

St Peter's RC High School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115729
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326528
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Christopher Russell HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1577
Sixth form	402
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Stenson
Headteacher	Mr L Montagu
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 March 2006
School address	Stroud Road Gloucester Gloucestershire
Telephone number	01452 520594
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out without notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited forty-nine lessons and held meetings with staff, governors and students. They observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including approximately 600 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- Whether lessons promote excellent learning and enable students to make outstanding progress; whether all groups (including all ethnic groups, students with English as an additional language and able, gifted and talented students) achieve well.
- Whether the curriculum for 14–19 year olds meets the needs of all groups in the school.
- The support that the school provides for students, particularly those from vulnerable groups.
- The systems and processes that support monitoring, planning and quality assurance across the school.

Information about the school

St Peter's is a large comprehensive school. It has specialist status for mathematics and computing, and is designated as a high performing specialist school. St Peter's is also a Training School and a lead member of the Gloucestershire Initial Teacher Education Partnership.

The attainment of students on entry to the school is close to the national average. The majority of students are White British, although the proportion from minority ethnic groups is increasing. The proportion of students with English as an additional language, although still below average, is rising rapidly. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly below the national average.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Peter's is a school with an excellent culture and ethos. Two of the most striking things about the school are students' exemplary behaviour in lessons and their excellent attitudes to learning. St Peter's students are mature, friendly and polite. They are very positive about their school and eager to take advantage of the many opportunities that it provides. Senior leaders see the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as their core purpose and this is a real strength of the school's work.

Leaders monitor all aspects of the school's work very closely, and track and analyse students' achievement carefully. They have a powerful commitment to equality and work hard to ensure that no group is 'left behind'. They look very closely to ensure that what the school does meets everyone's needs. As a result, students' outcomes – their achievement and the wider aspects of their personal development – are all at least good; most are outstanding.

The general quality of lessons is high and many lessons are excellent. Teachers' subject knowledge is well developed and extensive, and the teaching of key subject knowledge and understanding is rigorous. The quality of learning is, however, somewhat inconsistent. In particular, some lessons lack sufficient opportunities for students to participate actively in a range of activities. In these lessons, students spend a lot of time listening passively to the teacher. The curriculum meets students' needs. In particular, it provides strong support for the development of the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information communication technology (ICT). The range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is increasing, but remains rather limited.

This is a school with ambition and drive. Considerable progress has been made in dealing with the key issues raised at the last inspection: marking and assessment have improved appreciably and the sixth form has made significant strides forward. Leaders and staff across the school are not complacent: they are committed to the needs of the students and ambitious for further improvement. Rigorous systems and processes are in place to ensure that this improvement continues. Leaders analyse areas of strength and potential improvement meticulously to help plan for the future. Middle leaders, such as heads of department, are held highly accountable for the performance of their areas.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the overall quality of teaching and learning to outstanding by developing teachers' repertoire of professional skills and teaching strategies, so that lessons in all subjects include more frequent opportunities for students to participate actively in a range of lesson activities.
- Ensure that the 14–19 curriculum meets the needs of all students more closely by developing the range of available courses (including by exploiting partnership opportunities with other providers where appropriate).

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

- Students achieve well. They are highly motivated, enjoy learning and engage enthusiastically with a wide range of activities in lessons. Students' learning skills are well developed. They concentrate and listen well, focus diligently on their work, and are able to collaborate very effectively with each other in pairs and groups. Where teaching is less varied and active, students can be rather passive.
- GCSE examination results are consistently above average. The proportion of students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics – 65% in 2008 – is impressive. Students' overall GCSE point score, while better than the national average, is less strong. The school exceeds the vast majority of its specialist school examination targets.
- Students feel very safe in school. They say that bullying does occasionally occur, but also that the school deals with it well.
- Opportunities for students to contribute to the school and wider community are extensive and diverse. They include an impressive range of charity and fund-raising work.
- The consistency of outcomes for all groups is a key strength. Students from all groups, including able, gifted and talented students, those from different ethnic groups, and students with English as an additional language, all do well.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	2

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

- The large majority of lessons are at least good and many are excellent; no inadequate lessons were seen during the inspection. At its best, teaching is inspiring. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly, and their relationships with their classes are superb.
- There is, however, some variability in the quality of learning across the school and between subject areas. In particular, some lessons, while they enable students to learn securely, are rather over-controlled by the teacher and not very interesting. In these lessons, students spend too much time listening passively. Activities lack variety and interest for students; opportunities to work independently or in groups for more extended periods are limited.
- Marking and assessment have improved since the last inspection. While still a little variable in some areas, marking is now much more consistent across the school and provides more helpful guidance to students about how to improve their work. The school sets challenging targets for students and monitors progress against them rigorously.
- The way in which the school cares for and supports students is an important strength. Despite the school's size, everyone is known as an individual. The needs of vulnerable students are very well met.
- The school is endeavouring to widen the range of courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, but it is still rather narrow. Specialist status makes a strong contribution to the curriculum. For example, all students gain an ICT qualification by the end of Year 11.
- High quality provision in English and mathematics helps to ensure that a very high proportion of students gain five or more higher grade GCSE passes, including these subjects. The variability in the quality of learning across the school, along with the relatively narrow range of courses at Key Stage 4, means that students' overall GCSE score is not quite as high.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

- Leaders at all levels of the school strive for further improvement. Clear leadership from senior leaders, coupled with effective structures to ensure strong leadership and accountability across the school, have enabled the school to sustain its excellence and continue its development. Governors play a strong

role. They are knowledgeable about the school and they are able and willing to challenge leaders when they need to.

- Leaders have focused rigorously on safeguarding. Much has been done in recent years to refine and improve the school's systems in this area. A wide range of relevant training has been provided for staff.
- St Peter's does much to promote community cohesion. The school works very closely with many local schools and provides a number of them with a wide range of help and support. The school also provides a range of services and activities for the local community. A number of refugees and asylum seekers now attend St Peter's and an increasing proportion of students have English as an additional language. Leaders are highly committed to meeting the needs of these students. They receive high quality care and support, and they do very well at the school.
- Promoting equality and tackling discrimination are seen as important priorities and the school is highly effective in meeting its duties in this area. Monitoring and evaluation are very well developed and a specific committee of the governing body has recently been set up as a further check to the school's work in this area. Consequently, outcomes are consistently strong for all groups of students.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	1
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

- A number of aspects of the work of the sixth form were identified as key areas for improvement at the last inspection. Leadership and management in this area are excellent and significant improvements have been made over the last three years. Most notably, much useful work has been done to improve the quality of sixth form teaching.
- Students' learning and progress are good and improving. Advanced level results improved significantly in 2008 and the proportion of students attaining grades A and B increased by 9%. Given their starting points, these students achieved more than those who took examinations in 2007.
- The school has an inclusive approach to sixth form access and many students therefore enter the sixth form with below average GCSE grades. Over recent years, the attainment on entry to the sixth form has been declining. Leaders

recognise that this makes the development of a wider and more diverse range of sixth form courses an even more pressing priority for the school.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Of the parents who responded to the questionnaire, the overwhelming majority were very positive about the school. There were many positive comments about the extent to which staff put themselves out to help and support the children. In essence, the findings of inspectors reflected the views of parents. A small number of parents had minor concerns. Comments covered a range of areas, but there were not significant numbers of comments about any particular issue.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007–8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007–8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007–8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007–8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



27 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of St Peter's RC High School and Sixth Form Centre, Gloucester
GL4 0DE

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. We judged the school to be outstanding.

The school's ethos and atmosphere are excellent. We were particularly impressed by your behaviour and by your very positive attitudes to learning. You are very well cared for and relationships between staff and students are superb. The outcomes that the school helps you to gain are excellent overall. You achieve well and attain very good examination results.

The quality of lessons is high and we saw a number of outstanding lessons. We also saw that the overall quality of lessons is a little variable. In particular, some lessons involve a lot of listening passively to the teacher, with limited opportunities for you to work on your own or in groups on more interesting tasks. We have asked the school to ensure that lessons in all subjects are more varied and active. We also saw that the curriculum, while good, has limited opportunities for you to study vocational qualifications. We have asked the school to continue to develop the Key Stage 4 and sixth form curriculum to ensure that it matches your needs and interests as closely as possible.

Staff are committed to continuing the school's improvement. Although the school is already outstanding, they are all ambitious to make it even better in the future. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Yours sincerely

Chris Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector

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