



St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124460
Local Authority Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 300102
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Michelle Parker HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Little Chell Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Tunstall
Age range of pupils	11–18		Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6LZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 234477
Number on roll (school)	891	Fax number	01782 577157
Number on roll (6th form)	85	Chair	Bill Robinson
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	C Smith
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2005		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	7–8 March 2007	300102

© 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College is a popular and oversubscribed 11 to 18 school, serving a socially and economically diverse area in the north of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. It is slightly below average in size and has few students from minority ethnic groups, few who are entitled to free school meals, and few with learning difficulties and disabilities or statements of special educational need.

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.

At the time of its last inspection this school was subject to a Notice to Improve in November 2005 because of an inadequate sixth form. The school has worked hard to address the weaknesses identified. It is now satisfactory with some good features.

The drive and enthusiasm of the headteacher is shared by the recently restructured senior leadership team. As a result, the school now understands the reasons for the underachievement of some groups of students and has put appropriate strategies in place to support them. Leaders and managers make effective use of information on students' progress to ensure that teaching is better matched to their needs.

Standards in both key stages have improved since 2005. In particular, the school has addressed the weaknesses in English, mathematics and science noted in the previous report. Although students' achievement is satisfactory overall, girls do not achieve as well as boys. A small number of boys from Pakistani and Bangladeshi families underachieved in 2005 but the school has identified and addressed their needs. Students with learning difficulties and or disabilities, and those students who are looked after by the local authority, make satisfactory progress.

Provision for students' personal development and well-being is good with some outstanding features. For example, involvement in the community is exceptional. Students are encouraged in many subjects to challenge stereotypes and to think deeply about demanding moral issues. As a consequence, ethnic and inter faith cohesion is strengthened. The school ensures that students have a wide range of opportunities to develop good workplace skills. This contributes to students' high take up of higher and further educational opportunities.

Students enjoy coming to school, feel safe, and are confident that any bullying or racism is dealt with promptly. Parents, rightly so, have very high expectations of behaviour in school and students' behaviour observed by inspectors was good. Teaching throughout the school is at least satisfactory and good in the sixth form. Teachers clearly explain what students need to do to improve in class but written comments on students' work are not always sufficiently clear to help their learning. However, students understand what their targets are and what they need to do to achieve them. Students are often stimulated by appropriately challenging work in lessons and this boosts their progress though not yet across all subjects consistently. Governors are effectively informed about all aspects of school life and are able to confidently hold the senior leadership to account and promote high standards. The school provides satisfactory value for money and has demonstrated that it has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Shortcomings in the sixth form identified in the previous inspection have been tackled rigorously.

Whilst there are differences in the performances of different groups of students, overall they are making satisfactory progress and standards are about average. Ongoing assessment now identifies underachieving students so that teachers are able to promptly provide appropriate support in each subject. This combination of a strategic overview of performance and responsive support has improved the capacity of the sixth form to tackle underperformance. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

Students now attend regularly and are punctual to lessons. Private study has been successfully encouraged because students now have an area for study with access to computers. Students make use of learning materials on-line in school and at home through the intranet. Guidance about post-16 choices and criteria for entry to the sixth form have ensured a more accurate match of courses to students' interest and previous attainment. The school has established close links with other schools and a further education college to appropriately extend the range of provision offered to students in the sixth form. A rigorous programme of training for staff, sharing both external and within school examples of best practice, has effectively raised the quality of subject and lesson planning, assessment and guidance.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers' written comments on students' work clearly explain what students need to do to improve the quality of their work.
- Ensure that all groups of pupils make at least satisfactory progress in all key stages, more consistently providing tasks in lessons that cater for the whole range of learning needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Across the school standards are broadly average and students of all ages are making satisfactory progress.

Test results of pupils aged 14 show that standards fell during the period from 2003 to 2005, but this trend was halted in 2006. Strategies put in place by the school have successfully boosted attainment of pupils aged 14 in 2006, particularly in mathematics and science, and achievement is now satisfactory. The school has carefully analysed results and understands what to do to improve attainment in English where standards are still lagging behind other subjects.

Although the number of students achieving 5 or more A*- C grades at GCSE fell from 69% in 2005 to 63%, in 2006, their achievement was still in line with similar schools

nationally. However, it is a priority for the school to ensure that more students achieve 5 or more A*- C including English and mathematics. There were only small differences in the attainment of boys and girls overall. Nevertheless, girls did not do as well as they should have done, and too few boys attained the highest grades. Furthermore, not enough students attained grades A*- C in mathematics and English in 2006. The school now has appropriate strategies to rigorously monitor, intervene and support individual students. The school is appropriately focusing additional support upon those who require it. As a result, most groups of students, including those who are looked after by the local authority and vulnerable students, are making satisfactory progress.

Students in the sixth form now make satisfactory progress. Although standards still remain low, underachievement has been robustly tackled and is in decline.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

As at the time of the last inspection, the personal development of students aged 11 to 16 is good, and it has improved in the sixth form where personal development is now also good. Spiritual, moral and social education are outstanding, with students learning well about their own and other religious traditions and cultures.

Students know how to make moral judgements because there are stimulating opportunities to consider ethical dilemmas and challenges in lessons such as religious education and history. For example, students in a Year 7 assembly demonstrated the importance of taking personal and communal responsibility for tackling bullying.

