

St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104833
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	324112
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Linda Tetik HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	739
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Elizabeth Dolan
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Mousdale
Date of previous school inspection	2 November 2005
School address	Boardmans Lane Blackbrook St Helens Merseyside WA11 9BB
Telephone number	01744 678112
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School is a popular, smaller than average voluntary aided school with specialist status for the visual arts situated in the east of St Helens. The school serves a relatively disadvantaged catchment area and the percentage of students entitled to free school meals is above the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. A small percentage of students are of minority ethnic heritage. Very few students speak English as an additional language. The school has achieved the full Healthy Schools Standard and the Silver Artsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School is a good school with some outstanding features. The strategic leadership of the headteacher has set a clear direction for improvement. She is well supported by the effective senior leadership team. This has resulted in rising standards and outstanding outcomes for learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Partnership working, particularly to support the most vulnerable students is a strength of the school.

Learners say they enjoy coming to school, that they feel safe and have confidence that the school will deal with any incidents of bullying effectively. This is reflected in the mission statement which describes the school as 'a welcoming family' where they 'respect one another'. They have many opportunities to take on responsibility which help build their skills and confidence. The vast majority of young people are well-prepared for their economic well-being and go on to further education, training or employment.

The senior leadership team have focused on improving teaching and learning, developing the curriculum and putting in place effective monitoring and evaluation processes. As a result the proportion of learners attaining five or more higher grade GCSEs is rising and in 2008 it was close to the national average. Inspection evidence shows that learners' current progress is good and standards are in line with national averages. The school is not complacent and recognises the need for continued improvement, particularly the proportion of students achieving five or more higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics. Attainment in the specialist subject of art and design is good.

The school's specialist status for the visual arts contributes greatly to raising standards. It provides a wide range of enrichment opportunities enabling learners to develop their skills and make an outstanding contribution to the community. The school building is adorned with art work from all learners, celebrating their achievement and improving the learning environment.

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan effectively and use information and communication technology (ICT) imaginatively to provide interesting and engaging lessons that enable most learners to make good progress. They create a positive climate for learning in the classroom and provide good oral feedback so that learners know how to improve their work. Teachers identify the different needs of learners in planning, but in some lessons, particularly for mixed ability groups, it is less clear how these different needs will be met. This occasionally results in some learners making slower progress. The development of the Key Stage 4 curriculum, which provides a good range of academic and vocational courses, is contributing to raising standards.

Governors provide good support and hold the school to account. The school's capacity to improve is good and this is evidenced by the effectiveness with which senior leaders have tackled the issues raised at the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of learners attaining at least five higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics.
- Ensure teaching is consistent in meeting the needs of all groups of learners, particularly in mixed ability classes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Learners start in Year 7 with below average standards overall. Although results in national Key Stage 3 tests were below average in 2007 good improvement was seen in attainment in English, mathematics and science in 2008. Inspection evidence shows that standards are broadly in line with national averages and given the learners' starting points this is good progress. Previous underachievement in mathematics is being tackled effectively.

Results in GCSE examinations have improved year-on year. In 2008 results were close to the national average and targets were broadly met. Inspection evidence shows that current standards are in line with national averages and learners are making good progress. Results in the school's specialist subject areas are good and make a major contribution to raising standards. Results for students entered early for GCSE in English and results for modular examinations in GCSE mathematics and science provide evidence for rising attainment and good progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are learning to speak English as an additional language needs are well met and they make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students are well behaved and polite. The school has high expectations and a clear code of conduct and these contribute to students' self-confidence and enjoyment of school. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students are creative and imaginative and have a very strong sense of right and wrong. The effective personal and social education course and activities such as the 'One World' project encourage students to consider issues such as stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice. This results in students showing a high degree of respect towards the customs, traditions and beliefs of others. Students regularly raise money for good causes. They take on responsibilities, for example, as school councillors, peer mentors or junior sports leaders. They say that improvements in teaching, particularly involving the use of visual arts, make lessons more interesting and, as a result, they learn more. Attendance has improved in recent years and most students attend well. However, despite the school's good work in conjunction with the local authority, a small, but significant group of mainly older students are absent too often and, as a result, overall attendance is satisfactory. Students know how to stay safe and have good attitudes to healthy living. They join in enthusiastically in physical education lessons and many take part in extra-curricular sport. They know what foods are good for them and are aware of the dangers of smoking and substance abuse. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding, for instance, through the work of the school council, the healthy school group and with other schools. Students make good progress in developing the skills and abilities needed for their future economic well-being and the proportion of students taking up further education and training after the age of 16 is high.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and explain ideas clearly. Planning includes a wide range of interesting activities to keep students engaged in their learning. Question and answer sessions are conducted well and neatly dovetailed

