

Painsley Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124456
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314936
Inspection date	11 December 2007
Reporting inspector	John English

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	879
6th form	226
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Downie
Headteacher	F R Tunney
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Station Road Cheadle Stoke-on-Trent ST10 1LH
Telephone number	01538 483944
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the college and investigated the following issues:

- The impact of the college's provision, especially its science specialist status, on its high standards.
- The impact of the college's Catholic ethos on the students' personal development and well-being.
- The provision and standards in the sixth form.

Evidence was collected from national published assessment data and the college's own records of the students' attainment, visits to lessons, discussions with teachers, students and governors, the views of parents, and a range of other documents supplied by the college. Other aspects of the college's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the college'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

This is an average sized comprehensive school. It became a science specialist college three years ago. Most of the pupils are of White British heritage. There is a 65% Catholic population. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low. The sixth form provision is shared in a consortium arrangement with two local schools. The college has a variety of national awards, including Investor in People, Healthy School, Eco-school, Sportsmark and Becta ICT Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Painsley Catholic College is outstanding. Its managers and governors are aware of this, and most parents believe so too. Many expressed a sense of great pleasure that their children attended the school. 'I could not have sent my children to a better school', wrote one, and many picked out the headteacher and the management of the college for particular praise. It is a school where individuals really count, and where students' personal development and well-being are as important as the achievement of high standards. This is because of the vision of the headteacher, which is based on his Catholic faith and shared by all staff, and even more notably by the pupils. Those professing the Catholic faith, and those of other faiths or none, all understand the spiritual and ethical values underpinning the life of the school, and can clearly trace its benefits in their personal development and standards of attainment.

A further key influence has been the establishment of the school as a science specialist college. This has had a major influence in developing the curriculum, making it more relevant to a wide range of the students. It has been influential in improving the quality of teaching and learning, by developing and sharing innovative practices. Through activities with partner schools and the wider community, the college has become a real centre of excellence, and this has given it a self confidence which has permeated many of its activities. Specialist status has played a key role in improved standards over the past three years.

Standards by the end of Year 11 are high. These standards are maintained in the sixth form. The proportion of students who achieved five or more grades A* to C in the 2007 GCSE examinations reached 90%, which is well above average. This figure has risen steadily over the last three years. The school takes even greater pride from the fact that all its students achieved eight grades A* to G. This year group entered the school with standards which were broadly in line with the national average, which shows that from their starting point their achievement is outstanding. All groups of students, including those who are gifted or talented and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve equally well. Standards on entry to the school are now rising, and were above average in the two youngest year groups.

In addition to achieving these high standards, the students develop into mature, sensible young people, with a strong sense of community responsibility, and independence of mind. One student expressed the views of many when he said that what was important to them was that everyone wanted to do the 'right thing' and to do well, and this attitude was 'infectious'. Whilst accepting the ethical and spiritual values that underpin the life of the college, students feel that they can contribute to it and influence it. The college council is active and acts as a conduit for ideas for improvement as well as general discussion of issues of importance to students. For example, at their suggestion, students can use the college's computers at a 'homework club' outside school hours. Other responsibilities willingly entered into include being prefects and taking opportunities to act as mentors for younger students. Students have a very good attitude to work, founded on a clear sense of the value of education as well as their daily enjoyment of lessons and the company of their teachers and peers. They find lessons absorbing and rewarding. They really enjoy coming to college – the rate of attendance is well above the average. Students feel very safe and well cared for, and treat each other with respect. There is little inappropriate behaviour or bullying, and any that does occur is thoroughly dealt with because, as one student put it, 'we are a telling school' and adults take any such instances seriously. Students eat healthily and, although pressure on the timetable means limited physical education lessons in Year 10 and 11, most of them take plenty of exercise because of the high

participation rates in the many additional sports activities offered by the college. Overall, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

The curriculum in the main school and in the sixth form has improved considerably over the past few years, particularly influenced by the specialist college status. This has enabled the college to develop its vocational and work related courses, as well as enriching the science curriculum. It is now well balanced, and an exceptional element is the way it can be adapted for individuals with particular needs. A very high proportion of students continue in Years 10 and 11 with a modern foreign language. Citizenship is exceptionally well taught by integrating it into all subjects in the curriculum, so that it is presented in relevant contexts. Information and communication technology (ICT) is very strong and, together with the high standards in key skills, ensures that the students are very well prepared for future study or working life. Given the wide range of opportunities available in other local post-16 institutions, a high proportion of students opt to continue their studies at the college. Teaching is outstanding. All the teachers are subject specialists, lesson planning is exceptionally good, and teachers can respond flexibly to the needs of the students because of their capacity to assess how well the students understand the lesson. Teachers can then change the course of the lesson, if necessary, to ensure that the students make maximum progress. Students report that teachers are always able to explain things in a different way if they do not understand them at first.

