

St Joseph's RC Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108735
Local Authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	309784
Inspection date	10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow 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 (total)	1515
Sixth form	485
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Terry Carney
Headteacher	Dr Joe Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2005
School address	Mill Lane Hebburn Tyne and Wear NE31 2ET
Telephone number	0844 4772500
Fax number	0191 4210531

Age group	11–18
Inspection date	10 December 2008
Inspection number	309784

© Crown copyright 2008

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 one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following aspects: students' achievement and standards, their personal development, the effectiveness of academic guidance and aspects of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation of its work; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment information; visits to lessons; school documents and analysis of over 870 parents' inspection questionnaires. In addition, there were discussions with the headteacher, staff, governors and students. 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, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Joseph's is a popular, oversubscribed comprehensive school, serving the wider catholic community in the south western area of South Tyneside local authority. It is very large when compared to other secondary schools nationally. The number of students on roll continues to rise both in the main school and the sixth form. Nearly all students are White British and although students come from a wide range of social-economic backgrounds, a below average proportion is known to be eligible for free school meals. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion who have a statement of special educational need. The school first became a specialist technology college in 1996. In 2001 it became a Leading Edge school and it was awarded an additional specialism as a vocational college in April 2007. The school is subject to a new build as part of the local authority's Building Schools for the Future programme. This is due to be completed by September 2011.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Joseph's is an outstanding school. Student's welfare and care lie at the heart of all the school does. This assures students' outstanding personal development and achievements. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding. The school's Christian ethos pervades this happy, caring and inclusive community where everyone is valued equally and enabled to participate fully in all the school has to offer.

Students enter the school with broadly average standards. Very good transition arrangements make sure they settle into school quickly and make good progress so that, by the end of Key Stage 3, they attain standards that are above average. In recent years, standards attained by students at the end of Key Stage 4 have been well above average, representing outstanding progress. Unvalidated school data for summer 2008 GCSE examinations shows the proportion of students attaining five good GCSEs dipped, but still remained well above the national average. The proportion achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics also dipped but remained above average. This was mainly as a result of previous staffing turbulence in mathematics. Stringent actions have been taken to redress the balance and the most recent school data and inspection evidence indicates that current standards are once again very high, students' progress is very good, and the school is well on track to achieve its challenging 2009 targets. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, looked after children and vulnerable students also make good and often exceptional progress in their learning and attitudes because of the outstanding individual support they receive from teachers and support staff alike.

Since its previous inspection the school has worked hard to make sure the quality of teaching is always outstanding and it is well on the way to meeting that ambition. It is judged outstanding overall. High expectations and very good relationships between staff and students alike ensure that nearly all lessons are purposeful, interesting and engaging; ensuring students make rapid progress in their learning. Senior and middle leaders' focus on lesson planning has secured a generally cohesive approach across the school. They are aware that there are still a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and planning in some departments and are taking action to iron-out these differences. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and become independent learners, they work equally well in groups or independently. This helps them to grow in confidence and build their self-esteem. Rigorous assessment of students' work and individual target setting in all subjects is being used increasingly successfully to help students understand how well they are doing and what more they need to do to achieve the best that they can.

Students are caring, mature, thoughtful and respectful of one another and their school community. They are appreciative of the way the school makes sure personal achievements are celebrated and say there is always someone they can go to in times of need. A very small proportion of parents who completed the inspection questionnaire expressed concerns about incidents of bullying. Students who spoke to the inspection team indicated that incidents do occasionally occur; however, once reported to staff, these are dealt with decisively. Over 60% of parents responded to the questionnaire. They were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education and care their children receive; however, a small minority of parents do not think enough is done to seek their views. Students make a very positive contribution to the work of the school and the local community in many ways. Charity work is a strong feature of the lives of the students and they raise significant funds to benefit those less fortunate than themselves.

Students say they enjoy school and this is clearly evidenced in their very good attendance and attitudes to learning as well as their exemplary behaviour in lessons and throughout the school. No student has been permanently excluded in recent times and the proportion subject to fixed period exclusions is low. Students who are at risk of being excluded or disaffected with school, and those experiencing difficulties in their lives, are well supported by the pupil support team and the range of external agency support that is called upon when necessary.

The technology specialism supports the outstanding curriculum well and specialist subject targets in mathematics, science and technology continue to be met or exceeded. The school's outreach work is enabling partner primary schools to access high quality specialist support. It also provides strong links, training and support to the local community. The vocational curriculum has been well-extended over recent years and makes an outstanding contribution to students' achievements and personal development. Students value the wide range of options in Key Stage 4 particularly. This is evident from their high attendance rates, and outstanding behaviour and attitudes that are captured in regular surveys conducted by the school. The curriculum is further enhanced by the wide range of well attended activities that take place before, during and after the school day, although a few older students think that the range of sporting activities is limited at Key Stage 4.

