

St Joseph's Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110087
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	325099
Inspection date	10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	645
Sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Frank Shephard
Headteacher	Mr James Welsh
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Shaggy Calf Lane Slough SL2 5HW
Telephone number	01753 524713
Fax number	01753 579128

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional inspector. The inspection focused on:

- how school leadership is improving the achievement of students in mathematics at GCSE
- the impact of specialist arts status and creative learning on the students' academic and personal development
- the effectiveness of the school's support for the achievement of its more vulnerable pupils and those newly arrived from abroad.

Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, school assessment data, discussions with students, staff and the Chair of the Governors, and from the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school'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 secondary school, which is smaller than average, opened a sixth form in September 2008. Free school meal eligibility is below the national average. The school serves a culturally diverse community. Over half of the students are from minority ethnic groups, with an increasing number coming from Polish backgrounds. Almost a third of the students have a mother tongue other than English. The proportion of students who need extra help with their learning is broadly average. The school is part of a loose federation with two other local secondary schools, and achieved specialist status as an Arts college in January 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The headteacher, staff and governors are accurate in judging that St Joseph's is a good school. The progress seen at the last inspection has continued, and the school has developed some outstanding features to its work. This has been made possible by the headteacher's determined and highly effective leadership. One parent reflected the views of many when writing, 'St Joseph's has been really well led by the headteacher over the last eight years. The school clearly demonstrates a very strong Catholic ethos and displays excellent morals and social values.' The headteacher's goal is to raise standards and include all students in school life. He is very ambitious for the students, and accepts nothing but the best from everyone. This is reflected in the challenging targets he sets everyone and the effort put into their achievement.

The continuing drive to raise standards is rooted in improving learning throughout the school. There is no complacency, but rather a strong sense of teamwork, with all staff sharing the headteacher's ambitions. This is seen in his determination to increase the number of A* and A grades at GCSE. Even though few students enter the school with skills above those expected at the age of eleven, he has accurately identified that the most able students are not always challenged sufficiently, and there is potential for them to do better.

One area of considerable improvement since the last inspection is the quality of the curriculum. Access to computers and to vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 has improved. The school met all targets in its first year as a specialist Arts college. This, along with the focus on greater creativity in teaching, is a major factor in extending the students' learning. Students say how much more interesting lessons have become as teachers adopt creative ways to stimulate their imaginations. This has considerably increased their enjoyment of school as well as giving them greater confidence to perform in front of others. Their self-esteem is high and their aspirations are rising.

Subjects other than arts have benefited from specialist status. Linking learning to art activities in subjects such as science and mathematics brings learning to life. Teachers imaginatively use resources to engage the students, who greatly enjoy the active style of learning that comes from role play, practical and drama activities. Learning is brisk but, at times, teachers' questions require little more than short answers and do not check the students' understanding. Students know how well they are doing and the steps they need to take to achieve their targets. There are some good examples of them assessing their own work and that of their classmates. However, this practice and the quality of marking are variable and hold back students' progress at times.

Good teaching based on an outstanding curriculum contributes to the students' good achievement. They make good progress from below average skills on entry so that standards are average by the end of Year 11. The improvement in standards has continued, and can be seen in better GCSE and Year 9 test results. The proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades in 2008 was the highest the school has achieved. A dip in science results has been tackled, and results this year show that students are on course to meet quite demanding targets. The school's own assessments suggest that the current Year 11 students are on track to meet the higher 2009 targets, and so raise results again.

The students' outstanding personal skills and good academic development place them in a strong position for success in their future lives. They are a great credit to themselves and to the school, making a very considerable contribution to its happy atmosphere. Their behaviour is excellent and they show great respect for adults and each other. Their concern for others is

based on strong Christian values and shows in their support for a variety of charities. The focus on developing the students' voice through the federation means they play a significant part in the school and its developments, while gaining a sharp understanding of their rights and responsibilities. They take seriously the responsibilities they are given, such as mentoring younger students or making a difference through the school council. Through links with partner schools in South Africa and events such as the multi-cultural day, the students develop a growing understanding of the wider world.

