

St Antony's Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106372
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	324385
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Jane Austin 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)	714
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Joe Carter
Headteacher	Mr Bill Byford
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2005
School address	Bradfield Road Urmston Manchester Lancashire M41 9PD
Telephone number	0161 911 8001
Fax number	0161 749 7270

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Inspection number	324385

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: 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

Although smaller in size than average, St Antony's has grown considerably in the last seven years. It is popular and oversubscribed. The majority of students are White British with a broadly average proportion, about one fifth, from minority ethnic backgrounds. While those of Caribbean heritage form the biggest minority group, students come from a wide range of backgrounds and include a number of recent arrivals from Poland. There are 13 students at the early stages of learning English. The college serves an area with more than usual levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is a little above average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The college has held specialist status in business and enterprise since 2003. It has the Investors in People and Healthy Schools awards. The local authority in which St Antony's is located operates a selective secondary education system. At the time of the inspection the principal was absent due to ill health and had been for several weeks.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Antony's puts the interests of its students at the heart of its work. It lives up to its aim, 'to provide an environment in which members of the college community can develop spiritually, individually, socially and educationally.' Staff know students well and provide them with good care and support closely matched to their individual needs. As a consequence, students develop into mature, responsible young people who behave well and enjoy learning. They willingly take on responsibilities in college, for instance, for charitable fundraising. They are well placed to do this because their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The college's Catholic ethos makes a significant contribution to this.

Pupils achieve well to reach standards that are broadly average overall at Key Stages 3 and 4. There was a marked rise in the provisional GCSE results in 2008 with the college achieving its best ever: 66% of students gained five or more passes at grades A* to C. All students left college with at least one GCSE pass or equivalent and an above average proportion gained at least five passes, demonstrating the college's successful approach to ensuring that all students do well. There were notable successes in vocational GCSE subjects such as construction, and health and social care. However, although standards in science are rising, students' achievement in this subject is satisfactory rather than good. In the main, targets in the college's specialist areas of business studies, information and communication technology (ICT), and mathematics were met or exceeded. Provisional results of this year's Key Stage 3 national tests also went up in all three core subjects, although standards in science remain below average.

Good teaching and learning are key to students' good progress. Students are well motivated to meet their own challenging targets by lessons that, in the main, capture their interest and make them think. They have positive attitudes to learning exemplified by the pride many show in their work. Despite this, and the college's appropriate strategies, attendance remains stubbornly below average and the number of persistent absentees is too high. The good curriculum is responsive to students' aspirations, for example, through the introduction of a wider range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4. A broad range of activities and ventures with enterprise at their core enhance the opportunities students have for learning in and beyond the classroom. Students are enthusiastic about the good choice of extra-curricular activities on offer. The good provision made by the Padua Centre for students experiencing a range of problems enables them to continue learning by providing individually tailored support programmes.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders at all levels successfully work in concert to sustain the college as a 'family' learning community with a strong sense of Catholic identity. While this ethos brings undoubted benefits, it is characterised by an informality of approach that is harder to maintain as the college grows in size. This is evident in the patchy implementation of several policies and procedures. Most importantly, systems for monitoring and evaluating the college's performance are uneven in their rigour and coherence. As a consequence, the college's evaluation of some areas of its work is too generous. Nonetheless, the college has made improvements since the previous inspection, most notably the significant rise in standards at Key Stage 4. This demonstrates that its capacity to improve is good. It provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish more formal and sharper systems for monitoring and evaluating the college's performance.
- Raise students' achievement in science.
- Reduce levels of persistent absence.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students join the college in Year 7 having reached standards that are usually a little below average. The college intake spans a narrower range of ability than is commonly found, with the vast majority of entrants being middle attaining students. By the end of Year 9 students have caught up this slight shortfall to reach average standards overall. Students make good progress in English and mathematics and satisfactory progress in science. The unvalidated Key Stage 3 national test results for 2008 demonstrate an improvement in the proportion of students achieving the level expected for their age in English and mathematics, and this proportion matches national levels. Students also did well in these subjects at the higher Level 6. While science results improved, they remained below average and below the college's target at both the expected and higher levels. Inspection evidence indicates that improved performance at Key Stage 3 is being maintained.

By the end of Year 11, standards remain average. In nearly all subjects the proportion of students achieving the highest grades is below average. However, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C has improved by 19% in the last two years and by 13% when English and mathematics are included. This trend of sustained improvement has now brought the college in line with national averages on these measures, while its strong reputation for ensuring that nearly all students achieve GCSE passes at the lower grades has been maintained. Overall, students' achievement is good but it is satisfactory in science. The college has recognised that students' achievement in this subject is not as high as in other subjects and the effective actions taken have started to raise standards in both key stages. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and there is no significant variation in achievement between boys and girls or between students from different ethnic groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students like St Anthony's and most enjoy attending; the college is working effectively with the few who still find this difficult. New pastoral strategies are bringing about improvements and attendance is rising, although at present this falls below the national average. Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students' report that they feel happy, valued and safe in college and any incident which may occur is dealt with quickly and effectively. They know who to turn to for support and are confident this will be provided for them. Students have positive relationships with staff and their behaviour is good. They like the college's reward system which recognises both their social and academic achievements. As a result, the college has a particularly warm, relaxed atmosphere in which all flourish and feel included. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and are involved in a broad range of sports. They gain a good understanding of issues around healthy eating and keeping safe.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are considerate and polite, and they work very well together. Students develop the skills, attitudes and initiative that enable them to contribute well to the community by taking an active part in college life as council members and peer mentors. Multicultural themed lessons and festival celebrations, together with visits to Italy, France, Germany and Spain, promote an understanding of other cultures effectively. Through participation in the college's range of enterprise activities, students develop approaches and aptitudes that provide an excellent foundation for the next stage of their education and working life. These skills are put to effective use on work-related training which includes local nursery placements and construction courses. Positive involvements with primary schools as sports leaders enhance students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Students make good progress in core skills and ICT and, for some, links with local colleges promote independence.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Good relationships between teachers and students, as well as amongst students permeate lessons and set a positive climate for learning. Together with teachers' effective classroom management skills, this ensures good behaviour, with pupils generally on task throughout lessons. Students benefit from well-timed praise and encouragement. They are clear about what they are going to learn because teachers share the objectives of lessons with them at the outset. Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to explain topics and extend students' learning. In the best lessons, challenging questioning involving all students and a range of approaches promotes a brisk pace, with all students making maximum progress. Engaging starter activities, often making effective use of interactive whiteboards, enthuse students and ensure high levels of enjoyment.

Where lessons are comparatively less successful, planning does not take sufficient account of students' different capabilities and prior learning to ensure that tasks are closely matched to their individual needs. For instance, although the college has identified gifted and talented students, challenging activities that develop their thinking are not always included in lessons. Inconsistencies in the structure of lesson planning across the college contribute to this variability in quality. It is also a factor where learning outcomes are ill-defined. This results in too little focus on activities that promote specific skills and too much direction by teachers, reducing students' independence in learning.

There is some good practice in written feedback to students but this is not consistent across the school. Sometimes marking does not give enough specific advice about what students need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good quality curriculum enables students to achieve well academically and in terms of their personal development. Students in Key Stage 3 are provided with a secure grounding in basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and ICT. Curriculum time for science has been increased and this has contributed to the very recent improvement in standards in this subject. The curriculum is thoughtfully constructed to ensure students' achievements are built on effectively in Key Stage 4. The increasing student population is encouraging college leaders to cater more flexibly

for a wide range of students' needs and some useful early steps have been taken to personalise learning for some groups of students. For example, older students can now choose to follow three alternative pathways: academic, vocational or mixed. Recently introduced examination entry arrangements provide students with increased opportunities to achieve good GCSE passes in English. GCSE courses in mathematics are carefully targeted to suit all abilities. The college is starting to enlarge the range of its GCSE level courses in science. The college ensures that students following off-site courses, such as hairdressing and engineering, do not miss out on essential lessons in college.

