

# St Joseph's College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131301
<b>Local Authority</b>	Stoke-On-Trent
<b>Inspection number</b>	328580
<b>Inspection date</b>	10 December 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Davinder Dosanjh 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>	Grammar (selective)
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	942
Sixth form	322
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Michael Phelan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Roisin Maguire
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 December 2005
<b>School address</b>	London Road Trent Vale Stoke-on-Trent ST4 5NT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 848008
<b>Fax number</b>	01782 745487

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## Introduction

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

- achievement and standards
- the quality of teaching and learning
- 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, observation of the school at work, discussions with senior managers, talking to governors and pupils, and an analysis of parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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 Joseph's College is a selective Catholic school in Stoke-on-Trent. There is an entrance examination in order to gain admission. About three quarters of the students are practising Catholics, the rest are practising members of other Christian denominations or another faith. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is very low at 2%. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also very low. Approximately 90% of students are White British with 10% of students from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. About 30% of students join the sixth form from other schools in the area. The school is designated a specialist science college with a subsidiary specialism in mathematics.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Joseph's College is an outstanding school which is heavily oversubscribed. It deservedly has an excellent reputation in the local community. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and comment on the dedicated staff, and excellent care and support for all students. Many say they could not wish for a better school. Staff give high importance to the welfare of their students and safeguarding procedures are robust. The Catholic ethos underpins the work of the school and the school successfully develops the whole person and strives for academic excellence. It embraces and celebrates diversity and thus the school is a well-ordered and very happy community and all beliefs and values are respected. Relationships between staff and students and amongst students are superb. Students' personal development and well-being are exceptional. Behaviour and attendance are first-rate: students really enjoy school and all that it offers. Despite the poor sport facilities, the development of healthy lifestyles is excellent. The school has very commendable sporting achievements, both locally and nationally. The range of opportunities to contribute to the school, local community and beyond continues to grow. Teachers take many opportunities to extend the cultural development of students with many international links and visits. Students develop a range of leadership, social and group-working skills by running companies during enterprise week, acting as prefects and preparing and delivering assemblies. Preparation for life beyond the school is excellent. Over 90% of students stay on into the sixth form.

Achievement is outstanding. Students enter the school with standards which are well above national averages because the intake is based on selective academic ability. The progress students make from joining the school to the end of Year 11 is outstanding overall. The school continues to maintain and improve on the outstanding standards reached by students at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. The school has increased the proportion of students who achieve the highest levels in national tests at the end of Year 9 and A\* or A grades at GCSE. Students do particularly well in single sciences, additional science, English, modern foreign languages, religious studies and mathematics. The school is aware that a small number of subjects do not perform as well as they should at GCSE, A and AS level. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve very well because of the excellent support they receive, as do the small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The combination of individual support, detailed monitoring of students' progress and outstanding teaching has been successful in ensuring the academic success of students.

Science and mathematics specialist status is a key strength of the school and performance in both science and mathematics has improved considerably since the last inspection. The majority of specialist targets have successfully been met. An increasingly number of students take sciences at A and AS level. Both of these subjects have taken a lead in developing the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve teaching and learning. The curriculum is excellent because it is very broad and balanced, meets the needs of individual students particularly well and is regularly reviewed. The specialism has enhanced the courses on offer which include both vocational science and further mathematics at A level. As a result of the specialism, a wide range of outreach activities take place with local primary schools and high schools ranging from science days to booster sessions for able and talented students. Extra-curricular opportunities are extensive and music and sport feature heavily. In keeping with the Catholic ethos, the students are encouraged to help and work with communities locally and across the world. Sixth form students work on La Sallian projects in Africa and India as well

as Joshua Foundation projects in Australia. Extended school status since June 2007 has enabled many out-of-hours' opportunities to take place with students and the local community. The school has developed an excellent engagement with parents by running a well-attended parent and governor learning week each year and having a parent council.

Staff have excellent subject knowledge and many are passionate about their subjects. Teaching is outstanding as a result of the stimulating and productive learning environment created by teachers. Lessons are delivered briskly and enthusiastically, have clear learning outcomes and use a variety of styles and activities which motivate students. Students clearly enjoy their lessons and told the inspectors this. Teachers provide opportunities for students to investigate, think creatively, solve problems and learn independently. All subjects use ICT effectively to support students' learning. Work is marked well and students are given expert guidance on what they need to do to improve. Students respond well to the challenging targets set by the school and fully appreciate the help they receive from teachers to achieve them. They have a positive attitude to their studies and work cooperatively and productively by themselves or with their peers. The monitoring of lessons through the internal and external reviews is highly effective in identifying key strengths, areas for development and where opportunities exist for the sharing of good practice.

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding and the school goes from strength to strength. The headteacher provides dynamic leadership and is well supported by a very skilled and strong leadership team. The senior leadership team sets a clear direction for the school and the school works extremely well on a day-to-day basis. This is not a complacent school and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of its work, particularly the departmental reviews, ensure that strengths are identified and weaknesses addressed. The school improvement plan is well focused and builds on what the school does well, but is also responsive to areas which could be even better. The school knows itself very well and continues to strive for excellence in all that it does. A range of internal and external data is used thoroughly to analyse performance and pinpoint areas for improvement. Staff are very active in the development of the school by sharing good practice and subject leaders have been very effective in continuing to enhance their areas of responsibility and maintaining high standards. Governors are very committed to the school, play a key role in discussing strategic issues and provide strong support and challenge. They are well informed about the performance of the school. The promotion of community cohesion is excellent and is reflected in the school's values and ethos and the many curriculum opportunities to develop understanding of a range of different communities, alongside an involvement by many students in a variety of community projects.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

The sixth form provides an outstanding quality of education. Standards are well above average and achievement in the sixth form is outstanding. Pass rates, including high grades, have continued to improve to well above the national average. As in the main school, students make outstanding progress in their studies as a result of the expert teaching they receive. Retention rate on courses is exceptionally high at 97%, as is attendance. Although the sixth form curriculum is predominantly academic, where the majority of students follow A-level courses, there are some vocational elements, for example in the provision of applied A levels and the recently introduced Certificate of Personal Effectiveness. The curriculum offers a broad education and a wide range of choices. Students appreciate the extensive extra-curricular activities, including

the highly successful school sports teams and the variety of clubs, musical activities and trips abroad.

Support and guidance for students in the sixth form are outstanding, with all students benefiting from rigorous and effective advice and guidance on their studies, their careers and higher education choices. The school made an impressive start to the year by completing the new sixth form building in an incredibly short period of time. Students now work in a more appropriate learning and social environment, in which they can thrive. Sixth form students are articulate, sociable and have a positive attitude to their studies. They are excellent role models for the younger members of the school 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. This has been evidenced by their innovative leadership of the 'Encounter' programme, their assistance with the Sierra Leone project and the support many provide for students in the lower school. The highly effective leadership and management of the sixth form have ensured that the qualities identified at the last inspection that make the sixth form so effective have been maintained and built upon. Where there are areas for development, for example in bringing some subject areas up to the level of the very best, these have been clearly identified.

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

- 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	<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	1
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**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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>	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
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	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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**

11 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of St Joseph's College, Trent Vale, ST4 5NT

My colleague and I really enjoyed our visit to your school and came away thinking what a super school you go to. You are right to be proud of your school, it is outstanding. We enjoyed talking to some of you, watching the well-prepared assembly and seeing some of the medals you won at the local sports partnership competition. This letter is to tell you our main findings.

- The standards you achieve in examinations are exceptionally high throughout the school and you are making excellent progress.
- The Catholic ethos underpins the work of the school and hence the school succeeds in developing the whole person.
- You are also making excellent progress in your personal development, displaying mutual respect for all at the school.
- Your contribution to the school community, local community and projects abroad is very commendable.
- Your behaviour and attendance are impressive.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding and has ensured your academic success.
- The school provides a varied and broad curriculum, which is appropriate to your needs, and the range of extra-curricular activities is extensive.
- Staff provide excellent care, support and guidance, allowing you to fulfil your potential.
- The science and mathematics specialism of the school has brought you many benefits and opportunities.
- The sixth form continues to provide an outstanding quality of education.
- The dynamic leadership of the headteacher and very skilled leadership team have ensured the school goes from strength to strength.
- The school's leaders, governors, dedicated and committed staff have been very successful in providing you with a high quality of education, and they show a relentless drive to carry on with this.

We have asked the headteacher and senior managers to work on bringing the small number of weaker subjects up to the level of the very best.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh Her Majesty's Inspector