Students learn how to adopt a healthy and safe lifestyle and to deal with risks in their everyday lives. They report that bullying is rare and dealt with quickly. They say they feel safe and secure in school and find their teachers approachable. One of the older students reflected on this saying, 'All of the staff are easy to talk to if we have a problem.' In this close-knit school, the needs and circumstances of all students are well known to staff, giving the school a strong family feel at all times. This means it is almost impossible for anyone to fall through the net and underachieve.

Students greatly appreciate the extra effort teachers put in for them. As another student said, 'Members of staff are always willing to sacrifice their free time to help a child fulfil their full potential.' The school has robust systems to check the students' progress, identify where targets might be missed and then put in place courses of action to redress the situation. This is particularly successful for students with low literacy levels or those who find learning difficult. The focus is very much on identifying individuals' needs and developing a programme that suits them best so they can achieve and remain included in education for as long as possible.

Newcomers to the school and students who have a mother tongue other than English are carefully assessed so that the support they need can be put in place. This enables them to access quickly all that the school offers. They achieve well, particularly once they have gained confidence and skills in English language. The school works with considerable success to engage minority ethnic communities through its various arts programmes.

Systems to check subject performance are rigorous and include seeking the views of students on their learning experiences. The careful analysis of assessment data alongside the evidence gathered from regular departmental reviews means that priorities are clear and understood by all. One example is that the recent review of mathematics by the senior leadership team has identified why some students failed to gain the GCSE results expected of them given their Year 9 test results. This has led to a clear plan for action, with success already evident. Governors are well led and provide a good balance of challenge and support to keep the school on its toes. The school has a record of improvement that stretches back to before the last inspection. This and the determination of the headteacher mean the school is very well placed to meet its future challenges and achieve its ambitions.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form had only been open for three months at the time of the inspection. It was not possible to investigate all aspects in detail, but there is no evidence to suggest the school's self-evaluation is inaccurate. The students are very happy with the advice and guidance they received while making their course choices, and with the support that teachers have given them this term. They are confident that they have made the right choice in staying on into the sixth form at St Joseph's rather than going elsewhere. They are quite happy to turn to their teachers to share a problem or worry. The school's view is that these students are taught well and are

making good progress. The inspection saw nothing to contradict this judgement. The students have plenty of opportunity to contribute to the community within and beyond the school. They report that Year 11 students are already asking them about their experiences as they prepare to make choices for next year. The number of courses available is limited at present, but considerably enriched by opportunities for physical education and citizenship lessons. Getting the curriculum right as the sixth form expands and ensuring that decisions made are informed are the next priorities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Challenge the thinking and learning of the most able students in lessons and through extension activities.
- Ensure that assessment and marking are used consistently to engage students in their learning and help them identify how to improve their work.

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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	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	2
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	1	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

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

05 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Joseph's Catholic High School, Slough, SL2 5HW

Thank you for your help and cooperation when I inspected your school. I spoke with many of you in lessons, in groups or around the school. I thought you showed confidence and a strong sense of maturity. You said that you enjoy school and feel safe.

We agree with you that St Joseph's is a good school with some outstanding features. It has improved in many ways in recent years, such as the improvement in your access to computers and the impact of the arts specialist status. You are doing well in your work and making good progress. Standards are rising and GCSE results are getting better each year. Your dedicated and determined headteacher is supported by hardworking staff and governors. By carefully assessing how well you are doing, teachers are able to make sure that the courses you study meet your needs and interests. You have good teachers who show considerable interest in your personal and academic development. They try hard to make sure that your learning needs are catered for and that all of you have the opportunity to succeed.

The staff and governors are always looking to do even better. We think that there are things that can be even better so we have asked your teachers to:

- challenge the thinking and learning of the most able students in lessons and through extension activities
- ensure that assessment and marking are used consistently to engage you in learning and help you identify how to improve your work.

You can help too. Continue to be good ambassadors for your school.

Once again, many thanks. I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Martin Beale

Lead Inspector