Extra-curricular provision is good. Most students make good use of the wide range of opportunities provided to support their learning and to pursue their interests in the arts and sport. Residential visits enhance students' enjoyment of college life and useful initiatives, such as the Plant a Bulb campaign (in aid of sufferers of myasthenia gravis), demonstrate their compassionate outlook. Gifted and talented students are identified formally but systems and procedures to promote their progress effectively are at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The college provides good quality care for students and is increasingly ensuring that it promotes their overall well-being. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are in place; procedures for child protection are well established and understood by all staff. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support. Non-teaching staff make a good contribution to the care, guidance and support of vulnerable students, including those whose academic performance needs a boost. The additional support provided by the Padua Centre is sensitive, well coordinated, and very effective in promoting the well-being of students. It enables them to remain engaged in education and is valued by students and staff alike.

The systems for monitoring progress and setting challenging targets are successful in developing students' confidence and self-esteem. Students are routinely involved in evaluating their own progress. They know how well they are doing: however, guidance to help them to improve their work is better in some subjects than others. Parents are well informed about their children's progress and like the 'postcards home' celebrating particular achievements.

Older students have the opportunity to discuss their option and career choices with teachers and careers advisers at key points during their time at college. As a result, they are able to make well informed decisions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders have embedded a culture where every student matters and sustain a strong commitment from staff to this. Students' good achievement, both academic and in personal development, are testament to their success. Subject and pastoral leaders are committed, reflective practitioners striving for continuous improvement. They contribute effectively to the college's strategic direction. Subject leaders play a central role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision as well as checking on students' progress

towards their targets. While some procedures for aspects of this are well established and implemented consistently, they are not moderated. Systems for tracking achievement are cumbersome and not fully coordinated. In addition, there is an over-reliance on informal ways of sharing information and evaluating the quality and impact of the college's work. This is hindering a fully realistic appraisal of some aspects of the college's performance.

The college's specialism has provided a catalyst for building good links with the local community. Effective collaboration with a number of primary schools is fostered through enterprise activities, such as 'Going Mobile', as well as by regular specialist teaching and the use of facilities in ICT. In addition, the college delivers a well established and oversubscribed programme of accredited ICT courses for adults. Connections with a range of local businesses are growing and students are benefiting through, for instance, the 'Women in Business' day. Building on the strong sense of community within the college and locality, the college is in the process of developing a farther reaching approach to community cohesion. The college maintains close and positive relationships with parents. The comment of one of the many parents who returned the inspection questionnaires is typical of the views expressed by the majority; 'I feel assured that both my child's education and well-being matter to the staff and are being handled well.'

Governance is good. The governing body provides a great deal of support and an appropriate level of challenge to the senior leaders. The chair and vice chair of governors know the college very well because they play a part in its day-to-day life.

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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?	2
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	2
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 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	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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 all for welcoming us to your college during its recent inspection. A special thanks to those students who gave up their time to speak to us and help us find out how well the college performs. This letter explains our findings and what we think the college should do to get even better.

St Antony's is a good college with a family atmosphere where you enjoy learning and get on well together. GCSE results have risen in recent years, with a significant improvement in 2008. You achieve well during your time in college. You make good progress in lessons because teaching is good and you behave well. You appreciate knowing both the challenging targets you are aiming for and how near you are to reaching them. You can choose from a good range of suitable courses at Key Stage 4. Together with the variety of enterprise activities you experience, and good guidance, this all adds up to excellent preparation for the next stage of your education or employment. Many of you make a good contribution to college life, for example as college councillors, peer mentors or sports leaders. You enjoy the variety of extra-curricular opportunities on offer. Your spiritual development is outstanding. Staff know you very well and provide good care and support for you. For some of you, the Padua Centre makes a big difference to your success.

In order to improve further, the college needs to ensure that you make more rapid progress in science to reach higher standards. In some lessons across the curriculum you would benefit from work that is more closely matched to the next steps in learning you, individually, need to make. Your attendance is below average and a small number of you miss far too much schooling. We have asked the staff to do all they can to help you attend college regularly. Clearly you have a part to play in this. We have asked senior staff to tighten up systems for monitoring the work of the college so that they have a sharper picture of its strengths and areas for development.