Students enjoy coming to school. Attendance is good and is improving, and students participate enthusiastically in those lessons that challenge and engage them. Occasionally, in more mundane lessons, students lose interest and concentration.

Students conduct themselves safely as they move around the site, and participate well in the school's extensive programme of physical education, after school team games and health related activities.

The school makes an excellent contribution to the local and wider community. For example, the public appreciates performances by students in shopping centres and at the local Remembrance Day ceremony. Students benefit from a good work experience and careers education programme. This is enhanced by good communication to help parents understand and support their learning. As a result, a high proportion of students continues into further education or training. Good enterprise skills and economic awareness are developed, for example, by raising money for charities by organising special events and concerts.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that teaching and learning are satisfactory in the main school. There have been recent improvements in the sixth form, where the quality of teaching is now good. Students' progress overall is satisfactory.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and have improved their lesson planning as a result of extensive sharing of good practice coupled with external support. Teachers now have a better understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses and are beginning to provide a range of tasks and resources to cater for the full range of learning needs in classes. However, sometimes teachers spend too long addressing the whole class, or give all the same work, and both more able and less able students make less progress. Students enjoy lessons because of the variety of activities, and they especially value opportunities to work together on tasks in small groups. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Strong emphasis on students evaluating their own work and that of others has helped them to deepen their understanding of what they learn.

Teachers know their students well, providing stimulating learning opportunities that have a positive impact on their performance. Well planned questions, high expectations and pace help maintain students' engagement with appropriately challenging work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory across the whole school. Close links with primary partners ensure students entering the school settle down well. Information and communication technology (ICT) is now taught to all students. The range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in the arts, has a positive impact on students' personal development. Pathways in Years 10 and 11 provide for the needs of all abilities, with a key skills course successfully raising standards of literacy and numeracy of lower attaining students. Links with local schools and colleges widen the choices available, especially in vocational areas. However, the needs of the ablest and the least able students are not yet consistently met by the work planned for lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students benefit from good care, guidance and support, which have improved since the last inspection. The school's warm, friendly ethos provides an orderly and safe environment for learning.

Child protection procedures meet statutory requirements, whilst risk assessments are carried out appropriately. Bullying is rare because the school has effective procedures to deal with incidents, and makes sure that students understand their responsibilities towards each other.

Systems to improve the monitoring of students' progress have improved. They ensure that underachieving and vulnerable individuals are identified and given additional help. Parents and students receive helpful information about achievement in relation to potential, based on the school's recently enhanced student progress database. However, the quality of written advice given to students about how well they are doing and what they should do in order to improve is often not as precise or consistent as the high quality verbal feedback in lessons.

Most parents observe, rightly, that teachers know their children well and are good at helping them through personal difficulties and settling them into school. There has been a great improvement in the quality of guidance given to sixth formers about study skills and self-organisation. The importance of full attendance is appropriately stressed in communications to students and parents.

There are good links with outside agencies such as the police, social services and the educational welfare service.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management have undergone significant changes since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. There is a shared commitment and responsibility for improvement that includes teaching and non teaching staff, and senior and middle leaders. Staff are now held to account for standards, achievement and students' progress. This powerful teamwork is instrumental in driving the school forward. At all levels the more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, and the use and understanding of performance data, has enabled leaders to more accurately identify strengths and areas where further work needs to be done to raise standards.

The budget has been well managed and resources for learning well deployed. The impact of spending decisions is closely evaluated ensuring resources are used to gain the maximum benefit. Improvements in provision and achievement mean that value for money is now satisfactory.

The school has a more accurate and realistic picture of its achievements than at the time of the last inspection. The actions the school has taken are having a beneficial impact. There has been a significant improvement in attendance in the main school and in the sixth form, and achievement is improving all key stages. The curriculum has been modified and now meets statutory requirements.

Governors play an active role in decision making and give a satisfactory strategic lead. The school's specialist arts education influences many aspects of the school and underpins the excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of the school and its work with the community.

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?	3	3
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	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	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	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?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
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?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
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

Thank you for making us so welcome and for contributing so helpfully to the inspection of your school. We listened to your views with interest and were impressed by the thoughtfulness of your comments.

Your school is no longer subject to a Notice to Improve. It now provides you with a satisfactory education and has several good features. Your school is a very friendly place. You make everyone feel welcomed. We were pleased to see how hard you and your teachers have worked to address all the issues identified in the last inspection. Your attendance has improved. You are working hard in most lessons, particularly when there are high expectations made of you. You understand what grades you are working towards and you are increasingly confident in setting yourselves more ambitious targets. You spoke very positively about courses in the sixth form and, although girls are not doing as well as boys, your attitude to independent study has improved. Your work in the community and understanding of current social issues showed great maturity and are outstanding. The work you do for a wide range of charities is impressive and an indication of the very strong moral and spiritual ethos in the school.

We were impressed by the respect you showed each other and the good relationships you have with staff.

Teaching has improved in the sixth form and is now good, many improvements are now happening lower down the school. However, we have asked your teachers to ensure that all students receive the support and challenge they need so that none underachieve. We have also asked your teachers to ensure that their marking provides you with clear indications of what to do to improve.

We wish you every success in the future