The students are exceptionally well cared for. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from excellent support from the teacher assistants and links with external support agencies. All the students know that there is an adult they can talk to if they have worries or concerns. Child protection arrangements and safety measures are all effectively in place. The students receive exceptionally good guidance on the levels at which they are working and how they can improve. In the first three years teachers set them clear targets for improvement in every subject. In Year 10 and 11 students are sensibly encouraged to determine targets themselves, guided by the extensive feedback they get on their work, particularly homework. In most subjects in the sixth form, guidance is excellent.

The headteacher provides outstanding direction for the work of the college. He has an unswerving vision based on meeting the needs of students and adults, and is very well supported in this by his senior managers. Together with the governors, managers have a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school. They believe that 'outstanding' does not preclude the requirement to continue to improve, and the school's self-evaluation clearly identifies areas of relative weakness. The college sets very challenging targets for itself, and achieves most of them. It is highly inclusive – although a Catholic college, it has a high proportion of non Catholics – values all students equally, and ensures that all groups achieve equally well. Governors set high standards and support the school whilst constantly challenging its performance. There have been many improvements in provision since the last inspection, demonstrating outstanding capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Standards are well above average and students achieve exceptionally well from their starting points. Results in 2007 improved considerably compared to the previous year. This was largely due to the drive and clear vision of the director of the sixth form. Self-evaluation is exceptionally effective in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Clearly thought out plans have been put in place and have already had a positive impact in raising standards in subjects such as music and biology. Better use of assessment data has resulted in students being set

challenging targets. The management of this combined sixth form is complex, but increasingly constructive relationships between the schools are leading to a greater consistency in provision.

However, there are still some inconsistencies in target setting and the quality of marking in a few subjects, so that at present a small minority of students are not challenged sufficiently.

Students are exceptionally well motivated and take every opportunity to enrich their learning through the outstanding extra-curricular provision. They thoroughly enjoy working within the local community and show a high respect for each other, the local and school communities, and their teachers. They are appreciative of all that the teachers do to support their learning and value the guidance they are given that enables them to achieve so highly. They use the opportunities given to them to comment on the work of the college responsibly and take pride in contributing to its development and improvement. They understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and participate regularly in sport. They feel very well supported and safe within school.

The current curriculum offers an unusually wide range of academic AS and A level courses, reflecting the college status well. The recent addition of a number of vocational courses meets the needs of an increasingly wide range of students. The college provides excellent guidance to students at the end of Year 11 so that they all enrol for appropriate courses, including those who go to other institutions. The innovative induction process for the first few weeks in Year 12 has led to very good retention rates.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that weaknesses in target setting and academic guidance in a small number of subjects in the sixth form are eliminated.

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?	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	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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	1	

The quality of provision

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

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?	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 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	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Painsley Catholic College, Cheadle ST10 1LH

My colleague and I very much enjoyed our visit to your school for the recent inspection. I would like to thank you all for your courteous welcome, and particularly those we talked to in lessons and in the arranged interviews. You all clearly think you are attending an outstanding school, and we totally agree with you.

Everything about your school is excellent and I will start with what this means for each of you. The standards you achieve by the end of Year 11, and those of you who stay on to the sixth form, are high and your achievement, which means the progress you make over your years at school, is outstanding. In addition, we were impressed by what balanced, mature young people you are. You have a very sensible attitude to work and to your relations with others. You contribute very positively to your school and the wider community. Whether you profess to be Catholic or not, you all recognise the benefits of the ethical and spiritual values of the college, and feel secure and valued within it. Together with the excellent care and teaching you get, this is why you achieve so well. Here are some other key features of the college.

- It is very well led and managed by the headteacher and senior staff.
- The specialist science college status has led to major improvements in facilities and the range and quality of the curriculum.
- You get exceptional guidance how to improve your standards. The only exception to this is in a few subjects in the sixth form, and we have asked the college to ensure that this is resolved. You can help by ensuring that you seek guidance on how to improve in all your subjects.

You are being given the very best of opportunities to prepare for success in your lives after you leave school, and you are making the very best of these opportunities. Congratulations to you and your college, and I wish you all the best for the future.

With best wishes.

John English