

# St John's Catholic Comprehensive

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118933
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	313156
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 May 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Robin Gaff

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>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1085
6th form	190
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Philip Gilbert
<b>Headteacher</b>	John Stanley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 March 2005
<b>School address</b>	Rochester Road Gravesend DA12 2JW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01474 534718
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<b>Age group</b>	11-19
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St John's Catholic Comprehensive School is slightly larger than average, and gained specialist status as an arts college in September 2007. The percentage of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is above average and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The school's sixth form works in collaboration with other local schools. The school has recently undergone a succession of changes affecting staffing at all levels, including the senior team.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

St John's is a satisfactory school. There are many indications that it is improving and moving forward. Members of the senior leadership team, which has been in place since September 2007, have a clear vision for the future. They are successfully addressing the challenges facing the school. The school's recently acquired status as an arts college is already beginning to have a positive impact both within the school and in the wider community through participation in local events and links with local primary schools. Students are benefiting from the extended range of cultural activities, and the quality of work in visual arts is high, as shown by the attractive displays of students' work around the school. The school as a whole is now clearly focused on raising attainment. Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory, and there is good, and some outstanding, practice in some areas. However, the quality of teaching and learning is not yet consistently high enough to ensure sustained rises in standards. The impact of middle managers in bringing improvement is too variable at present. Governors know the school well, and now hold senior leaders more readily to account. However, they have not ensured that all statutory policies are in place and regularly reviewed. Issues raised by the last inspection report have been addressed successfully, particularly concerns about behaviour. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory with many developing strengths, giving the school a sound capacity to improve further.

Standards attained by students in the sixth form are broadly in line with national averages. Their achievement is satisfactory as their progress is consistent with the standards they have reached when they begin their courses. The standards reached by students in the main school have fallen in recent years. In 2007, standards at GCSE were below average, representing underperformance by students who joined the school with average levels of attainment. Robust information from the school's own tracking systems, as well as the results of modular tests taken by current Year 11 students, indicates that this decline has been halted, and that these students are now on course to achieve results in line with national expectations. These students are achieving satisfactorily. A more stable staffing situation, together with changes in the curriculum and improvements in teaching, has enabled this to take place. However, assessment of students' work is not always sufficiently thorough, and information gained from assessment is not used consistently across the school to plan tasks that meet the specific learning needs of all students.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Although a few parents report concerns about behaviour, students themselves confirm that it has improved considerably since the last inspection. Students now feel safe from bullying and racial harassment. They play a greater part in dealing with incidents themselves through the anti-bullying council, so that any that do occur are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students are polite and welcoming to visitors, and the atmosphere around the school is calm and orderly, although a few lessons are disrupted by a small minority of students. Most students want to learn, and attendance is in line with national averages. Students relate well to their tutors, and they are well cared for on a day-to-day basis. They are responding well to the more consistent application of the rewards and sanctions system, where greater emphasis is being placed on celebrating good behaviour and positive contributions to school life. Pastoral staff and subject teachers work well together to help students who experience problems that impinge on their learning, and a small number of sixth form students work with the school chaplaincy to support younger students. The school

complies with requirements for safeguarding children and young people, and the support it gives to vulnerable students, such as looked after children, is good.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The standards currently being attained by sixth form students indicate that results in 2008 are likely to be similar to those achieved in 2007. Most students have a good understanding of what their targets are, but the monitoring and review of targets vary across subjects. Overall the quality of teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. In some lessons, students are actively involved in their learning and teachers use a good range of strategies to engage them. Too many lessons though are too teacher directed, and students have insufficient opportunities to demonstrate and develop their knowledge and understanding.

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and they value the support provided by both their tutors and teachers. Their attendance is good. Students can choose from a broad range of AS and A-level subjects, and can also access courses at other schools through the Gravesham consortium. Vocational options for students however are too limited, and not all students are able to take part in extra-curricular activities. Students receive good guidance about progression to higher education; guidance for those students intending to go straight on to work is not sufficiently well developed.

Leaders are committed to improving the quality of students' experience. However, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning do not involve all sixth form leaders. This limits their effectiveness in driving forward improvement of the quality of provision, and of students' attainment.

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

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- Raise standards across the whole school by ensuring that good and outstanding practice in teaching is extended more widely.
- Make sure that teachers make better use of student performance data, so that students know what to do to improve their work.
- Conform to all legislative requirements by ensuring that all statutory policies are fully in place, and are regularly reviewed.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

While results attained in some subjects, including music, have been above average, the overall performance of students at GCSE has been below expectations for the last two years, particularly in English and science. Girls, particularly those in the upper ability range, achieved less well than similar students nationally. The school has acknowledged and addressed this underperformance, with the result that standards are now showing a significant improvement. Most students, including higher attaining girls, are now on track to meet their targets. They are attaining standards that are broadly in line with national averages, and their achievement

