

# St Damian's RC Science College

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	106270
<b>Local Authority</b>	Tameside
<b>Inspection number</b>	319252
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 June 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Peter Toft HMI

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	789
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rev Fr Myles Sheahan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs F Ashton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 March 2007
<b>School address</b>	Lees Road Ashton-under-Lyne Lancashire OL6 8BH
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 3305974
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 3314744

---

<b>Age group</b>	11–16
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 June 2008
<b>Inspection number</b>	319252

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The college is of average size, with two thirds of students coming from four local Catholic parishes and a sixth from three Catholic primary schools beyond Tameside. Students are mainly of White British heritage. Few are from minority ethnic backgrounds or have a first language other than English. A few Polish students with limited experience in the English language have recently been admitted. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is broadly average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college holds Investors in People status and the Gold Healthy Eating Award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this college no longer requires significant improvement. It is now providing a satisfactory quality of education with some good features. It has dealt effectively with the points for improvement identified in the last inspection and has improved to a satisfactory degree. It has a good capacity to improve further and a burning ambition to do so.

Students start in Year 7 with broadly average prior attainment. In 2007, by the end of Year 11, standards were average, indicating that students made satisfactory progress throughout their five years here. For Years 10 and 11, this shows an improvement on the recent past. Results in the national tests in Year 9 also show satisfactory progress and achievement and students reach average standards. The college is rightly determined to raise standards further, not least to enable students to meet the challenging targets which it sets for them. In recent years, these have not been met but the gap in 2007 was smaller than that in 2006. In the lessons seen, achievement overall is at least satisfactory and often good. However, there is some difference between classes. This is due to a variation in the quality of teaching and the diligence with which marking is carried out. Teaching overall is satisfactory. Some good and very good lessons were seen. In a small number of lessons, class control is weak or abler students are given work which is too easy. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and they make satisfactory progress. The variation in teaching is less marked than it was in the last inspection: the college has worked assiduously to enable subject leaders to play strong roles in supporting staff to improve. This has been well aided by the clear-sighted vision of senior leaders in their efforts to raise standards by improving teaching, together with the specialist advice provided by the local authority and other external consultants. Time is now needed for these improvements to become deeply embedded in normal practice and for the small amount of weak or pedestrian teaching to be brought up to the level of the best.

Students develop well in their time at St Damian's. They leave as confident individuals, well placed to go onto further study or employment, as the vast majority do. Behaviour is good throughout the college. A small number of parents raised poor behaviour as an issue. This is confined to a few lessons where class control is not strong enough. Most parents are supportive of the college. They recognise the lengths to which staff go to provide a secure environment in which students develop well, personally and socially. The college's strong moral and spiritual values shine through in this. Care, guidance and support are good. The college has developed effective procedures to track the academic progress of students and to give them related guidance. The curriculum is good and it gives ample opportunity for students to develop skills needed for their future lives and an understanding of how to stay healthy and fit.

The headteacher and governors give good strategic leadership, with a careful balance between providing support and challenge to the staff. They have clear and appropriate ambitions for how the college should continue to develop. Much effort has been put into ensuring that the design of the new college building, which is about to be constructed, supports these educational ambitions. Planning for improvement is diligent and has been very effective in guiding recent improvements. The senior leadership and middle management teams have developed well and work collaboratively to secure improvement as well as the college's day-to-day operations, which run smoothly. Recent actions to tackle underperformance have been effective but time is necessary for the college to complete this task. The college has a clear picture of its performance. Its procedures for self-evaluation are effective and provide a solid basis for

planning and development. Monitoring is extensive, although some of the evaluations of the quality of teaching are more generous than those of the inspectors. Financial management is strong. Value for money is satisfactory. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory.

Although the college's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, its performance in four respects needs improvement. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the college to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying these weaknesses. The college would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

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

- Improve attainment for all students in order for the college's challenging targets to be met.
- Ensure that the remaining weak teaching is improved.
- Strengthen the rigour with which teaching is evaluated.
- Ensure that marking routinely informs students about how to improve their work.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be 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**

Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that achievement and standards are now satisfactory overall. Students enter the college in Year 7 with standards in line with all schools nationally. By the end of Year 9, standards, over time, have been broadly satisfactory but, in 2007, students made significantly worse progress than in the previous year, particularly in English. However, current evidence for the present Year 9 students shows a significant improvement for this year and the college is in line to reach its challenging targets.

Actions to address poor standards and achievement in Years 10 and 11 are having a positive impact. Standards have improved since the last inspection. The percentage of students attaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE rose in 2007 and was significantly better in both English and mathematics than the previous year. Assessment information collected by the college and work seen in lessons during the inspection confirm that students currently in Years 10 and 11 are making satisfactory progress overall. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

In science, the Year 9 national assessment results for 2007 were not as good as in previous years. The GCSE results showed some improvement but remained below target. There are clear signs, however, that the rate of students' progress has improved this year. This is evident from the college's records which track students' progress and in the results already achieved in the GCSE science examinations in Years 10 and 11. Achievement in science is now satisfactory. It continues to improve and the college is close to meeting its targets as a result of more stable staffing, developments in the curriculum and improvements in teaching and learning.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Personal development is good. It makes a positive contribution to the progress students make. They attend well, behave well and show good attitudes to learning. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students know right from wrong and subscribe to the strong

values the college teaches: they are courteous and well mannered. Bad behaviour is not tolerated and consistent and firm action is taken when necessary. The number of exclusions is low. Good levels of consideration are shown to others. Students learn about life in their own and other cultures and understand the need to show tolerance while living in a multicultural society. Good opportunities are provided for students to prepare for their future economic well-being. An appropriate emphasis is placed on acquiring basic skills and preparing students for the next stage in their education or for life at work. The many chances provided to interact with the community and develop teamwork skills contribute to their social development particularly well. Students make a good contribution to the college and the wider community. In college, older students perform valuable roles, for instance by acting as peer mentors and prefects. Students are taught to live healthily and safely. The success of the college in encouraging students to participate is seen in the positive responses of students to extra-curricular clubs and sporting activities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory and improving. In the majority of lessons relationships are good and attitudes are positive. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge. There are examples of good practice where work is well planned and meets the needs of students with different abilities. The use of a range of resources stimulates interest and opportunities are provided to develop the students' independent learning skills. Students are able to assess their own work and that of their peers. Teachers have high expectations in these lessons and use questioning effectively to strengthen understanding. Students enjoy them and make good progress because of engaging methods and teachers' enthusiasm. In some lessons, however, planning is weaker and does not focus on how to engage the students. Teachers' expectations of the less able students are not sufficiently high and the more able students are not fully stretched. As a result, students become disengaged and their behaviour and pace of learning declines. Although in general work is marked regularly there are inconsistencies in the quality of marking. This does not always help students to understand how to improve. The college recognises the need to develop assessment further.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good. In Years 7 to 9, it is broad and balanced, meeting statutory requirements and the needs of all students. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum offers a number of pathways which match the capabilities and aspirations of students of all abilities. This helps to keep those in danger of losing interest well motivated and engaged in learning.

Provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology is good. Since the last inspection the college's intranet has been improved to help students to learn independently. Students appreciate this additional support which they can use at home. It includes virtual learning activities, revision material and syllabuses. Study support sessions, master classes and holiday workshops are well attended. They support students particularly well in the run up to external examinations. This is helping to raise achievement.

The college's work-related learning programme prepares the students well to make informed choices about their future careers. The college ensures that students are taught to develop

healthy and safe lifestyles through the well-structured citizenship programme. A good range of extra-curricular activities strengthens the curriculum and students' appreciation is evident in the large numbers participating. Residential courses such as retreats, trips abroad and enrichment activities provided through the college's science specialism add to students' enjoyment and achievement.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. The pastoral support for students is of a high quality. Vulnerable students are particularly well supported by the college and looked-after children receive excellent support. Students state that they are well cared for and know where to go for help if they need it. Appropriate staff training is in place to ensure that health and safety arrangements and child protection systems are robust and up-to-date. The appointment of student support officers has strengthened the care provision, which is further augmented by external agencies. The use of assessment to track the progress made by students has developed well. Individual targets are realistic, challenging and used well to motivate students. As a result, those who are not achieving as well as they should are quickly identified and helped. The procedures for doing so are effective. As well as tackling underachievement, progress managers fulfil a valuable role in tracking the progress of all students and helping them to attain their targets. Although recently developed, there is clear evidence that these measures to track academic progress are supporting the improvement in achievement.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The college's leadership and management are satisfactory overall, with some good aspects. In particular, it has managed improvement very well since the last inspection and has good capacity for further improvement. Governors are well informed about the performance of the college, aided by the clear information provided by its staff and the advice given by staff of the local authority and diocese.

They have played a full and strategic role alongside the very effective headteacher in planning to deal with issues raised in the last inspection, as well as to secure more general improvement, including working on the design of the new building which is poised to be erected. The senior staff have clearly delineated roles which have recently been reoriented to meet the changing needs of this obviously improving college. They work effectively as a team and also in support of the increasingly effective group of middle managers. A major improvement recently secured has been the development of good procedures to measure the performance of major aspects of the college's operation and development. Self-evaluation is carried out rigorously and leads to an accurate and honest picture of strengths and weaknesses. This provides a strong foundation to support the planning for, and action to bring about, the various improvements which have been well secured in recent times. However, some of the college's judgements about the quality of teaching have been over generous. Staff development has been well managed, as has the recent strengthening of the position of science in this specialist college in subject lessons, in the curriculum and in support provided for science in partner schools. The college remains popular within the local community. It has developed good procedures for communicating with parents and these are well appreciated by a majority of the

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).



## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<b>School Overall</b>
--	-----------------------

### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
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	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<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
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

After our visit to your college, I would like to tell you of our findings.

- St Damian's is a satisfactory college. It has improved well since the last inspection and its staff and governors are keen to continue this improvement.
- You are given good care, guidance and support and this helps you to develop well personally, socially, morally and spiritually.
- Relationships are good throughout the college and in the vast majority of lessons your behaviour and attitudes to learning are good.
- The standards you reach are satisfactory overall and the staff are working hard to ensure that they continue to improve.
- You are given an interesting curriculum and many of you take part in the good extra-curricular activities.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall. We saw some good and very good lessons, though a few did not really challenge you very well.
- The college is soundly managed and this is helped by the clear dedication of the senior and other staff, well supported by the governors.

Although the college has improved since the last inspection, it needs to improve further in four ways. These are to:

- raise standards to meet the college's ambitious targets
- improve teaching in those few lessons where it is weak
- strengthen the way teaching is evaluated
- improve marking so that it shows you what you need to do to improve your work.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you well for your future learning at St Damian's.