into practical activities. Teachers provide learners with good oral feedback and this motivates them to do well and builds good relationships. In Key Stage 4 in particular, where oral assessment is linked to explicit examination grade criteria, learners acquire good self-esteem and understanding of how to improve their work. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations of students' progress and learning is lively. Teachers make effective use of ICT to develop students' skills and understanding. Lessons are clearly structured as teachers consistently use the school's detailed lesson format to help them plan their lessons. Lesson outcomes for different abilities of learners are consistently outlined in these plans, but it is not always clear how the different needs of these learners will be met. On these occasions, which are more common in mixed ability classes, the pace of learning drops a little and some students' progress slows. The robust monitoring of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice have been instrumental in improving the quality of the learning experience.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and successfully promotes learners' achievement and personal development. They follow a traditional range of subjects at Key Stage 3, with the choice of French or Spanish. This is enhanced by initiatives to increase students' involvement in their own learning and to promote literacy and numeracy. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides a good range of academic and vocational courses well matched to learners' needs. They particularly value the new courses and the improved ICT resources which have resulted from the school's status as a visual arts college. The school works very well with other local providers to offer a range of vocational courses: for example, in hairdressing and engineering. Alternative courses meet the needs of a small number of learners for whom mainstream courses would not be the most appropriate option. The school encourages learners to take part in the good programme of extensive extra-curricular activities including master and revision classes and the chance to obtain sports leadership qualifications. Popular themed events involving a broad range of external providers and a wide programme of visits give opportunities for students to extend their learning and broaden their horizons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, support and guidance provided by the school are good with some outstanding elements. Staff are highly committed to the well-being of learners and are very proficient in identifying learners who are at risk of underachieving. The management of support for vulnerable students and their families is outstanding; the school plays a vital role in marshalling support from other agencies to help students and families. The health, safety and well-being of students are given the highest priority. Progress is monitored well and parents and carers receive termly progress reports. Learners receive good oral guidance on what they should do to improve their work. The good practice in marking is not yet fully consistent in all subjects. Students are given good opportunities to experience the world of work and are well informed about their choices when they leave school. The school has been successful in involving parents and carers in school life and is active in canvassing their views.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leadership provides very effective, energetic and purposeful direction. A major strength is its work to ensure the well-being of learners, in particular the needs of the most vulnerable. The school's contribution to community cohesion is excellent. This is evident in the outstanding outcomes for learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's specialism has been a key factor in this success. Comprehensive systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the performance of the school have been established. The headteacher has taken decisive action to improve leadership in key areas of the curriculum. While the impact of this work has yet to be fully realised there is clear evidence of rising standards, for example, in mathematics. In other subjects, the successful focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning has boosted learners' achievement. The personal and academic progress of individual learners is carefully tracked. Targets are challenging, but realistic and the school is increasingly successful in meeting them. The school has correctly identified the key priorities to raise standards. Governors support and challenge the school effectively. Financial resources are carefully matched to the priorities identified in the good school development plan. Child protection and other safeguarding procedures are fully compliant with current government guidelines. Excellent partnerships have been established with the wider community partly as a consequence of the development work carried out by the school's specialism. The school has made substantial progress since its previous inspection and has good capacity for further improvement.

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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
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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
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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
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**

Thank you for your warm welcome when we came to your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you, getting to know your school and seeing your impressive work in the visual arts displayed around the school. We were sorry we did not have time to go to the art exhibition.

You will be pleased to hear that you go to a good school that is improving all the time. We were impressed by your politeness, good behaviour and how well you get on with each other.

Here are a few examples of what we found during our visit.

- Your headteacher and senior managers lead the school very well.
- The staff are committed to caring for your well-being and are excellent role models for you.
- Teachers provide you with interesting and engaging lessons.
- Specialist status for the visual arts is having a significant impact by providing you with a wide range of experiences and opportunities.
- You make an outstanding contribution to the school and local communities.
- Results at GCSE are rising every year and this is due to the drive of the senior leaders, the skill of the teachers and your own hard work.

We have asked the school to make sure that:

- teaching is consistent in enabling all of you to make good progress
- more of you attain at least five higher passes at GCSE including English and mathematics.

Although most of you enjoy school and attend well there are a few who are absent too much. They can help the school by improving their attendance. I am confident that you will continue to work hard to make sure that your school continues to go from strength to strength in future.