

# St Mary's Catholic School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117594
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	312665
<b>Inspection date</b>	17 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Robert Drew

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	927
6th form	164
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rev John Cunningham
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Anthony Sharpe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 November 2004
<b>School address</b>	Windhill Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 2NQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 654901
<b>Fax number</b>	01279 653889

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards and achievement in the main school; the overall effectiveness of the sixth form; students' personal development and the quality of the care, guidance and support that promote it. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and students' work, parents' questionnaires, interviews with staff, pupils and the chair of governors and extensive school documentation including its self-evaluation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no reason to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

The school is slightly smaller than average but is increasing in numbers and becoming significantly over-subscribed. It provides education in a Catholic context for Bishop's Stortford and the surrounding area. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage, while about 20% come from a range of minority ethnic groups. The proportion who have learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. Pupils' backgrounds vary but overall are advantaged compared with the national profile. They enter the school with above average standards. The school has specialist status in performing arts and has the following awards: Healthy Schools, Art Mark, Charter Mark, Challenge Awards and Investors in People.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has some outstanding features and shows an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Because it is well led and managed the school builds very successfully on students' good prior learning and their positive attitudes. It more than repays the very strong support given by parents. The school is helping students reach standards that are well above national averages by the end of Key Stage 4. This happens partly because it is thorough in assessing the past performance of students and setting challenging targets for them. To help meet these expectations it provides good teaching and some that is outstanding. It monitors and supports students very closely with frequent reviews of their progress and their needs. Parents and the students themselves play a significant role in this process. As a result, the progress made by students between Years 7 and 11 is good and sometimes exceptional. It is notable that gifted and talented students and those who have learning difficulties or disabilities all make equally strong progress. This stems from lessons in the main school consistently offering tasks that match the needs of all students. In turn, this reflects the school's emphasis on lesson planning so that clear structure and strong pace are standard features. Relationships in lessons are very good so that learning is enjoyable and students feel able to participate fully. They show very strong motivation and willingness to learn.

There remain some inconsistencies in achievement. For instance, there are year-to-year variations in overall progress. In addition, even when progress in general is very strong it has sometimes only been satisfactory in core subjects. The school has taken specific action to strengthen progress in mathematics, where this problem was most marked. The initial impact has been good. Improvement is further helped by teaching and systems for tracking progress, both of which are improving from already strong positions.

The school's self evaluation of the curriculum as 'good' is well justified. It is broad and imaginative and caters well for the full range of abilities in Key Stages 3 and 4. The need for greater range in the sixth form is a development priority in the school's plans. Specialist arts college status contributes particularly well to the breadth and quality of provision and to the excellent enjoyment of school reported by students.

Students' personal development is outstanding because the school's expectations of them are so well established and consistent. Behaviour in lessons and around school is excellent, attendance is well above national levels and students show far more enjoyment of school than is common. Students are very aware of health and personal safety issues. Fear of bullying is remarkably low and reported incidents very few indeed. Students care for each other and their mature relationships with staff and visitors are impressive. Another excellent feature is the contribution to the community made by so many students, as demonstrated in their mentoring of younger pupils, their highly participative role in masses and their initiative and drive in promoting 'Fair Trade' at parish events. Their preparation for later economic well-being is very good because they have such well developed skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) as well as in their personal qualities. All this is achieved because staff combine strongly caring attitudes with highly effective policies and procedures. Statutory requirements for child protection and the safeguarding of pupils are fully met. Care, guidance and support are evident in the positive relationships that pervade lessons and in innumerable informal exchanges between staff and pupils. Systems for assessing pupils' needs, providing

guidance and monitoring personal and academic progress are strengths of the school. Staff are excellent role models and give consistent messages about moral, social and cultural issues. Spiritual development is promoted not only in explicitly religious settings but also through ensuring regular scope for reflection in lessons.

The headteacher sets high expectations for students' academic and personal development and this promotes a highly productive learning ethos. Expectations are clear, demanding and successfully communicated to colleagues and students. Good overall leadership and management are reflected in the good impact they have on standards and achievement. The capacity for further improvement is excellent. This is demonstrated by the high quality of the school's monitoring of its performance, the accuracy of so much of its self-evaluation and the rapid implementation of wise strategies to bring about change. There is scope for more teaching to improve from good to excellent and the school has demonstrated that it knows how to achieve this. Staff have the skill and commitment to make it happen. In addition, the school has brought together a very effective senior leadership team, with many individual strengths and a marked sense of collective responsibility. The team's commitment to further improvement is impressive. The school provides particularly good value for money.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The sixth form provides well for its students. There is a wide range of attainment which include those who are extremely able as well as many lower attaining students. Data shows the school succeeds in helping all groups make good progress, principally by providing teaching that is good and at times outstanding. Staff are acutely aware of pupils' widely varying needs. A strength of the teaching is the way that staff cater for the individual needs of all students. Strengths and weaknesses in academic progress are identified early and at frequent intervals. This allows the school to consult with students and their families in time to put support in place and see improvements follow. The overall amount of progress, while very positive, does not quite match the sometimes exceptional progress seen in the main school.

Sixth form students are very alert to their responsibilities as well as their rights within school and the wider community. They play a very valuable role in the life of the school. Many mentor younger students and assist staff as prefects. Others organise rock concerts, manage the annual 'Shoe Box' appeal or provide regular sports coaching in local primary schools. Their excellent personal development leaves them well aware of personal safety and health issues and very well prepared for their future economic well-being.

While leadership and management of the sixth form are already good, the school's decision to make it the direct responsibility of the new assistant headteacher is wise. Currently the school is undergoing a period of growth. The leadership team has recognised this as a time for greater strategic decision-making and more comprehensive monitoring from the head of sixth form and the senior leadership team as a whole. Standards are already above average but there is scope for setting sights higher and promoting even better attainment. Its recent university successes provide encouragement in this area. Its self-evaluation rightly notes some difference between achievement in the main school and in the sixth form and seeks to reduce the gap. The sixth form offers good value for money.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Consolidate the improving trend in students' achievement in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4 by closely monitoring and responding to recent initiatives, such as the extra tests introduced by the school in Year 8.
- Increase the amount of excellent teaching so that there is greater consistency from year to year in the progress that pupils make.
- In line with existing plans, ensure that new leadership and management arrangements for the sixth form provide the closer monitoring required to improve achievement.

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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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	

### 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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
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?	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	1	
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	2	
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**

18 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic School, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM 23 2 NQ

Thank you for your welcome during my recent visit to your school. Special thanks are due to those who gave up lunchtime to come and speak with me.

You are in a good school, and some of what it does is outstanding.

- Standards are well above national averages.
- You make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form.
- Your behaviour and your contribution to the school and community are both excellent.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding.
- The school gives you excellent care, guidance and support.
- Leadership and management are good and have some outstanding features.

To improve further the school needs to:

- make sure the recovery in mathematics standards in the main school continues
- increase the amount of excellent teaching so that the progress you make is outstanding each year and in all core subjects
- build on the good standards in the sixth form so that progress in Years 12 and 13 matches more closely the best in the main school.

It was a pleasure to hear so many positive things about the school from yourselves and your parents. I hope you continue to enjoy your time at St Mary's.

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew

Lead inspector