

St Augustine's Catholic High School A Specialist Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116997
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326515
Inspection date	30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif 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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	857
Sixth form	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Dean
Headteacher	Yvonne Brennan
Date of previous school inspection	11 July 2006
School address	Stonepits Lane Hunt End Redditch B97 5LX
Telephone number	01527 550400
Fax number	01527 550230

Age group	13–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- achievement and standards
- the quality of teaching and learning
- curriculum and other activities
- the effectiveness of the sixth form
- the impact of specialist status
- the quality of leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, achievement and attainment information, observation of lessons, scrutiny of documentation provided by the school, observations of the school's work, discussions with senior and middle leaders, talking to the chair of governors and students and an analysis of parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the HMI 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

St Augustine's is a popular oversubscribed Catholic school which serves the communities of Redditch, Bromsgrove and surrounding areas. Just over half of the students are from Catholic backgrounds, although many have other faiths, including a growing number of students from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is growing but below the national average. Most students are from White British families with a few from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. About 60% stay on to the expanding sixth form. The school was designated a specialist science college in 2006. It has a Healthy Schools award and achieved its financial management standard for schools in 2007–08.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Augustine's is a vibrant and dynamic Catholic school that provides a good education for its pupils. It has not stood still since the last inspection. The school aim of being 'A Christ centred learning community committed to the development of the whole person' successfully permeates school life. The active involvement of the staff, governors and students in all aspects of the life and work of the school is impressive. Staff and students share a sense of purpose and are highly committed to the school's values and its continued improvement. Students' personal development is exceptionally strong, as is their care, guidance and support. Students display maturity and take responsibility for their exceptional behaviour in and around the school despite the building work for the new amphitheatre. They are always extremely polite and eager to help. They speak proudly of their school and how staff are always available to help them both personally and academically. Parents overwhelmingly support the school and its commitment to meeting the needs of individual students. As one parent commented, 'The school develops the whole person. The teachers are always trying to help the children fulfil their potential.' Another stated 'I feel the school provides an exceptional curriculum which is taught extremely well.'

Standards overall are above average, clearly indicating the good and sometimes outstanding progress students make during their time at the school. Students enter the school in Year 9 with standards that are in line with the national average. The proportion of students reaching the expected levels in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 is just above the national average. The good progress continues. Results in the GCSE examinations have improved steadily since the last inspection and are above average, although there was a slight decline in 2008. The school recognises that some of the girls and some of its growing number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds are not doing as well as they could and has set in place effective strategies to support them. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those that are vulnerable make very good progress because of the support and guidance they receive from the staff and the school's excellent relationships with outside agencies. After the last inspection, the school turned its attention to developing the curriculum. It has done this very well. The curriculum has been enhanced and personalised to meet the individual needs of its students. The broad range of activities, within and outside lessons, many reflecting the school's science specialism, contribute considerably to raising the overall achievement. The number of students opting for engineering, for example, is growing and many from other local schools are joining the course. Equally, the work of the growing music department is impressive with students performing both nationally and internationally. This adds considerably to their personal and social development, as well as raising their aspirations and improving overall achievement. Teaching is good with some excellent features. The work set for students is challenging and lessons are focused clearly on examination requirements. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively. In the best lessons, teachers encourage students to research and to develop their own opinions and to work independently. In many lessons, students are given opportunities for discussion through skilful questioning by teachers to which they respond with maturity. Relationships are excellent, with much use of praise and humour. Teachers challenge the students, and opportunities are given for them to discuss their work in ways that develop their thinking and debating skills. However, in a very small minority of lessons opportunities are missed for students to work independently and there is a tendency for teachers to dominate the lesson.

Much of the credit for students' good achievement is due to the strong leadership provided by the headteacher, which parents variously describe as 'inspirational', 'passionate' and 'incredibly hardworking'. She is ably supported by an effective leadership team and by the staff. Governors provide good support and challenge, and ensure that all statutory requirements are fully met. The school has gone from strength to strength since the last inspection. The headteacher's energy and vision drives school improvement. She takes every opportunity to ensure that the students in her school get the best there is to offer. The dedicated and skilled senior leadership team, along with the middle leaders, set clear direction for the school. The response from staff in turn is enthusiastic and they work effectively. Consequently, the school has exceptional capacity for continued improvement.

The school's monitoring and the evaluation of its work is rigorous, particularly its departmental reviews, which ensure that strengths are identified and any weaknesses addressed swiftly. The school development plan builds on what the school does well, but is also responsive to areas that could be even better; for example, the school is aware that the day-to-day marking does not consistently give feedback to students on how to improve their work and that students do not always have sufficient time to act upon the advice that is given to them. The school knows itself well. It continues to strive for excellence in all that it does. It recognised that the provision in the sixth form needed to be broadened in order to raise standards, which it has done successfully. The school uses the data available to analyse its performance and to pinpoint areas for improvements at all levels. Most of the middle leaders have been effective in enhancing their areas of responsibility and continue to strive to improve standards that are already above the national average. They are actively involved in developing the teaching in their subject and willingly share good practice wherever it exists. The school uses its staff and other resources, particularly through its specialist status, to enhance its work with its local partner schools. From the evidence provided by the school, this is justifiably regarded well by them because of its positive influence on younger pupils and their experiences. The school's contribution to community cohesion also supports students' personal development extremely well. Effective use of outside agencies, work with other schools and colleges through specialist status and sixth form collaboration, and work with the various minority ethnic communities add to the wide range of initiatives that integrate the school and local community. School's monitoring and evaluation of its work with the community shows that both the school and the wider community benefits from these effective links.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students enjoy sixth form life, feeling part of a community and valuing the freedom to organise their own studies. They particularly enjoy making a positive contribution to the life of the school through, for example, mentoring younger students. They say that they have enormous respect for their teachers who they believe go 'that extra mile' to help them. Students appreciate the extensive extra-curricular activities, including the successful sports teams and the variety of clubs, musical activities and trips abroad. Tracking of individual progress and assessment procedures are robust, enabling students to make good progress. In the past, students' achievement has been satisfactory. However, inspection evidence and current school data show that students are making good progress in most subjects, leading to above average standards. The curriculum offered is good. It has been developed since the last inspection and now offers a variety of pathways, including vocational courses at all levels, to best meet the needs of individual students.

Support and guidance for students are outstanding, with all students benefiting from rigorous and effective advice and guidance. The students commented highly on the support and guidance they receive from the school and the Connexions team on careers and higher education. The students are confident, articulate, sociable and have positive attitudes. They are excellent role models for the younger students and are developing as socially aware and responsible citizens. They show respect for each other and have developed a real sense of personal, social and moral awareness of their responsibilities in the school and the wider community. The good leadership and management and effective teaching contribute to a supportive and challenging ethos. The school is well aware that there are a small number of subjects that need to be brought to the same level as the very best.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by sharing the good practice that already exists.
- Ensure day-to-day marking consistently gives good feedback to students on how to improve their work and for students to have time to act upon that advice.
- Bring a small number of subjects up to the level of the very best.

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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	1	1

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	1	

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	1	
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?	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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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**

1 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Augustine's Catholic High School: A Specialist Science College, Redditch B97 5LX

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly when I visited your school. I very much appreciated the opportunity to speak with you and join in with some of your meetings, particularly the school council. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in evaluating the evidence provided by staff and confirming their view that St Augustine's is a good school with many outstanding features. Your parents value the strong leadership of the headteacher and the effective support of school staff, so they will be pleased to know that the school provides you with a good education overall. Some aspects are outstanding, for example the excellent care, guidance and support you receive and by your contribution to the school and wider community. The subject choices on offer continue to widen, and the work undertaken by both the school and you with local schools is very good. I was also impressed with the contribution you make to the life of the school as mentors and in sharing in the duties at break and lunchtime with your teachers. Having seen you perform, I can see why your performances in music, both nationally and internationally, are so well received.

The school provides a wonderful range of trips, activities and clubs for your interest and enjoyment. This is a very strong testament to the dedication and enthusiasm of staff, and their commitment to giving you a full all-round education. Your headteacher's passion and drive have helped the school to raise standards; she knows that challenging targets can be met. I agree with you and your school that the school is a safe place to be, and that you are getting every support that you need.

There are two main things I have noted that the school is already working on in order to improve further. First, to increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by sharing the good practice that already exists. Second, to make sure that the day-to-day marking consistently gives good feedback on how to improve your work and to give you time to act upon that advice.

You can help by attending every day and by thinking about what you are learning in lessons, and what you need to improve.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Rashida Sharif

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools