

The Holy Cross School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102607
Local Authority	Kingston Upon Thames
Inspection number	308068
Inspection date	10 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Limm HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	923
6th form	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr V McDonnell
Headteacher	Mr T Gibson
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	25 Sandal Road New Malden KT3 5AR
Telephone number	020 8395 4225
Fax number	020 8395 4234

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; teaching and learning; care, guidance and support and the impact of this on pupils' personal development and well-being; and aspects of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from: the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; curriculum and planning documents; observation of lessons; discussions with staff, students and a member of the governing body; and from the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

The Holy Cross School is an oversubscribed medium sized Roman Catholic comprehensive school for girls in the residential area of New Malden. The sixth form is federated with a local boys school and there are joint lessons in a number of subjects. Students come from a broad range of social, economic and ethnic backgrounds and a wide geographical area. More than 24% have a mother tongue other than English. The number of students eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. Most students enter the school with levels of attainment broadly above average. Until September 2007, the school admitted about twenty girls each year that had passed the local eleven plus selection process. Governors have made the decision to end this admission arrangement and the current Year 7 is fully comprehensive. The school was designated a Science College in 2003 and a Training School in 2004.

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. Christian values and concern for others are at the heart of its work. All who work in the school are highly committed to equality of opportunity for every young person. It has a good reputation locally for providing high quality education and care. This is reflected in the very high number of responses to the parental questionnaire of which 98% were extremely positive. One parent wrote, 'I am very proud to have my daughter attending this school', and another thought the school's 'strategies are brilliant'. The school is particularly successful at engaging its students in all aspects of the school community and raising their aspirations. Students leave the school with excellent skills and qualities to enable them to succeed well in the next stage of their education or employment.

Most students enter the school with above average attainment but standards are well above average in all years and improving. Students make outstanding progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The school consistently exceeds its challenging targets by ensuring that individual students are constantly challenged to beat their own personal targets. A good example of this is the excellent set of science results for Key Stage 3 in 2007 where students made outstanding progress and helped the school to exceed its science target by fourteen points. Because of the school's rigorous and highly effective monitoring of student progress all groups, no matter what their learning needs, achieve extremely well. Students who enter the school with slightly lower standards than the majority or with learning difficulties and disabilities are provided with excellent support and guidance to ensure that barriers to learning are overcome. The development of students' basic skills is excellent, particularly the ability to communicate in a range of contexts and to use number in problem solving. Many students demonstrate a very high level of independent thinking and expression.

Students achieve so well because of the excellent teaching and support they receive and because of their own very positive attitudes. This combination proved so effective that standards continued to rise during a major building project on the school's small site. Teachers' comprehensive subject knowledge and excellent use of questions enable students to reflect well and speak at length about their work. Lessons are carefully planned to include an imaginative range of learning activities to encourage students to think for themselves and find their own solutions to problems. Teachers benefit from the excellent range of professional development opportunities that have accompanied the school's status as a training institution. Seven teachers achieved an MA degree last year in educational and teacher-related studies and other teachers have been involved in research-based projects that have made a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Learning is enhanced further by the excellent relationships that exist between teachers and students, and between students and their peers. One girl said, 'I feel so safe here, everyone knows each other and in corridors when we pass teachers they always ask how we are doing, they really care about us. I could go to any one of them if I had a problem'.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding because they are encouraged to develop their self-confidence and aspire to achieve so well. They are able to work independently and collaboratively and can sustain their concentration on difficult tasks. They eat healthily and take regular exercise. Students say they hugely enjoy attending school and really get involved in lessons and other activities available for them. They undertake a range of responsibilities in school and undertake many volunteering activities outside school. Attendance rates are above average and behaviour is excellent. Students' spiritual, moral, social

and cultural development is excellent. There is an excellent curriculum which is built around individual needs so that students really do benefit from personalised programmes of study and support mechanisms. An excellent feature of the school is the strong set of links with organisations and schools in other parts of the world which has been developed using information and communication technology to enhance curriculum provision and international understanding.

Students receive outstanding care, guidance and support. The school's Inclusion Unit provides excellent support and guidance for those students who need extra help to remain engaged on school work and attend school regularly. The care and support of the small number of looked-after students is excellent. Appropriate child protection procedures are in place. Risk assessments are undertaken regularly and robustly, particularly when planning for visits out of school.

The high level of achievement and outstanding quality of care of students are a direct result of excellent leadership and management. The headteacher, ably supported by his leadership team and strongly developing middle managers, promote a culture of highly effective school improvement. Staff set high standards for themselves and have a very strong commitment to continuous improvement. Evaluation is well established in the school and a self-critical culture exists. A strong feature of the leadership is an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and what it needs to do to improve. The Headteacher and staff are not complacent. Efficient monitoring systems ensure that improvement is maintained at pace. The school has the support of an outstanding governing body which challenges teachers constructively on a range of issues relating to standards, teaching, curriculum and organisation. The outstanding leadership and vision of the headteacher, with the full support of the governors, parents, staff and students, are at the heart of the school's excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is federated with that of a local boys' school, an arrangement that is well established and works well to provide students with a good education. Numbers are rising as the popularity of the school grows and the quality of provision improves. Attainment on entry is broadly average and the school tries hard to accommodate some students whose prior attainment might not secure a sixth form place in normal circumstances but who are known to the school and are prepared to work hard and have high aspirations for themselves. Even so, students make good progress but not enough able learners achieve the highest A-level grades. The sixth form is well led and managed and new systems for tracking student progress are beginning to have an impact in setting more realistically challenging targets for individual students. Teaching and learning are good and the curriculum is excellent for meeting a wide range of individual needs. Students' personal development is outstanding and this is bolstered by excellent care, guidance and support. There is good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

* Improve the proportion of sixth form students gaining the highest grades.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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	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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	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?	1	1
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
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

17 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Holy Cross School, New Malden, KT3 5AR

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school. I enjoyed meeting some of you and found your comments and opinions most helpful. They helped us to make up our minds that your school is outstanding. I was impressed by how much you wanted us to know this and how you communicated your pride in the school and all it provides for you.

In addition to what you told us we liked your school so much because:

- overall you make excellent progress in the main school and good progress in the sixth form
- you attain very high standards up to GCSE and good standards in the sixth form
- you enjoy school and appreciate how much staff do for you, both in and out of school
- the relationships are so good and you feel safe at the school
- you develop excellent attitudes to learning and your behaviour is extremely good
- your headteacher gives the school excellent leadership and he is very ably supported by his senior staff and teachers
- you enjoy the many extra activities provided by the school including strong links with schools in other parts of the world
- your teachers work very hard to make your lessons interesting and thoughtful
- your curriculum is planned to meet your individual needs
- the school looks after you very well.

I felt, that to improve further, the school has to ensure that a higher proportion of sixth formers gain the highest grades.

Best wishes

Peter Limm

Her Majesty's Inspector