

Sacred Heart Roman Catholic VA School - A Specialist Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111763
Local Authority	Redcar and Cleveland
Inspection number	325456
Inspection dates	11–12 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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)	740
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joan Gillis
Headteacher	Mrs Pat Hibbert
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2005
School address	Mersey Road Redcar TS10 1PJ
Telephone number	01642 487100
Fax number	01642 771470

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sacred Heart is specialist science college which serves a large catchment area around the town of Redcar. Students come from 19 local primary schools, one of which shares the school's site. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with very few who have English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has Gold Travel, Healthy Schools and the Intermediate International awards. The school was awarded science specialist status in 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sacred Heart is a good school with a number of outstanding features. Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive and the strong guidance that teachers provide. Students make good gains in their learning at both key stages, regardless of their starting points, to reach above average standards. Achievement is particularly impressive in English where consistently good or outstanding teaching helps students make considerably more progress than similar students in other schools. Performance at the highest grades is consistently good in English but not so high in science where too few GCSE students reach the top grades. Provisional results for 2008 show another rise in students' attainment and are the best ever results for the school. Good performance in GCSE and vocational courses has brought success to almost every student who entered the examinations. Parents are very supportive of the school. The large number of questionnaires returned showed that parents were overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school. Many agree with the views expressed by one parent. 'The warmth, encouragement and high level teaching are wonderful. Our child enjoys every aspect of Sacred Heart and is eager to attend.'

The standard of teaching and learning is good. There is some outstanding teaching in many departments. Teachers plan well to interest and challenge students. Excellent relationships and mutual respect create a very positive climate for learning. Where this is matched with methods that allow students to engage with the learning the pace is brisk and sometimes the atmosphere is 'electric'. Where teachers rely too heavily on lengthy explanations, students are too passive to think and learn for themselves. Sometimes teachers do not make clear to students what precisely they need to do to improve their work. An excellent curriculum makes a very strong contribution to students' enjoyment of learning and their success in national examinations. The wide range and good balance of academic and vocational subjects meets the needs and aspirations of students very well.

The school's Catholic values underpin the students' outstanding personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their behaviour is excellent. They show high levels of self-respect and respect for others and the school environment. Students make outstanding contributions to local, national and international communities through charity fund-raising events, links with a local school for pupils with specific learning difficulties, and links with a number of European and African schools. They enjoy school and attend well. They stay fit and healthy and are keen to participate in the many after-school clubs, including additional classes during 'Period 6', a daily after-school lesson when students receive additional support or extension for their learning. The excellent care, support and guidance given to students is at the heart of the school's success. Staff at all levels are dedicated and ambitious for students to do well. This is evident in the extra time they give voluntarily at lunchtime and after school to ensure that students' needs and concerns are listened to and acted upon. Students have enormous confidence in their teachers and mentors. This gives them a strong sense of security and well-being in school which contributes very well to their all round success.

The school is well led and managed at all levels. The headteacher has provided excellent vision for the development of the school since the last inspection. Under her very good leadership the school has made significant strides in developing the quality of provision, raising standards and achievement and in improving students' personal development. School self-evaluation is accurate and gives senior leaders a clear picture of what needs to improve further. Subject leaders give good support to the school's improvement through a clear focus on raising

standards. In the last year the school has not given priority to monitoring teaching and learning by subject leaders so that some outstanding practices are not being shared for the benefit of all students. The school's specialist status has had a positive impact on broadening the curriculum and improving teaching and learning. Governors are very supportive, well informed and provide the school with good levels of challenge. The school runs very efficiently and calmly. Lunchtime staff, both in the kitchen and in the dining hall, do an impressive job in ensuring that a large number of students are fed without over running into afternoon lesson time. This is just one example of the excellent teamwork that exists in the school and is typical of how the school tackles any obstacle.

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating teaching in their departments so that outstanding practice is shared across the school.
- Develop systems to inform students more precisely of how they can improve their work, so that they can see a clear pathway to reaching their targets.
- Review Key Stage 4 science courses to enable students to reach the highest grades of which they are capable

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and students' achievement is good. In 2007, results in Key Stage 3 national tests dipped to average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, test results in English showed that Sacred Heart students had made significantly better progress than most similar students nationally. In mathematics and science they made the same progress as most other similar students. Provisional Key Stage 3 results for 2008 indicate that the school's record of above average standards has been restored. The school exceeded its challenging targets in all core subjects and the proportion of students reaching the higher levels significantly increased in science and English. Results in GCSE and vocational courses were above the national average in 2007. The proportion of students with five good GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was above the national average and boys' performance was significantly above the national average. Provisional results for 2008 show a further improvement in Year 11 standards in both GCSE and vocational subjects. Again, the school exceeded its challenging targets, including those at the highest levels. While science is amongst the high performing departments at grade C, it is behind them in the proportion of students reaching the highest levels of A* and A.

Students achieve well in both key stages regardless of their background, starting points or learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They enter the school with attainment that is broadly in line with national averages and make better progress than students in most other schools. Good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps them to achieve as well as other students. Students make outstanding progress in English at both key stages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students have an excellent understanding of how to look after their personal safety, health and well-being. They enjoy school life and attend well. Students are friendly, well mannered and act responsibly. They concentrate well in class and

are keen to learn. Students behave exceptionally well in lessons and feel that the support and rewards systems and the mentors who support good behaviour ensure that everyone is encouraged to do their best. They say that 'Period 6' is very successful in supporting students who want to do well. Incidents of bullying are rare and students report that any that occur are managed sympathetically and effectively by teachers. Students are proud of their school and they say that it takes account of their views. They are delighted that the lunchtime menus were changed in response to their requests for more healthy options. Students are keen to take responsibilities as prefects, librarians and peer mentors. Students enjoy these responsibilities and feel that they help them to mature as individuals as well as giving them the opportunity to support others. The school prepares students very well for adult life through good careers guidance and links with local industry. Enterprise skills are very well developed through a variety of enterprise activities and through work experience. These, together with the students' overall good literacy and numeracy skills, are very helpful in developing workplace and other skills to contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. There is a significant proportion of outstanding teaching and all lessons seen were satisfactory or better. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent. Students' behaviour is exemplary and they respond very well to teachers' high expectations. A hallmark of all lessons is the mutual respect and willingness of students to work productively with each other and their teachers. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this to plan a good range of suitable activities in lessons. Information and communication technology (ICT) and other resources are used effectively to enhance students' learning by developing independence and increasing the pace of learning. There is very good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Where learning is most successful, students are encouraged to think independently and become active learners because they have the opportunity to learn by doing. In such lessons there is brisk pace and good challenge and activities are well matched to the range of abilities in the class. In lessons where teaching is satisfactory and students are expected to learn by listening to lengthy explanations, the pace is slower, too many activities are teacher directed and students are passive for too long. When assessing students' work teachers focus on the examination grades that students should aim for rather than explain what aspects of the subject they need to learn next. Students report that this can be frustrating when they are not clear precisely what it is they need to do to improve, regardless of examination targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Curriculum provision is excellent. The extensive array of GCSE and vocational choices and progression pathways meet the needs and aspirations of all students very well. The transformation of the curriculum for Key Stage 4 students has been achieved through well planned and very effective partnerships with local schools and colleges. A strong feature of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is the provision of 'Period 6', an additional time slot each day when students receive extra support or extension for their learning. All teaching staff are involved in this voluntary scheme. The school's specialist status has enhanced the science curriculum through involvement in national initiatives. The department takes a lead in developing

new strategies for assessing pupil progress. The wider curriculum in the school has been enhanced through links between science, ICT and mathematics. However, the wealth of provision in science at Key Stage 4 has led to some students being involved in too many examinations at the end of Year 11. While many students have gained more science qualifications than is usual, this has sometimes been at the expense of them reaching the highest grades.

