

St Mary's Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112998
Local Authority	DERBYSHIRE LA
Inspection number	311083
Inspection date	7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Nada Trikić 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1277
6th form	269
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father P McGuire
Headteacher	Mr Tom Moore
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Newbold Road Upper Newbold Chesterfield Derbyshire S41 8AG
Telephone number	01246 201191
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning, the curriculum, leadership and management, the language specialism, and the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff, pupils, students and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail.

Description of the school

St Mary's is larger than most secondary schools. It serves a Catholic community drawing pupils from both urban and rural backgrounds. The majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds and there is a range of minority ethnic groups present. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. St Mary's became a specialist school for languages in 1997.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school that has many outstanding features. The strong Catholic ethos and core values promoted by the headteacher and his staff underpin the achievements of pupils, and their personal and spiritual development, which are outstanding. This results in excellent relationships, outstanding attendance and exemplary behaviour which create a thriving learning community. Pupils say they feel safe and valued. There are good opportunities for pupils to share their views and take responsibility through year-group forums but this is much stronger for sixth form students. The school's emphasis on social, moral, spiritual and cultural education is shown through pupils' commitment to charity events, for example raising funds to build a primary school in Africa. These activities contribute greatly to cultural and global awareness as well as community cohesion.

Pupils enter the school with standards above the national average. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is exceptionally high and this continues in Key Stage 4 representing outstanding progress. There is a relentless focus on academic achievement. In 2007, 85% of pupils achieved five or more high-grade GCSE passes, with girls and boys performing equally well. This is well above the national average. The outstanding achievement of pupils results from a combination of high quality teaching and excellent care, guidance and support. Pupils throughout the school are well cared for and feel able to talk to teachers about any concerns. There are strong systems of support through the pastoral care arrangements to identify pupils at risk of falling behind to keep them on track. Expectations are high and teachers generously give their time to provide any additional support required. Marking is very detailed and pupils say that it is very helpful in supporting their progress. Pupils are very clear about their targets and the action needed to improve. Parents have great confidence in the school and play a key role in the school's success. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are robust, as are systems for child protection, risk assessment and health and safety.

Strengths in teaching lie in the excellent subject knowledge, high expectations, enthusiasm and commitment of teachers. Since the last inspection, the school has established a teaching and learning group to assist in the sharing of good practice. This has resulted in a clear view of the characteristics of successful learning, which have been effectively shared through twilight training sessions. Teachers know pupils very well and in outstanding lessons pupils are challenged to think for themselves and are guided by expert questioning to deepen their understanding. High quality interaction in the classroom ensures that pupils know exactly the standards expected of them. Furthermore, effective use of interactive whiteboards increases pupils' participation, and responsibility for their own learning.

The decision to specialise in languages has been influential in the school's development: leadership has been strong as demonstrated through extended provision. Pupils study French, German and Spanish in Key Stage 3. Japanese, Chinese and Italian languages are taught to older learners. Exceptionally high standards, well above national averages, are achieved and pupils' rate of progress is excellent.

Pupils' enthusiasm for languages is enhanced by exchanges and visits, which inspire them, widen their horizons, and build confidence. While languages are a strength, overall the curriculum is good. There is a good range of academic subjects but leaders have not broadened the curriculum to include vocational subjects, or work related learning across the 14 to 19 age-range. There is an outstanding range of popular extra-curricular activities. Pupils say that the

opportunities to take part in sporting, music and other activities complement the demands of academic study very well.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders know the strengths of the school well and where improvements are required. Information and communication technology (ICT) does not meet statutory requirements in Key Stage 4, which was the case at the time of the last inspection. This has an impact on pupils' economic well-being and the numbers studying ICT at advanced level. Leaders have been slow to take actions on this aspect. The headteacher has created a strong team ethos across the staff, and a shared commitment to excel. Much is delegated to middle leaders in the way they plan, monitor, review and evaluate their work. Although there is some excellent practice, this is not fully in place across the school. There is a good cycle of development planning but action plans at whole-school and middle leadership level do not always focus sufficiently on measurable outcomes for pupils, with timelines to monitor and evaluate improvement. Performance data is readily available and the middle leadership development group has recognised the need for them to make more consistent and effective use of assessment data for target-setting, tracking and the analysis of results. The group have effectively set out their priorities for training and development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students are very positive about the caring and vibrant community created within the school's good sixth form. Students enter the sixth form with standards well above the national average, make good progress and sustain the high standards achieved previously. The proportion of students completing their courses from Year 12 to Year 13 is exceptionally high. A key factor behind the effectiveness of the sixth form is good leadership, the outstanding individual academic and personal support and guidance students receive. Almost all students go on to university. Sixth formers provide excellent role models for younger pupils and are very actively involved in the life of the school. They are generous in the time they give to organise events in the main school and in supporting charity events. As a result, they feel valued and display mature attitudes to life and learning. Students take full advantage of the range of additional activities on offer, which enriches their experiences, and ensures high quality relationships. A good curriculum is on offer with strong progression routes to advanced courses in languages. Curriculum pathways at 14 to 19 are not in place to provide alternative vocational courses to complement the academic subjects on offer.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the curriculum to ensure that vocational options and pathways are developed for students at 14 to 19; and address statutory requirements in ICT.
- Continue to strengthen consistency in planning, monitoring and evaluating in line with the school's best practice.

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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?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
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	2	

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

9 November 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic High School, Chesterfield, S41 8AG

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you, and hearing about how much you enjoyed school and the additional activities on offer. We were particularly impressed with your positive attitudes, the respect you show each other, and your excellent behaviour. St Mary's is a good school with many aspects which are outstanding. The standards you reach in school are exceptionally high and you make outstanding progress from Years 7 to 11. Students who enter the school's sixth form make good progress from these very high standards. You told us that you particularly enjoy lessons where you are encouraged to work together on varied and interesting tasks. The staff know you very well and work very hard to support your achievements and personal development.

As a specialist language school, you have many more opportunities to develop your language skills, and you recognise the advantage of these skills for the future. Many of you have taken part in visits abroad, which have helped to broaden your experience and cultural awareness. The headteacher and staff provide you with a very safe environment in which you feel valued. We could see that the strong Catholic ethos supports you in developing a set of beliefs and values as shown in your consideration of others. Your commitment to raising funds, and in the ways you support each other is superb. We could see that you all have an opportunity through the year forums and school council to express your views and to be involved in making improvements in the school. This is especially strong in the sixth form. Students enjoy the prestige of belonging to the sixth form community and provide excellent role models for younger pupils.

The headteacher and senior staff provide good leadership to support your success in school. We decided at the end of the inspection that your school needed to improve a few areas in order to be even more successful. The curriculum needs broadening to include vocational courses in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to provide a wider range of choices. In addition, provision for ICT needs to be improved so that all students can develop key skills for the future. There are strong systems in place to check the work of the school to support your learning. These can be strengthened further by more common approaches, which make use of the school's best practice.

We wish you every success for the future.

Nada Trikić

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools