make satisfactory progress across the school and reach below average standards by the time they leave. In 2005 standards in Years 9 and 11 were well below average, indicating that these students made insufficient progress. The overall trend in standards over four years in English, mathematics and science is upwards. In 2006, attainment at the end of Year 9 at both Level 5 and Level 6 rose significantly and challenging targets were met. Although there was little improvement in the numbers gaining five or more higher GCSE grades in Year 11, results overall continued to improve and the percentage of students gaining alternative qualifications at Level 2 in English and mathematics doubled. There was a marked increase in the proportions of students gaining pass grades. Only two students left without gaining at least one GCSE grade. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support that ensures they achieve in line with the other students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most students enjoy school and are developing a growing sense of loyalty towards it. This is in no small part due to the efforts of teachers, the school counsellor and learning mentors. Relationships are warm and the staff are good role models. Students behave satisfactorily both in lessons and at break-time. Attendance is below average but the school has raised the attendance rate considerably over the last year and met its target. Punctuality to school and to lessons has also improved but still remains an issue, particularly for older students. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. They willingly support a range of charities, including those which sustain lives in Africa, but have fewer opportunities to develop initiative and responsibility in the school community. Students' response to encouragement to adopt healthy life styles is mixed. They participate well in the wide range of sporting activities but some prefer less healthy eating options.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the best lessons students rise to the challenge of high expectations and a brisk pace, following the good example set by teachers' expertise. Questioning is skilled in developing students' understanding. Routines are clear and well established. Less effective lessons provide fewer opportunities for students to work independently or to reflect on their learning. Information on students' progress is not used consistently enough to match work to their needs. On a few occasions expectations of students are weak and this leads to a lack of motivation. Teaching assistants work effectively to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective work is done in the Year 7 'nurture' group to reinforce the basic skills of those students who have found the transition to secondary school challenging. The increased proportion of good teaching reflects the decisive action taken by leaders.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and makes a satisfactory contribution to students' progress. The school places strong emphasis on developing students' literacy skills and this is helping to improve their learning in other subjects. Work-related learning for all is at an early stage of development. For some students in Key Stage 4, this provision is developing rapidly and they are gaining a good range of employment skills. Work experience is also effective in equipping all Year 10 students with skills useful for their later working lives. Although the option system enables nearly all students to secure their first choice of courses in Year 10, the school has a limited range of vocational courses available to all students. A lack of learning resources restricts their achievement in technology. Students' personal development is supported by a good range of enrichment activities that include sport, the arts, and residential visits.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Health and safety procedures, including child protection, are in place and risk assessments are regularly reviewed. Students are well supervised and arrangements for helping those who join the school during term-time to settle in have improved. This is reflected in the increased quality of support for students with English as an additional language. Other groups of vulnerable students, including those at risk of exclusion, receive sensitive help. Close partnership with feeder primary schools promotes continuity of care and ensures that students make a good start in Year 7. Students are well guided about future subject and career options. Most feel safe and believe there is someone to turn to if they have

a problem. They say, 'Teachers care about our education.' The new system to track students' progress is a useful tool for school managers and has raised expectations amongst both teachers and students but is not yet fully embedded in the work of the school. Students are aware of their targets but do not get enough clear guidance on how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and deputy headteachers give very clear direction and have created a common sense of purpose amongst staff. The school's managers are now succeeding in raising attainment and achievement through improved teaching and learning and by establishing higher aspirations for students. Performance management procedures are in place and the school monitors teaching and learning accurately, with appropriate support being available where needed. Middle leaders are increasingly effective in ensuring that students work towards their targets. The school acknowledges that a few middle leaders are initiating change less successfully than others and steps are in hand to ensure that the best practice is consistently applied across the school. Leaders at all levels know the school's strengths and areas for development and work hard to overcome the barriers to achievement. The school is striving to raise standards through a range of well-planned initiatives. However, some of these are at an early stage and their full impact in relation to students' results have yet to be fully realised. Governors provide a good balance of support and challenge for the school. They are well informed and are committed to the success of the school.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

We visited your school last week to find out how well you were learning. Thank you for making us welcome and being helpful when we asked you questions. This is what we found.

We judge that you are now receiving a satisfactory education, as the school has made many recent improvements. Much of this is down to the good teamwork of the staff, well led by the headteacher and his senior colleagues. The staff also care for you and support you well. We were impressed by how well you get on with them.

You have also played your part in making things better. You are realising that coming to school more regularly gives you a better chance of making the progress you should in lessons and sets you up better to pass exams. You are setting higher standards for yourselves in your behaviour, which is helping you concentrate more on your work. We have asked the staff to ensure that these positive developments continue and to work hard to ensure the standards you achieve are higher still.

We have asked the headteacher to do four other things to help you achieve better. Firstly, to make sure teachers plan work in lessons that is at the right level for each and every one of you. We also think it is important that teachers involve you more in the assessment of your work to help you learn more quickly. You can help by regularly checking how well you are doing and by telling your teachers if you are not sure how to improve your work. We believe that all of you in Years 10 and 11 should have access to a wider range of vocational courses. Finally we have suggested that you are given more opportunities to develop your self-confidence by contributing to the work of the school more. You can do your bit by being more willing to answer questions in lessons and assemblies.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school. We hope you will help your teachers make St Paul's an even better place to be.