

# St Mary's Catholic College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119778
<b>Local Authority</b>	Blackpool
<b>Inspection number</b>	327128
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 October 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ruth James 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>	Secondary
<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)	1225
Sixth form	158
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Barry Leyland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Stephen Tierney
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 January 2006
<b>School address</b>	St Walburga's Road Blackpool Lancashire FY3 7EQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01253 396286
<b>Fax number</b>	01253 305475

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<b>Age group</b>	11–19
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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 Mary's Catholic College is situated in Blackpool in an area of above average deprivation. Most students are of White British origin. Slightly more receive free school meals than is the case nationally. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national figure, although there are fewer with a statement of special educational need. Since 2003, the school has held specialist status for mathematics and computing.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

St Mary's Catholic College is a good school, and some aspects of students' personal development and well being are outstanding. The Catholic ethos is strong and contributes well to the outstanding spiritual development of the students and the friendly, supportive and encouraging atmosphere that is found in the school community. Most parents agree and are supportive of the school. As one parent commented, 'We are grateful for the care our children receive at St Mary's. They are all thriving, they enjoy school, they take advantage of the extracurricular activities on offer, and they are encouraged to become caring, respectful members of society.'

Students make good progress as a result of the good teaching they receive and attain above average standards. The curriculum is good and encompasses personalised learning approaches through different and appropriate learning pathways for students from Year 7, with emphasis on improving students' learning and study skills. Key Stage 4 includes a variety of different pathways and options that meet a wide range of needs, including work related courses. Students participate enthusiastically in the full range of activities including 'Active Lunchtimes' and 'Wonderful Wednesdays'.

Students' personal development is good overall. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good, and rewards and sanctions are applied consistently. Awareness of healthy lifestyles and safe practices is good. Attendance has not yet reached national average despite some significant improvement in recent years as a result of the focused work of the school. Students' contributions to the school community through positions of responsibility and work in fundraising for charity are outstanding. The care that students receive is very good. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported very well through work within the school and links with parents and outside agencies. Academic guidance is good overall, although there remain some inconsistencies in aspects of marking, assessment and tracking in different departments.

Leadership and management at all levels are good. The dynamic leadership of the headteacher sets the tone and drives forward improvements. He is ably supported by a strong senior leadership team. Leadership development work helps to ensure that middle leaders are well trained and effective. The school's capacity to improve is good, as demonstrated by improvements since the last inspection. These include the improved attendance and developments in target setting and progress tracking, especially in the sixth form. Governors have good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and governance is good. Specialist status has been used well to develop the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning and this is having a positive impact on students' experience.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

Students make good progress overall, especially at GCE A level since many begin with modest levels of prior attainment which do not necessarily provide a solid basis for further study at this level. Students who sit GCE A level examinations reach above average standards and school data show that most subjects had 100% pass rates in 2008. GCE AS level results are more varied and school data show that a minority of subjects had below average pass rates in 2008. It is evident from the lessons seen in the sixth form during the inspection, from the school's own

observations and from students' very appreciative response that overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. Progress in lessons is generally good as a result of this. Where teaching is less effective and examination results weaker the school has plans in place to tackle this. There is a good range of courses offered and this has been expanded to include vocational courses which provide progression from vocational courses at Key Stage 4.

Students' personal development is good. The presence of international students helps broaden their outlook. Students thoroughly enjoy the opportunities they have to participate fully in the life of the school, for example many have become involved with younger pupils in 'active lunchtimes'.

Leadership and management of the sixth form have improved and are good. They focus on maximising students' attainment, underpinned by good quality support. Systems for setting individual targets and tracking progress are now more firmly embedded, though not yet fully effective across all areas. There is good one to one support for students after GCE AS level results. The Year 13 students comment on feeling well informed about their targets and the progress they are making towards them.

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

- Continue to implement and develop existing strategies to raise the attendance of the minority of students who do not attend regularly.
- Ensure greater consistency in the application of school policies relating to marking, assessment and progress tracking across the school.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Students arrive at the school with about average prior attainment, although there are fewer very able students.

At Key Stage 3 students make good progress in lessons. Unvalidated data for 2008 show the proportions of students achieving at least the expected Level 5 were above average for English, mathematics and science. English results were particularly good, with more students attaining higher levels.

Key Stage 4 results in 2008 also showed improvement. School data show the proportion of students achieving five or more grades A\* to C at GCSE increased significantly over the 2007 figure. The proportion of girls achieving five or more grades A\* to C at GCSE including English and mathematics, which was below average in 2007, also increased significantly. In 2008 students did particularly well in art, design technology, history, media, PE and science. Results for ICT courses were much better in 2008 than 2007, when they were below average. A high proportion of students attain at least five grades A\* to G at GCSE. Students taking vocational courses such as hair and construction do very well. Data for 2007 which take account of prior attainment and contextual factors show that students' progress between Years 7 and 11 was above average, and the improved results in 2008 are indicative of better progress. This is supported by inspection evidence showing that students consistently made good progress in the lessons observed. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress as a result of the support they receive.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good, and their spiritual development and contribution to the community are outstanding. The majority say they enjoy school very much. Relationships are very good: warmth and respect between students and teachers is very apparent. The school has made great strides to improve attendance rates which are now much closer to national norms. Students say they feel safe, that bullying is rare and any incidences are effectively managed. In lessons and around the school inspectors saw good behaviour, even in overcrowded areas. New students settle in quickly and feel secure. Students take part in regular physical exercise, eat healthily and talk positively about the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Involvement in charitable events and enterprise projects contributes significantly to students' cultural development and global awareness. Many aspects of school life enrich the moral and social development of students, and their spiritual development, seen in corporate worship, the work of the 'lay chaplains' and elsewhere, is outstanding. Students show understanding and respect for people from different backgrounds and make an excellent contribution to the community through, for example, extensive charitable fund-raising. They readily accept the many opportunities for taking responsibility which the school provides. A programme of work experience and enterprise activities enables students to prepare effectively for the world of work or the next stage of education.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. The majority of lessons observed were graded good or better, and a few lessons were outstanding. This shows the outcome of the high priority given to improving the quality of teaching and learning through the professional development programme. The good learning is underpinned by the quality of classroom relationships. Teachers provide interesting and challenging learning activities which are generally well matched to the students' capabilities and ensure that subject knowledge and skills are built systematically. They also make good use of their developing expertise in using ICT to support teaching and learning. Consequently, the students, who are already well-motivated to learn, are keen to involve themselves in the activities and generally sustain their interest well throughout the lesson. Learning objectives are routinely shared with students who then have the opportunity to evaluate how well they have achieved at the end of the lesson. Learning was observed to be particularly good when students were also able to assess their progress during the course of the lesson as well. Lessons were not as effective when teachers failed to challenge students quickly when they were inattentive so that the pace of learning slowed. Most marking is regular and supportive but there are still inconsistencies in the extent to which it clearly informs students how to improve their work. The use of assessment systems to aid improvement is not yet fully developed to ensure that students achieve their potential in all subjects.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school has continued to adapt the curriculum in all key stages to provide appropriate pathways which match students' requirements. In Years 10

and 11 the range of work related courses has broadened and the school has shown itself sensitive to the needs of particular groups and individuals by the adoption of a flexible approach to this provision. The move towards a more personalised learning approach has resulted in the creation of different and appropriate learning pathways for students from Year 7. The school has committed considerable time and energy to improving students' learning and study skills in Years 7 to 9. Teachers and students can already identify some positive impact on approaches to learning, although it has not yet been in place long enough to lead to increases in attainment at higher levels at Key Stage 3. Students' have positive views of the 'Wonderful Wednesday' initiative. This provides them with the opportunity to spend longer and more focussed time on aspects of their academic courses, as well as to take part in activities which enrich their school experience. Good extra curricular provision is enhanced by the recently introduced 'Active Lunchtime' programme which, in addition to enabling students to take part in a well organised programme of physical activities, also provides good opportunities for students to take on responsibility as trained leaders.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. A major strength of the school, deriving from its strong Catholic ethos, is its success in ensuring that all students, irrespective of their background or ability, feel valued and well supported. Students praise the school highly and show high levels of maturity and self-esteem. Rewards and sanctions are well understood and consistently applied. Statutory arrangements for child protection and the safeguarding of students are in place and regularly reviewed. Health and safety is carefully managed. The school has robust procedures for identifying vulnerable students and gives them high levels of support. It works very well with parents and other agencies to ensure that no student slips through the net. Particularly effective induction procedures and links with primary schools enable students, including those in difficult circumstances, to settle in happily. Students have regular opportunities to reflect on their progress and set targets for improvement, although the extent to which this effectively helps them to improve varies between different subjects and different teachers. Students receive appropriate information about future options and career pathways as they move up the school.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

School leaders and staff have been effective in creating an inclusive and cohesive Catholic ethos with a strong focus on students' achievements and well-being. Morale is high and staff work effectively as a team. Finances and school administration are well managed. The school provides good value for money. The headteacher's vision and drive for improvement have been successful in developing a culture of high expectations. He is supported very well by the understanding and guidance provided by the governing body. The senior leadership team have a blend of complementary skills which together ensure St Mary's provides a secure and thriving learning environment which students' value.

The school specialist mathematics and computing status has been influential in improvements across the school. Opportunities for using ICT for teaching and learning are developing well. Students are very positive about the ICT courses which engage their interest and contribute to their future economic well-being.

The school's contribution to community cohesion, particularly through sport, is very good. The school has developed good local, national and international links. It has effective partnerships with others, especially the other local Catholic schools. This has a direct and beneficial impact on staff and students. Good systems are in place for senior and middle managers to check the quality of work through lesson observation, work scrutiny and progress checks. Consequently, the school knows itself well and is able to identify priorities for improvement and plan well for the future.



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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>	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	

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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>	2	2
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	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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

<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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2	
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**

Dear Students

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic College, Blackpool, FY3 7EQ

Thank you very much for making us welcome when we inspected your school. We visited lessons and talked to staff and students. You told us that you think yours is a good school and we agree. We looked at the results of questionnaires sent in by your parents. Most of them are very pleased with the school.

Your behaviour in lessons and around school is good and you have good attitudes to learning. Your spiritual development, the contributions you make to the school community through positions of responsibility and your work in fundraising for charity are outstanding. You make good use of the range of opportunities the school provides including 'Active Lunchtimes' and 'Wonderful Wednesdays'. The school looks after you very well. Your headteacher and other senior staff lead the school well and are constantly looking at ways of improving it. Teaching is good and your teachers work hard to encourage you, to make lessons enjoyable and interesting and to explain things clearly. The school offers you a good choice of courses. As a result of all these things, students at your school make good progress. The sixth form is also good and the presence of international students brings benefits to the school.

Although yours is a good school we found that some things could be even better. Marking and assessment are good in some subjects but not all, so we have asked your headteacher and staff to improve this to make sure you achieve your full potential. Some students have too many absences and we have asked the school to work with them to improve attendance so that valuable learning time is not missed.

We are sure that you will keep up your good work and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector