

St Peter's Catholic Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113908
Local Authority	Bournemouth
Inspection number	325911
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Dickinson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1587
Sixth form	385
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jan Wyatt
Headteacher	A McCaffrey
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2005
School address	St Catherine's Road Bournemouth BH6 4AH
Telephone number	01202 421141
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Peter's is a large, oversubscribed school which serves the Roman Catholic community of Bournemouth, Poole, Dorset and Hampshire. Students come from a wide area and some travel up to 15 miles to school each day. Many students also join the school for the first time in the sixth form. The school has two sites just over two miles apart, with Years 7 and 8 at the Iford site and Years 9, 10, 11 and the sixth form at Southbourne. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

The school has performing arts and sports college status and has held the Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark awards for several years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Peter's is a good school and a caring, inclusive community. It has some outstanding aspects and is improving. The senior leadership team is highly respected and regarded. They have created a cohesive community underpinned by warm, supportive relationships, where staff are strongly committed to students' well-being. Everyone pulls together in a quiet, understated way to promote the aim of its joint trustee, The De La Salle Order, to 'help young people to be fully prepared for life, practically and spiritually'. Students' personal development is outstanding. Students are valued and respected and, in turn, reflect these qualities in their dealings with one another. They make a very strong contribution to the ethos of the school. The school enjoys the support and confidence of the great majority of the parental community.

Students reach above average standards by Year 11 and achieve well. The proportion gaining five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, has risen year on year and was well above average in 2008. Despite this, over recent years, students in Years 10 and 11 have made satisfactory progress, which has contrasted with the good progress made between Years 7 and 9. This has been recognised by the school and tackled through an increasingly rigorous approach to tracking students' achievement, better intervention and support for students and good academic counselling. The school's records show that students currently in Years 10 and 11 are now making better progress. Teaching is good overall and there are some outstanding lessons that inspire students. However, the school does not fully maximise the potential for sharing the strengths in teaching that exist within some departments, including its specialist areas. Where teaching and learning are less effective, the planned tasks and teaching strategies do not focus sufficiently upon pupils' learning and students have limited opportunities to become actively engaged and develop their independence as learners.

The school's curriculum is good, especially in the sixth form, and its specialisms in performing arts and sports permeate all aspects of school life and add significantly to students' enjoyment and achievement. Its expertise in these areas is well regarded locally, regionally and nationally. The school's concern for its community context is very well demonstrated by the extensive involvement of students in a rich and diverse range of external activities and their understanding of, and concern for, global issues.

The senior leadership team manages the school's two-site arrangements very well. They share a zest to improve the school that is also evident within middle leadership and have not shied away from tackling areas of underperformance. However, despite having made considerable improvements in the evaluation of its own performance, the school's priorities for improvement are not linked closely enough to its development plan. The senior leadership team is aware of this and has begun to align these more closely. In addition, the criteria for judging the success of any actions are not sufficiently precise and measurable. As part of its self-evaluation, the school has recently extended its classroom monitoring but this is not yet frequent enough or focused sufficiently on students' outcomes.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education for its students and has some outstanding features. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. Academic standards are above average, with some very good results in

higher-level vocational courses. Students achieve well overall. They make outstanding progress in health and social care, sport and the performing arts. One-year vocational courses have broadened provision and students also achieve very well in these. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are often characterised by a sharp focus on the students' learning, students are clear about their targets and the vast majority know what is required to reach them. In such cases, students take clear responsibility for their progress and develop independence as learners. In some outstanding lessons during the inspection, students thrived and became completely engrossed. These features of exemplary practice are not shared widely enough across other departments to develop and enrich students' learning in other subjects and courses. The attention given to students' care, guidance and support is outstanding. This is reflected in the students' excellent attitudes, relationships and mature approach to sixth form life. Students feel respected by teachers and able to influence decisions which affect them. They rise exceptionally well to being given leadership opportunities and responsibilities and gain wide recognition and respect for their successes; the National Theatre Connections project and the recent 'Rock Challenge' are just two examples. Students enjoy an excellent range of additional activities, trips and residential visits, which include opportunities to visit other countries, learn about other cultures and take part in spiritual retreats. They appreciate the importance of keeping healthy and take part in a broad range of sport, dance and drama activities. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and provision is monitored closely. The leaders have taken action in response to the relatively weak results in a few subjects in 2008 and students' progress is improving. The development of an electronic database to record students' progress, with access for all staff, is a positive development. Since the last inspection a robust system of tracking and review has been implemented, but it is at an early stage and too early to judge its impact.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lessons in Years 7 to 11 are planned with a sharp focus on students' learning and provide more opportunities to develop their independence as learners.
- Ensure that identified priorities are explicit in the school development plan and use more precise criteria to measure progress and success.
- Broaden the range of methods to monitor teaching and learning and identify and disseminate the good practice found in many classrooms, including the school's specialisms.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter school with broadly average standards, although they vary from year to year and are sometimes slightly above average. Students achieve well. Standards are above average by Year 9 and show an improving trend in English, mathematics and science. Between Year 7 and Year 9, students' progress has been better in mathematics than English over recent years but the school has identified this and made some changes which are having a positive impact. Students' achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) is improving in Years 7 and 8, following an inspection visit last year that focused solely on ICT and identified students' progress in these two years as an area for development.

GCSE results are above average. As in Key Stage 3, standards have shown an improving trend since the last inspection and there was a marked rise in 2008. More students gained five good passes including English and mathematics than in the previous three years, and the percentage was well above the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' enthusiasm for school is reflected in their good attendance and wide participation in activities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is exceptional. Students feel very happy and secure, and develop very well socially and emotionally. They are respectful of one another, thoughtful, and demonstrate very mature attitudes. All these qualities shine through in many aspects of school life and help to create the school's special atmosphere. Students develop good workplace and life skills and take responsibility for organising significant aspects of school life, including major sporting and cultural events. Students appreciate the inclusive community ethos; 'it brings everyone together' and 'everything is community based' were typical of many students' responses when asked about their school. They say that bullying is rare and feel confident that it would be dealt with quickly and effectively. Students have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and many keep regularly active. Students' good academic standards and outstanding personal and social skills set them up well for their future lives, irrespective of the pathways they choose.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The vast majority of teachers are specialists in their subjects and many successfully create a learning environment where students are eager to learn. Excellent relationships exist between staff and students, and amongst the students themselves. In the very best lessons there is a good pace and the students are challenged effectively, often because teachers use a variety of learning strategies. These often promote independent learning and encourage students to consider and influence their own progress. Students are very clear which lessons they particularly enjoy and where they feel their learning is strongest. In many cases, this is linked to the lessons that involve and engage the pupils in interesting and imaginative ways. Some subject teachers, for example, frequently draw upon drama strategies and role play to enliven learning. In contrast, in some instances, time is not used productively and tasks are not planned with sufficient precision to indicate what students will learn. There are good examples of helpful marking within the school but teachers' feedback varies in the extent to which it gives helpful guidance to students on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of its students well and leads to good achievement. In recent years the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has been significantly modified to ensure that all students have access to courses that build on their strengths and equip them for the next stage in their education or path to employment. In particular there has been an expansion of vocational and applied courses, which are being increasingly taken up by students. The school is adapting the curriculum lower down the school to reflect the changes that are happening nationally and is monitoring the developments carefully to ensure that the changes work for all its students. At present the school is slightly under the target for two hours of physical education each week in Years 7 to 9 but is currently exploring ways of enabling this to happen. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support their learning in different subjects, although this is more strongly embedded in

some subjects than others. Through its specialist status, the school has developed very good links with primary schools and the wider community, and this has been a key factor in the school's promotion of community cohesion.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of the school's care, guidance and support is outstanding. The school shows a high degree of commitment to supporting pupils at all levels and it does this highly effectively and in many ways. Pastoral staff and those within the chaplaincy team, for example, are always there for students to support and guide them through any difficult times. The school also makes very good use of key practitioners and outside agencies to provide specific guidance and support. Arrangements for safeguarding and protecting students are rigorous. Setting up an inclusion room has enabled a range of interventions that have brought about a significant reduction in the use and length of fixed-term exclusions. The tracking systems are used well to support students' academic progress. Any underachievement is identified at an early stage and additional support is targeted well to improve progress. Students are clear about the levels at which they are working and value highly the termly academic counselling sessions. Students who come to school speaking little English are supported effectively, and there is good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good systems are in place to support students in transition to further education and the world of work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leadership team has been highly successful in creating a harmonious and cohesive community based upon their shared values. This underpins the excellent progress that students make in their personal development. The school's leaders have not until recently promoted academic progress as effectively. However, they have put in place changes that have made marked improvements and which are beginning to show through in terms of improved achievement. These demonstrate good capacity to raise performance further. The developments have included a new management structure that has encouraged collaboration and innovation. A good example of the strengthening of management at all levels is the new mathematics course in Year 10, which is already accelerating progress in this subject. Many parents added positive comments to the inspection questionnaires, praising the school's work and the wide-ranging benefits for students. The concerns expressed by a few parents in the questionnaires were not borne out by inspection evidence.

The school has been extremely adroit in managing a recent budget deficit caused by a fall in its expected income. The governors played an important role in this. More generally, the governing body challenges the school's leaders on important issues and has adopted a development programme to make sure it can continue to provide good support.

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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	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
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	2	2
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	1
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	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
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	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?	2	1
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?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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**

12 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Peter's Catholic Comprehensive School, Bournemouth BH6 4AH

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for giving us such a warm welcome. We were pleased to be able to meet representatives from all year groups and we enjoyed discussing the school with you and finding out your opinions. We also spoke to many of you, and staff, on a more informal basis and that was very valuable too. Thank you to everyone who helped us with our work in this way.

Your school is good and is improving. It also has some outstanding features. The way the school supports and guides you, and cares for you, is excellent. Your personal development is also outstanding. Your mature attitudes, strong relationships and commitment to the inclusive ethos in the school are tangible and help to make the school a special place in which to work and learn. That came through strongly from many people to whom we spoke, and all the inspectors commented upon it.

You achieve well and reach above average standards by Year 11. These are getting better year by year. Standards in the sixth form are also above average and students make good progress. Whether you leave at 16 or at the end of the sixth form the school is preparing you well for your future lives, not just academically but also socially and emotionally. I am sure you will do all you can to get the most out of your education.

Teaching at your school is good. We have asked the school to capitalise upon the best practice that exists and disseminate it more widely. Some of it lies within the specialist areas of performing arts and sports, but these are by no means the only areas where outstanding teaching is seen. We also found some teaching is less inspiring and interesting because it does not focus enough on what you will learn in lessons and opportunities are missed to develop your independence.

The leadership of the school is good. The senior leadership team and other staff who have leadership roles are helping to improve the school further. We have asked them to develop a wider range of methods for monitoring the quality of learning, particularly when visiting lessons. We have also asked the leadership team to be more precise when they draw up plans for the priority areas that need improving. This will help them know whether the actions they are taking are proving successful.

With best wishes

Margaret Dickinson Her Majesty's Inspector