Well planned provision at Key Stage 3 is enhanced by Year 9 students being entered for GCSE examinations in statistics two years ahead of time. Students enjoy an excellent range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Visits at local, national and international level make a significant contribution to students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The introduction of a sign language club and links to a local special school are examples of how the school makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion. Careers guidance, enterprise and work related learning opportunities are well planned and ensure pupils are very well informed about their options when they leave school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. High quality care and support for students are at the heart of the school's ethos. Systems for pastoral care are extremely well developed. Staff know students very well and a very efficient referral system ensures that students with concerns or problems are dealt with swiftly and appropriately. The school chaplaincy is very important in helping students identify their needs and seek help. There are strong links with outside agencies to provide expert support and advice for students, their parents and carers. There is effective monitoring and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learning Support Mentors give good support and guidance so that these students are very well integrated into the school and achieve as well as other students. Procedures for safeguarding students are effective and meet current requirements. Academic guidance is good. There are rigorous systems to assess and record students' progress against their targets. Any underachievement is quickly identified and appropriate, effective action is taken. This is particularly effective at Key Stage 4. but less so at Key Stage 3, where mentoring and coaching are not yet fully established.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Leadership at all levels has ensured that the school has made good improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher's excellent vision and very good leadership have ensured that the school has moved forward well on a number of fronts: standards are rising, achievement is now good and an outstanding curriculum has been developed. The school's relentless focus on raising standards and achievement has been well supported by staff at all levels and standards continue to rise. The senior leadership team provides expert guidance and support for the school's improvement. Leadership in science is good. The science curriculum is developing well both for students in the school and adults in the community. Subject leaders have risen well to the challenge of improving provision for learning, though their monitoring of teaching and learning has not been a priority in the last year. This means that much good and excellent practice has not been captured and shared with colleagues. Staff commitment and dedication ensure that all students are included and enjoy success in and out of the classroom. Governors have extensive knowledge of the school. They

are fully supportive, well informed and prepared to challenge and defend the school, and they do. Given its improvement since the last inspection the school is well placed to continue to improve.

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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	2
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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	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

Dear Students

Inspection of Sacred Heart Roman Catholic VA School - A Specialist Science College, Redcar and Cleveland, TS10 1PJ

Thank you all for making us so welcome during the recent inspection of your school. A special thanks to those of you who met us for interviews and gave us some very good insights into students' views of the school. We were impressed by your maturity and honest opinions, as well as your appreciation of and loyalty to your school. Please pass on our thanks to your parents and carers for the many questionnaire responses we received. They gave us a clear picture of how strongly they value and support your school.

We agree with you that yours is a good school and that it has some outstanding features. Among these is your own excellent personal development. This is apparent in your hard work, very good attitudes to learning and excellent behaviour. Your sense of responsibility and citizenship are also exemplary. You demonstrate a genuine care for the needs of others and a willingness to make a difference. Your fund-raising and community work are a credit to you and your school. Your teachers set an excellent example in how to care for others in the way that they care for and support you. This too is an outstanding feature of your school. It is something that you told us you value very highly. We agree that there are alternative methods of helping you to improve your work and have asked the school to look into how targets are presented so they are more easily understood by you all.

The headteacher and staff have developed an excellent curriculum that gives you a very wide range of learning opportunities both in and beyond the classroom. Your good learning benefits from mainly good teaching, with some that is outstanding. While this is commendable, we agree with some of you that sometimes learning is a little dull because you have to listen for too long rather than doing things that will help you learn. For this reason, we have asked the school to share the best practices of teaching and learning so that you build upon the good progress and achievement you already enjoy. We have also suggested that a review of the science courses in Key Stage 4 might help more of you reach the highest levels.

Your school is well led and managed. Your headteacher, governors, teachers and all staff are ambitious for you to do well and make the best of your potential. They have an accurate and perceptive view of your school's strengths and what it is that needs improvement. You can help them meet their targets by working hard and involving yourselves fully in the life of the school as you do now. You are part of a winning team. That is a very good starting point for your future success.

The inspection team and I send our very best wishes for the future to each of you.

Yours sincerely

Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead inspector