

St Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118907
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313143
Inspection date	8 October 2008
Reporting inspector	David Butler 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 (total)	1063
Sixth form	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Moffatt
Headteacher	Rosemary Olivier
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2005
School address	Reynolds Lane Tunbridge Wells TN4 9XL
Telephone number	01892 527444
Fax number	01892 546621

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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 issues: achievement and standards; care, guidance and support for vulnerable students; and the quality and the use of assessment information. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF), assessment data, parents' questionnaires, planning documents, observation of lessons, and interviews with staff, students and the chair of governors. 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 SEF, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School draws its students from a wide catchment area that covers West Kent and part of East Sussex. The number of students on roll has increased by 7% since the last inspection and there are slightly more boys than girls in the school. Just over 83% of students are White British, with the great majority of the remainder coming from other White ethnic minority groups. Around 10% of students speak English as an additional language, a significant increase since the last inspection. Almost one third of students in Years 7–11 have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school manages and staffs a resource base for hearing impaired students on behalf of the local authority. The school has had specialist status for mathematics and computing since September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Gregory's is a good and improving school. It has several outstanding features and no major weaknesses. The quality of education provided by the school's sixth form is outstanding. Students throughout the school make very good progress and achieve well because teaching is good and they receive excellent care, guidance and support. The school has a very positive ethos that focuses on meeting the individual academic and personal needs of all its students. This is reflected in its very strong commitment to equal opportunities and students' outstanding personal development. As one student with learning difficulties said, 'The school makes everyone feel they can succeed, even if they don't find things easy.' Students say that the school provides a very safe, caring and friendly environment. They are highly supportive of each other and enjoy very good relationships with their teachers. The large number of responses and comments received from parents about the work of the school were overwhelmingly positive.

Students' attainment on entering the school is average but the selective system that operates in part of the school's catchment area results in the school having a lower proportion of higher attaining students than is found nationally. Attainment in public examinations by the end of Year 11 is well above national averages. In 2007, 52% of students attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A*–C, including both English and mathematics. Unconfirmed data for 2008 indicate a significant improvement in this figure and almost 90% of students attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A*–G, including English and mathematics. These results represent very good achievement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who do not speak English as a first language achieve well, reflecting the excellent support they receive. Achievement in mathematics throughout the school is outstanding because of very effective teaching and subject leadership. Some results in GCSE science have been below expectations and senior managers have intervened to strengthen the leadership of the subject and improve teaching. The evidence from this inspection indicates that these measures are starting to have an impact. Standards and achievement have continued to improve since the school was last inspected and the school is making good progress towards achieving its challenging targets, including those set for its specialism.

The great majority of students enjoy their education, attend well and have very positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students are very caring towards each other and sensitive to differences. The mixed- aged tutor groups, known as 'review groups', are viewed very positively by students, who feel they have done much to foster the very good relationships that exist between students in different year groups. The daily review meetings, which are used to support both academic and social development, are highly regarded by students. Younger students spoke very warmly of the support they had received from older students in their work. Year 7 students said that the 'buddy' arrangements with sixth form students had done much to help them make a smooth transition from their primary schools and settle into the school well. Students report that incidents of bullying and other forms of harassment are rare and dealt with promptly and effectively. Their views were reflected in the responses and comments received from parents.

Students have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives, which is developed through the strong provision made for these areas in the curriculum. The take-up of the healthy eating options provided in the school's dining hall is good and increasing. All students receive at least two hours each week of physical education and a high proportion participate in the good range of physical activities provided after school. Students make an

excellent contribution to the school community, for example through the work of the student council, which has been instrumental in bringing about improvements to the canteen and the school environment. Students also make an impressive contribution to the local and wider community through charity work. The curriculum helps foster a strong cultural understanding, for example through visits and electronic communication with schools in other countries. Students develop good basic skills to help them progress to further education, training and employment, and they are provided with good guidance on the choices they need to make at various stages in their school careers. A good programme is in place to develop students' enterprise skills but there are currently very limited opportunities for them to undertake work experience. The school is actively seeking ways of reinstating work experience for all students.

The school evaluates the overall quality of its teaching and learning as good and observations of a sample of lessons confirmed this view. The school acknowledges there is some variation in the effectiveness of lessons and that more need to be consistently good or outstanding if achievement is to improve further. There is some exemplary practice but also lessons where there is insufficient focus on what students are learning. Students agree that they make good progress in most lessons and find them enjoyable. They also feel that teachers are approachable and very supportive when they encounter difficulties. They are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve to reach them. In a minority of lessons, students feel that teachers spend too much time talking rather than engaging them in activities, and they occasionally spend too much time copying down work. Strategies are already in place to share the excellent practice that currently exists, and these are worthy of developing further.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection because the school is very well led and effectively managed. The headteacher and senior leaders provide strong and clear direction and are well supported by other staff. They have a very good understanding of the strengths and weakness in the school and are proactive in bringing about change. Governors provide excellent support and are able to offer help and challenge to the senior leadership team, based on their detailed knowledge and understanding of the school and the local community. Much has been achieved in improving the effectiveness of middle leaders in raising standards in the subjects they are responsible for. There is some excellent practice but the school acknowledges more work still needs to be done if greater consistency is to be achieved. Senior leaders have been very effective in tackling the areas identified for improvement in the last inspection. The provision made for modern foreign languages has been greatly improved and achievement has risen. Excellent systems are now in place for monitoring and tracking students' progress and very effective use is made of assessment information to set targets and improve teaching and learning. This good record of success indicates that the school has strong capacity to bring about further improvement.

The school has developed excellent partnerships with parents and external agencies to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also with other providers of education and training. The school has a good understanding of the needs of the local community and makes a strong contribution to community cohesion, for example through its international day, its outreach work in information and communication technology and through its church work. The school is highly effective in integrating students from different religions and cultures and helping them to achieve well. The school is making very good use of the extra resources it receives for its specialism, for example by improving resources, enriching the curriculum and its work in other schools and the local community. The school has met the Financial Management Standards in Schools. It makes efficient and effective use of its funding and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students enter the sixth form with below average levels of attainment. They make excellent progress and attain examination results that are above average. Achievement is consistently good across subjects and is outstanding overall. The substantial number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who do not speak English as a first language also make excellent progress. The overwhelming majority of students successfully complete their courses. A high and increasing proportion of students go on to higher education. Students achieve well because teaching is consistently good and because they are provided with excellent support, care and guidance. The curriculum is also well matched to meet the needs of students, particularly those wishing to take GCE advanced level courses. The director of sixth form provides excellent management and leadership. She has a very detailed knowledge and understanding of students' needs and ensures they are met as fully as possible. There is an excellent induction programme for new sixth formers, including those joining from other schools. Monitoring of progress is rigorous and a good balance is struck between directing students and encouraging them to become independent learners. Students' personal development is outstanding and they make an important contribution to the life of the school and the wider community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of learning by extending the opportunities for teachers to share the exemplary practice that already exists in the school.
- Develop further the skills of middle leaders in raising achievement in their subject areas.

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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	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	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	2	
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**

9 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of St Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School, Tunbridge Wells TN4 9XL

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for helping us with the recent inspection of your school. I would like to share some of our findings with you. We think St Gregory's is a good and improving school. It has several outstanding features. The quality of education provided in the sixth form is excellent. The overwhelming majority of those of you we met with and the responses we received from your parents told us that you enjoy school and feel safe and extremely well cared for. We agree with these views. You make good progress and achieve well because teaching is good and you are given excellent support. Your personal development is outstanding. You are courteous and friendly, you attend well and your behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. We were impressed by the way you support and get on with each other across the year groups. You show you are able to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. Many of you make an excellent contribution to the life of the school, for example by taking on extra responsibilities and through the work of the student council. You also make a strong contribution to the local and global communities, for example through your involvement in charity work. Your school is very well led by your headteacher and senior managers and they are given excellent support by the governors.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements.

- We feel lessons could become even better if the opportunities for teachers to share their excellent practice with each other were extended further.
- The school has worked hard to help teachers who are in charge of subjects improve their skills in raising your achievement. We feel this has been successful and needs to be continued and developed further.

We feel your school is very capable of making these and other improvements. I hope you will play your part in this and wish you every success in the future. Yours sincerely

David Butler Her Majesty's Inspector