is satisfactory. The school's own tracking data show that the performance of students in Year 10 is also improving. The achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory, and is in line with the progress being made by other students. The progress made by students from Year 7 to Year 9, which was below expectations in 2007, has also improved in the core subjects and achievement is now satisfactory, although the number of students attaining the highest levels in mathematics has declined.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is satisfactory. Students gain a heightened spiritual awareness and appreciation of moral values from the school's Catholic ethos, good provision of collective worship, and the religious education programme. There is a general respect for the different cultures represented in the school. Participation rates in sporting activities are good, and students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They do not always apply this understanding in their uptake of the healthy options that are now available to them in the school canteen. Students are considerate of one another, and they show a good respect for rules designed for their safety such as observing the rights of way around the school. They say they enjoy coming to school, citing in particular the opportunities for practical work in arts subjects, and the good range of extra-curricular activities. The great majority of students are well behaved in lessons and around the school, and the number of exclusions is falling. Students can express their opinions through the year and school councils, although some raise doubts about their effectiveness. A significant number of students are involved in charitable fund raising and in projects for the wider community, for example the recent St George's Day parade, and various arts projects. Preparation for future economic well-being is satisfactory. This is demonstrated by the average standards attained in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), as well as the knowledge students gain of the world of work through work experience placements, and their choice of the increasing range of vocational options available to them.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Recent initiatives to improve the overall quality of teaching are well conceived, and early indications are that they are having a positive impact on students' achievement. Relationships between adults and students are positive and respectful. One Year 9 girl commented, 'There's so much encouragement from teachers.' Teachers make clear to students from the outset what they will be learning, and this helps students to reflect on their progress. They make good use of computer-based technology such as interactive whiteboards for teaching, and students enjoy their opportunities to use these resources in lessons. They also enjoy working together and learning in groups. For example, Year 8 students in a textiles lesson cooperated well to identify the design features of a selection of bags. However, students do not always have enough opportunities to learn from one another, and they are not always given sufficiently challenging tasks. In some subjects, for example in music in the sixth form, teachers prepare students very well for their examinations by encouraging them to assess and constructively criticise each

other's work. Students appreciate the detailed feedback they receive on their work in some subjects. However, there are shortcomings in marking; guidance on how students can make their work even better is not given consistently enough in all subjects.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is improving. Recent enhancements, such as the introduction of engineering for students in Year 10, are having a positive impact on students' enjoyment and attitudes to learning. Further developments are planned which will ensure that the curriculum provides an even closer match to students' needs and interests. Students appreciate the 'themed' weeks, such as creativity week, which are helping them to develop their personal and social skills through opportunities to work together in mixed age groups. Highlights of the school's enrichment programme include music, subject based after-school 'booster' classes, and a range of sports, including swimming for students in Years 7 to 11. The school organises a range of visits to local places of interest as well as talks from and activities led by visitors to the school. Students who already have a good grasp of literacy and numeracy are involved in a small number of challenging activities, such as mathematics competitions and writing for a magazine.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Improved provision in this area is beginning to have an effect on personal development and achievement. A committed and effective team of heads of year, assisted by pastoral managers, provides good care for students throughout the school, working closely with outside agencies such as social services. Senior managers have succeeded in providing a much calmer environment to support students' personal and academic development, through various curricular and organisational changes. Strategies for raising attendance are not yet having the same success, and attendance, though average overall, has slipped in Year 11 over the current year. Students receive good guidance about their options at the end of Year 9, and about sixth form courses while they are in Year 11. Academic guidance is less successful. The 10 week assessment cycle is well organised to enable regular monitoring of progress against targets, but some teachers are not using the information sufficiently to match work to the needs of individuals, or giving them enough feedback to help students move up to the next level in their work.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The headteacher and senior leadership team show a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have an accurate view of the school's current performance; they appreciate the need to improve students' achievement and standards across all years. The school is taking effective action to deal with areas of weaknesses. More demanding, yet realistic targets are being set. The use of more challenging targets is beginning to have a positive impact on raising

teachers' expectations of what the students are capable. The school is placing a greater focus on monitoring and evaluation, and has recently made considerable improvements in this area of its work, especially in concentrating on the quality of teaching and learning. This is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of students' learning. Middle managers, as well as being more effectively held to account, are also being empowered to develop their own areas. Many however are quite new in post. This group's impact in bringing about school improvement is variable. The governing body is showing a greater understanding of its role in providing both challenge and support at the strategic level, but has not fully complied with national requirements to agree and review statutory policies. Given the outcomes for students, the school's use of resources and value for money are satisfactory.



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## 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?	3	3
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?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

<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>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

12 May 2008

Inspection of St John's Catholic Comprehensive School, Gravesend, DA12 2JW

Dear Students

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you very much for your contribution to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views about the school, and appreciated the polite and courteous reception you gave us. I am writing to you to let you know about our findings.

St John's is giving you a satisfactory standard of education, and the school is improving, as many of you told us. The school's leaders and managers understand what the school needs to do to become even better. The standards reached at GCSE and in Year 9 have been below average in recent years, but we have seen an improvement in your achievement in classes and in the test results Year 11 students have already received, so we expect this year's grades to be much better.

We saw some good and outstanding teaching, and we want the school to extend this good practice more widely throughout the school. Most of you know your targets, but we think you need more detailed information about what to do in order to improve. The school's status as an arts college is giving you good opportunities for practical work, particularly in art and music, and the school has sound plans to make the curriculum match your needs and interests more closely.

You say you enjoy school, and that you feel safe there because behaviour has improved a lot, and you are much less worried about bullying. You like the system of green and yellow cards because it is fair. You have a chance to say what you think about the school through the year and school councils, but not all of you think they make enough of a difference. Some students need to improve their attendance, and a few need to improve their behaviour in lessons, so that everyone can get on with their learning at all times.

All the staff and the governors want the school to improve even further, and we think you can help them to do this. We have asked them to concentrate on the following points.

- Make sure all the teachers adopt the best practices already in the school to help you learn.
- Improve their use of assessment so you have a clearer idea of what you need to do to improve your work.
- Ensure that all required policies are in place and reviewed regularly.

We wish you all the very best for the future!

Yours sincerely

Robin Gaff Lead inspector