Students have a very good grasp of how to keep healthy, weigh-up risks and adopt safe practices: they are well prepared for the future. Very good partnerships with business, the local college, Connexions and work based providers, along with students' basic skills and the wide range of options available in Key Stage 4, promote students future economic well-being very effectively. As a result, the proportion of students who enter the world of work or training or continue with their education after the age of 16 is high. Over 50% stay on into the sixth form where they know they will continue to do well.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The drive and commitment of the senior, middle leaders and governors to do the best for the students in St Joseph's is paramount and they are very well supported by all staff in that endeavour. The process of school improvement planning and self-evaluation is thorough, accurate and inclusive. Staff and governors are fully involved; consequently they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and what is needed to continue to improve. Senior staff are fervent about including and involving students in the school's improvement and seek out their views regularly. Plans are in place to increase their involvement in the review of the quality of teaching across the school. Middle managers are very well supported and are effectively held to account for their areas of responsibility. They value this and the professional development opportunities provided to improve their expertise and leadership skills. Arrangements for managing performance are robust and there are effective procedures to identify and tackle underperformance.

St Joseph's is at the heart of its local community and arrangements to promote community cohesion are strong, although the school recognises that more needs to be done to provide opportunities for students to learn with and from young people of different backgrounds. Actions are already in place to tackle this. The school is tenacious in its work to assure that students are provided with a safe and caring environment in which to learn, grow and achieve. Consequently, safeguarding procedures are robust and meet current statutory requirements. Staff make the most of the school's old and sprawling buildings to ensure students get the best deal they can. The school has addressed the few areas for improvement identified in the last inspection and, given the very strong leadership, outcomes for students and the exceptional aspects of the school's work, the school has outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Standards in the sixth form are above average and achievement is outstanding. A high and increasing proportion of students join from other schools and most complete the courses they start. Both A Level and AS Level pass rates in 2007 were above average and progress was particularly good, given students' starting points. The proportion gaining the higher GCE grades, A-B, was broadly average. School records show that there was a slight dip in 2008. The focus on improving the quality of teaching is having the effect of correcting this decline well. Results in vocational subjects were above average and, overall, standards over the last three years show an upward trend and variation between subjects and courses is narrowing well.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Attendance is very high because students say they really enjoy their experiences in the sixth form. They say they particularly appreciate the ready help and guidance they receive from teachers which helps them do so well. There are a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching but it is outstanding overall. Teachers inspire confidence through their expert subject knowledge. As a result, learning is enthusiastic, sharply focused and enjoyable. The outstanding curriculum provides ample opportunity for the majority who wish to follow academic courses. Students also have ample opportunities to study a wider range of vocational subjects that prepare them well for the next stage of their lives. The outstanding care, academic guidance and support enjoyed by students in the main school continue in the sixth form. The assessment and tracking of students' progress contributes to their very good achievement. Students' progress is evaluated rigorously and, where performance causes concern, effective action is taken. Many students speak of their determination to reach the challenging targets set by their teachers. They also say that the entry requirements they have been given for their choice of university is a highly motivating factor. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding and all staff have a very successful focus on raising achievement and improving what is provided for all students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Eradicate the few remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching to ensure that all students can continue to achieve their best.

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.

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
---	----------------	-------

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
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	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1	1
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of St Joseph's RC Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School, South Tyneside, NE31 2ET

Thank you for making Mr Stafford and myself so welcome when we visited your school. A special thanks to all of you that spoke to us during the day. It was very interesting to hear your points of view. I would also like you to thank the great number of parents who completed the inspection questionnaire. We were very pleased to hear that the great majority who responded believe you get a good deal at St Joseph's and we agree. We have judged your school to be outstanding and we think your behaviour, personal development and attitudes are also outstanding. Well done! You are great ambassadors for your school. These are our main impressions.

- Senior staff provide excellent leadership and everyone works hard to ensure you receive a high quality education, attain highly and make very good progress in your learning.
- The care, support and academic guidance you are given are outstanding and you believe there are always people there to support you in times of need.
- The quality of teaching and the curriculum are outstanding, particularly in Key Stage 4 where there are many vocational options to meet your interests. This means that you are very well prepared to move on in your education, training or employment when you leave school.
- You contribute very well to the life of the school and take part in many activities that the school has to offer, although some older students think there could be a wider range of sporting activities available to them. Your charitable work is noteworthy.

Dr Campbell, senior teachers, staff and governors know the school's work well and are striving to continue to improve it. To help, we have asked them to make one particular improvement: to ensure that the high quality of teaching is consistent throughout the school so that all of you can continue to achieve your best.

Thanks once again, and I wish you every success as you travel through the school and onto your future paths, whether it be in the sixth form, college, training or employment.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector