

# John F Kennedy Catholic School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117557
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326647
<b>Inspection date</b>	21 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mark Sims HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1139
Sixth form	231
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Margaret Steed
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Bernadette Jenkins
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	Hollybush Lane Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP1 2PH
<b>Telephone number</b>	01442 266150
<b>Fax number</b>	01442 250014

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## Introduction

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

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: how the school has successfully raised standards and achievement in English, how effectively teaching and learning is monitored and evaluated, how effectively higher attaining students are supported, the suitability of courses to match students' needs and how well marking, assessment and target setting are used to support students. Evidence was gathered from visits to classrooms, discussions with pupils, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority, scrutiny of students' work, analysis of parents' questionnaires and examination of school documentation, including assessment data and the school's self-evaluation.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

John F Kennedy school is a larger than average-sized school situated in the suburbs of Hemel Hempstead. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally, although the proportion with statements of special educational needs is low. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is about average. Very few are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The school has been a specialist technology college since 1998 and added a second specialism of languages in 2008. It was granted rural designation early in 2009 and holds the Sportsmark Award and Healthy Schools status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It has made significant improvements since the last inspection and is well placed to improve further. Students join the school working at levels of attainment already above the national average, but because of the outstanding progress they make, they go on to reach standards that are well above the national average by the time they reach the end of Year 11, which represents outstanding achievement. Over time, the school has raised the level of attainment at GCSE and increased the proportion of students going on to achieve the highest possible grades through consistently good teaching backed up by the very high quality of care, guidance and support offered to students and their own outstanding personal development. The proportion of students who achieve five good grades, including English and mathematics, is also very high and increasing. All groups of students do well and there are no significant differences between students of different backgrounds. The school is aware of the reasons for a dip in the performance of a few higher attaining students in English in the most recent examinations. It has taken measures to ensure they are well on track to secure further improvements this year.

Students have an exemplary attitude to their learning, even when occasionally the quality of teaching falls below the high standard set in most lessons. They are keen to do well and have very good relationships with each other and with their teachers. Students of different backgrounds mix well together and they are comfortable working in mixed gender groups, including in physical education lessons. The provision for the promotion of student's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong and the school makes great efforts to celebrate cultural diversity. The behaviour of students and attitudes to each other seen during lessons and around the school is excellent. Students who find learning difficult, as well as those with disabilities, benefit from the supportive environment created by teachers and students in lessons where no specialist support is available. The level of attendance, including that for older students, is very high. Students enjoy coming to school. There were no permanent exclusions last year and the rate of fixed-term exclusions is very low.

Students report that they feel listened to and involved in the life of the school. Through opportunities on the school council and attendance at governing body meetings, they have a chance to have their say in influencing decisions. One student reported, 'This is a very special school.' The awards the school has received for health and sport indicate that students know the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise. The students' high level of literacy and numeracy is preparing them well for the world of work.

Teaching is consistently at least good in most instances. Over time it has improved. Lessons are tightly organised and well structured to take account of learners' different needs. Work is marked frequently. Where lessons are outstanding, teachers are working more creatively and imaginatively to engage learners further in their learning, for example through partner talk and students assessing each other's work. At its very best written feedback gives students a clear indication of what steps they need to take to improve further, although there is some variation in the quality of the feedback across subjects. The school has worked hard to improve the small proportion of teaching that it recognises needs to improve, through modelling lessons and peer observations. A teaching and learning group has been recently established, aiming to convert more of the good teaching into outstanding.

The school provides outstanding leadership, inspired by the enthusiastic drive and vision of the headteacher and the senior leadership team. They know the strengths of the school very well and have accurately identified areas for further development. As a result, leadership and management of the school, overall, are excellent. Teaching and learning are monitored closely and senior leaders and department heads use monitoring and data analysis well to secure further improvements. The governing body makes an outstanding contribution to the life of the school. Governors are very well informed about all aspects of the school including trends in achievement. They have a close involvement in individual subjects through their link roles with departments and are involved in observing lessons and appointing staff. Their close involvement enables them to provide both support and challenge to the school. They ensure that the school gives very good value for money.

The recent additional specialism is contributing significantly to the school, through the promotion of languages, and to the community through outreach to primary schools and after school classes. The exemplary quality of teaching and assessment in the languages department is yet to be matched consistently in all subject departments. The school's main subject specialism has led to exceptionally high results at GCSE in design and technology, where most students in Year 11 were entered for the exam and a third achieved A\* or A grades.

The school makes strenuous efforts to establish good communications with students' families and in return receives considerable support from parents and the local community. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and where individual concerns have been raised, about bullying or teaching, the school has taken action to address them.

Students from minority ethnic groups report that they feel well integrated in the life of the school. The strong Catholic ethos, which permeates the life of the school, also contributes significantly to promoting outstanding community cohesion. The faiths of all students are recognised and a prayer room is set aside for students' use.

Students benefit from a good curriculum, which provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The new creative and media diploma is an exciting development, in which the school is taking a lead within the local authority. The school is continuing to seek to provide further vocational opportunities for students who would benefit from these.

The care, guidance and support students receive are outstanding overall. The students and their parents report that they feel safe and secure in school. Incidents of bullying or racism are very low and any incidents that do occur are dealt with swiftly. All necessary arrangements for safeguarding students and child protection measures are in place and are carried out rigorously. Students on the gifted and talented register receive a range of individual opportunities to support their learning but the school is aware, through its monitoring, of some variation in different groups represented on the register. Each student is given an individual interview about their career paths and learning mentors provide a key role in the support of students.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

Effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is average. They make good progress and go on to achieve results in their examinations that are above average. Students benefit from an outstanding curriculum, which provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities enhanced by the collaborative arrangements with other providers. Care, guidance and support are good. The school recognises that more learning mentors are needed in the sixth form and is planning to meet this need. This, coupled with new

study facilities, designated for sixth form use, is designed to further enhance student learning. Leadership and management in the sixth form are good.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of written feedback students receive so they know how they can improve further.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	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	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	1	
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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	1	
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**

22 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of John F Kennedy Roman Catholic School, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 2PH

You will know that we recently came for a day to inspect your school. Thank you to those of you who took the trouble to speak to us in lessons, meetings or around the school. I thought you would be interested in what we have said in our report.

You are fortunate to go to an outstanding school. Thanks to the inspired leadership of your headteacher and senior leaders, the very high quality care, support and guidance you receive and your own dedication to want to do the very best you can, you achieve very high standards in your examinations. In the great majority of lessons, the quality of teaching is at least good and, over time, improving.

You have said that you all get on very well together and feel safe and secure coming to school. The curriculum, particularly in the sixth form, offers you many opportunities, which you take up willingly.

We have suggested one thing that we think will help the school to go on and improve further. We saw very high quality marking in your books in some subjects, which let you know exactly what to do to reach the next level. We have asked the school to make sure that this quality of marking is matched in all your subjects.

You should feel rightly proud of your school and your contribution to its success. May I take this opportunity to wish you well in your exciting new building and for older students leaving this year in your future careers.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims

Her Majesty's Inspector