

Holy Family Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104962
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	308719
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Jane Austin HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	782
6th form	158
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Gillespie
Headteacher	Mrs Seddon
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2005
School address	Virgins Lane Thornton Liverpool Merseyside L23 4UL
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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

Holy Family is a smaller than average school that has experienced a decline in its roll over recent years as a consequence of demographic changes. Although it serves an area of above average disadvantage, students travel from beyond the immediate community to attend and the proportion eligible for free school meals is average. Almost all students are White British with small numbers from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. No student is at the early stages of learning English. The school is designated barrier-free for students with physical disabilities. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average but the proportion with statements of special educational need is well below average. Comparatively few students join and leave the school other than at the normal times.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Holy Family is a good school with outstanding features. Notable is the outstanding care, guidance and support for students that focuses on securing success for each one. A comment from a school councillor is typical of the views expressed by many students, 'This is a school where the teachers want you to succeed.' All the systems in the school work coherently towards this end. Progress leaders know every student and work unstintingly to ensure that all do as well as they can. Challenging targets are set in all subjects and students' progress towards these is checked regularly. Measures to overcome underachievement are taken rapidly. The pupil outreach department is highly effective in supporting students with significant barriers to their learning, drawing on the expertise of an extensive range of external agencies to meet the individual needs of learners. The curriculum is good overall. It is outstanding at Key Stage 4 because it offers a range of pathways that match students' interests and aspirations. The needs of vulnerable and disaffected students are very well met through a combination of individually tailored opportunities for extended work experience and courses that help them develop the basic skills and personal dispositions needed to succeed beyond school.

The school's close and caring attention to the needs of every student fosters outstanding personal development. Students enjoy school life. Their excellent contribution to the school and wider community reflects the Catholic ethos of the school. Behaviour is outstanding and attendance is above average: it is well above average in the sixth form. Students have very positive attitudes to learning and together with good teaching this helps them make good progress and develop into mature learners. The school has a well-considered programme in place to further enhance the quality of learning and recognises the need to increase the opportunities for independent learning and improve the quality of feedback to students.

Overall, students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are above average. GCSE results are improving year-on-year with a marked rise in 2007 to 67% gaining five grades A* to C. A well-above average proportion of students left school with five good GCSE passes including functional English and mathematics, preparing them effectively for the next stage of their lives. At Key Stage 3 standards are above average in mathematics and science: students meet challenging targets. However, in English standards are broadly average and fewer students reach the higher levels.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides insightful, energetic and determined leadership. She has fostered an approach that seeks and achieves continuous improvement and is ambitious for every student. The concerted hard work of the highly effective senior team, good middle leaders and committed governors has resulted in an excellent response to the wide-ranging issues raised at the time of the last inspection. The school's capacity to improve is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good and provides good value for money. Standards are above average and students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress given their initial qualifications at GCSE level. Consequently, progression rates from Year 12 to Year 13 and then on to higher education, employment or training are excellent. Personal

development is outstanding. Students display very mature attitudes to work, leisure activities and supporting students in other year groups. They are confident, self-assured and eagerly anticipating moving on to a wide range of universities across the country. The quality of teaching is good. The good curriculum is significantly enhanced by a small number of level 2 and 3 vocational courses and the excellent partnership with other school sixth forms. Consequently, the needs and aspirations of the students are well served. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Students' academic progress and personal development is monitored regularly and considerable additional subject or personal mentoring is provided to ensure that those who are falling behind keep on track and those who are doing well strive for even higher achievement. Students spoke very highly of the amount of time devoted to them by their head of year and their subject teachers. The sixth form is well-led and managed. Self-evaluation is very good: consequently, strengths and weaknesses are identified readily and there are good action plans in place to bring about improvements where needed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate of progress in English at Key Stage 3.
- Enhance learning by improving the quality of feedback to students and increasing the opportunities for independent learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students achieve well given their initial starting points. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. However, by the end of Year 11 the proportion of students achieving the higher grades at GCSE is above average and improving and a well above average percentage of students achieve the new measure of five or more A* to C grades, including functional English and mathematics. Inspection evidence shows that students are making good progress. This is because of good teaching, a challenging target setting and monitoring programme and a robust response from senior and middle managers to improving subjects whose results lag behind the rest. In Key Stage 3 challenging targets are set in the core subjects. While these have been met in mathematics and science, there has been a shortfall in English. The school has identified this as an area for improvement and has good plans in hand to bring about the improvements required. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress due to well targeted support from the school and other agencies. Outstanding work by the pupil outreach department ensures that more vulnerable or disaffected students make good progress in the key skills of literacy and numeracy and that they are able to leave school equipped to gain employment or training. Overall, standards reached in the sixth form are above the local and national averages, representing good progress for the vast majority of students including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that students' personal development and well-being are outstanding in the main school and in the sixth form. This makes a significant contribution to their achievement. Students enjoy school and attendance is good in the main

school and outstanding in the sixth form. Behaviour is excellent. The students feel safe and cared for in school and say that the very few incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Relationships are very positive and students show respect and consideration for others. Their moral and social development is fostered very well through the structured programme for personal, social, citizenship and health education which is enriched by a range of activities. Together with other curriculum areas, such as physical education and science, this enables students to understand the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. They appreciate the variety of extra-curricular sporting activities available to them. There are fewer opportunities for spiritual and cultural development. Students' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding. They are keen to take on responsibilities, for instance, as school councillors, working with partner primary schools and working with the elderly, in addition to the many fund-raising activities for a variety of charities. The sixth form also support younger students with their reading. Students are very well prepared for the world of work, acquiring the skills necessary across the curriculum and in enrichment opportunities such as the Learning Enterprise Activity and Personal Development week.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good both in the main school and the sixth form. A notable feature of lessons throughout the school is the very good relationships between teachers and learners. This fosters very positive attitudes to learning and is a major factor in students' development as mature learners. In the sixth form this is further enhanced by students' involvement in, and responsibility for, their learning. Typically, lessons are well planned in manageable sections with a number of activities that appeal to a range of learning styles. Teachers share the purpose of lessons at the outset: this helps students understand where their work is leading and promotes good progress. Teachers' enthusiasm and good subject knowledge contribute well to students' enjoyment and their desire to learn. The very best teaching develops thinking through challenging questioning and offers a good range of tasks to capture students' interests. Consequently, students respond with enthusiasm and the confidence to tackle demanding work. For example, sixth formers studying biology enjoyed a practical activity as they wrestled with understanding the structure of DNA. Careful grouping of students develops their collaborative skills well. However, opportunities for independent learning are restricted. Where lessons are less effective teachers dominate and the pace of learning slows. In some lessons learning objectives lack precision and progress is not consolidated thoroughly at the end of the session. Work is marked regularly but students are not always sure what they need to do to improve because written feedback is variable in quality and frequency. Grading systems are specific to subjects and students are not always sure what marks mean. In this regard the school's current development project on assessment for learning is well-judged to build on current good classroom practice.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum has improved considerably since the previous inspection and is now good. It is outstanding at Key Stage 4 and allows students of all aptitudes to choose courses that they find challenging and motivating. Notable features are: the above average proportion of students who successfully complete GCSE in a modern foreign language; a wide range of accredited vocational courses; and extremely well-planned and personalised experiences for vulnerable students. There are very good partnerships with local colleges, employers and trainers. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has improved, although the school rightly seeks further improvements, especially in developing the students' learning skills. Nevertheless, new arrangements are giving more time to numeracy, literacy and to helping lower attaining students settle successfully. There are extensive opportunities for students to develop their information and communication technology skills. Students enjoy the very wide range of enrichment activities. They also enjoy the new approach to the teaching of personal, social, citizenship, health and careers education through thematic days.

The sixth form curriculum is good and enhanced through joint working with several local sixth forms. Students have a good choice of pathways and subjects, enabling them to pursue their studies at a level and in a form best suited to their interests and learning preferences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. Arrangements for students moving from primary school to Year 7 are very effective both in enabling them to settle in quickly and in ensuring the specific needs of individual students are met. Older students and their parents receive excellent support and guidance to make informed decisions about curriculum choices and future career opportunities. Excellent use of data enables progress to be monitored and reviewed with individual students. An extremely committed team of staff work coherently to identify students who are vulnerable or underachieving and organise a wide variety of intervention and motivational activities. Progress leaders know their year groups very well and the students receive excellent personal support. The student outreach department offers a holistic and integrated approach. It supports some students in their literacy and numeracy skills as well as increasing the opportunities available to different groups of students working with a wide variety of external agencies including connexions, the education welfare service, the school nurse, the youth service and the reintegration team. The partnership coordinator is tireless in the pursuit of increasing community links. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are firmly established and understood by staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, the leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher's clear vision, high expectations and resolute drive to secure the best for students have been pivotal to the wide-ranging improvements made since the last inspection. She is very well supported by an able and dedicated senior team whose roles and responsibilities reflect the school's focus on improving standards and achievement. Developments have been coherent and well-founded on an incisive evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. A key initiative has been setting students challenging targets in all subjects, together with the introduction of a manageable and effective system to track students' progress towards these. Staff at all levels are held accountable for students' progress. New roles for some middle leaders, and the creation of a department dedicated to removing barriers to learning, reflect a determination that all students should achieve as well as they can. The school works highly effectively with an extensive range of partners to provide specialist support for students who need it. Considerable, well-judged changes to the curriculum demonstrate the school's commitment to meeting the needs and aspirations of every student.

The school is working effectively to develop leadership capacity, for example, through inviting a number of staff to augment the senior team. Regular departmental monitoring and self-evaluation, a robust approach to under-performance and well-targeted professional development enable middle leaders to discharge their responsibilities with increasing consistency and rigour.

Governance is good. The contribution of the chair of governors to the strategic direction of the school is outstanding. Governors are well-informed and ambitious for the school. They make a valuable contribution to drawing up and monitoring its strategic plan. Control of finances and resources is rigorous: the school gives good value for money. The very large proportion of parents who returned the inspection questionnaire expressed overwhelmingly positive views about the work of the school.

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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?	2	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	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	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

Inspection of Holy Family Catholic High School, Liverpool, L23 4UL

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school and for helping us as we carried out the recent inspection. Particular thanks go to those of you who gave up time to talk to us. We think you attend a good school with outstanding features.

One of the outstanding things about the school is the way in which you are cared for. Your progress leaders work very hard to ensure that each one of you succeeds. The effective way in which your progress is checked against your challenging targets ensures that you do not fall behind. The student outreach department provides outstanding support for some of you to help everyone achieve as well as possible. The excellent choice of options at Key Stage 4 enables you to follow courses you enjoy. In Years 12 and 13 links with other local sixth forms give you a wide range of qualifications to choose from.

We were very impressed by your excellent behaviour and good attendance. Your work in the school and wider community, for instance, through raising funds for charity, is outstanding. Your very positive attitudes to learning, combined with good teaching, are a major contributor to your good progress. The standards you reach at GCSE and in the sixth form are above average. At Key Stage 3 standards are above average in mathematics and science and average in English. We have asked the school to help you make faster progress in English in Years 7 to 9. We have also asked the school to plan more opportunities for you to learn independently. We think clearer feedback on what you need to do to improve your learning would also be beneficial.

We can see that the school has improved a great deal since the last inspection and have every confidence that the headteacher will continue to lead the school well and make things even better for you.