

St James' Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101364
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	335704
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Sanderson 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1146
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr C Wicks
Headteacher	Mrs A O'Shea
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 part lessons, observing 32 teachers and spending just over four tenths of the school days observing learning. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, policy documents, students' books, 358 parental questionnaires, and staff and student questionnaires.

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

- whether teaching is consistently good across the school enabling students to make good progress in all subjects, particularly in mathematics
- how well teachers are making effective use of strategies to actively engage students in learning
- whether good systems are in place to track the progress of students towards challenging targets and whether those who are identified as underachieving are provided with effective support
- how well leaders and managers at all levels in the school are taking consistent action to raise standards.

Information about the school

St James' Catholic High School is a larger-than-average secondary school. Students are drawn from a wide area and from a range of primary schools. Nearly two thirds of the students are from minority ethnic groups and a much higher percentage than average speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is similar to that seen in most schools. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also similar to the national average. The most commonly identified of these needs relates to emotional and behavioural difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties. The school became a specialist science and sports college in September 2004

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St James' Catholic High School is a satisfactory school with a good sixth form. It is a school in which students learn harmoniously alongside others from different backgrounds and abilities. The care, guidance and support of students is outstanding and an extremely strong, thoughtful, caring ethos permeates the school. The spiritual dimension underpins the whole school and is integral to this. Students' social and moral development is excellent, relationships between staff and students are strong and the behaviour of students in lessons and around the school is good. Students really enjoy school and the opportunities it offers, and as a result their attendance is well above the national average. The school is at the heart of a close-knit community and consequently knows its families exceptionally well. Its engagement with parents and carers is excellent.

Despite these strengths, the overall effectiveness of the school is judged satisfactory because standards at the end of Year 11 are broadly average and students make satisfactory progress in their learning. There is also variation in the progress made by students in different subjects. For example, progress in English is good while in mathematics it is satisfactory. There is both good and outstanding teaching in the school but too much is satisfactory, particularly in mathematics, to ensure that students make good progress. There is also inconsistency in the quality of marking and feedback given to students about what they need to do to improve.

Many dimensions of cultural development are outstanding; for example, drama performance is of high quality in the school, and multicultural understanding is strong through the curriculum and links with other schools. Many students, including those in the sixth form, willingly take on the responsibilities offered to them and make excellent contributions to the school and to the wider community. All students adopt safe practices and feel extremely safe in school; the school's arrangements and procedures for safeguarding students are exemplary.

The headteacher provides the school with clear and effective leadership and she is well supported by the senior leadership team. The positive impact of leadership and management is evident in students' good behaviour and high attendance. Effective action has also been taken since the last inspection to improve the quality of the curriculum, which now meets students' needs and interests well. However, actions taken to improve teaching and so raise standards have been less effective. Some subject leaders have had a good impact in tackling weaknesses and raising standards. However, not all are equally effective and some have been hampered by changes in staffing. This has resulted in inconsistencies in students' progress between subjects. The leadership team has a sound understanding of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the school,

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but has been overgenerous in their evaluation of teaching and students' achievement. The school has a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that all staff plan lessons that are well matched to the ability of students in their class
 - ensuring that students are full participants in lessons and learn actively
 - ensuring teachers' questioning not only checks students' knowledge but also explores and develops their understanding
 - ensuring all teachers mark students' work regularly and give clear and helpful written advice about how to improve
 - continuing to develop effective strategies to share the good and outstanding teaching practice in the school.
- Reduce the variation in students' achievement between subjects by ensuring that all subject leaders rigorously monitor the quality of provision and outcomes for students in their subject area, and take effective action to tackle underperformance.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The standards attained by students at the end of Year 11 have remained at a similar level to those seen at the time of the last inspection, while national standards have risen during this period. The result is that standards relative to the national average have fallen and are now broadly average. Students made good or even better progress in a number of lessons observed during this inspection; however, this was not consistently the case, as in a number of lessons progress was satisfactory. This was particularly the case in mathematics, where students made satisfactory progress in a high percentage of the lessons observed. There have been some considerable staffing changes in mathematics since the last inspection and this has affected students' achievement in this subject. However, effective action taken by the school's leadership is beginning to result in improved teaching and student progress. Students made good or better progress in a high percentage of English lessons, where students' achievement is good. The school attained its specialist school targets in science and physical education in 2009. Detailed tracking of students' progress enables the school to ensure that all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language, make similar progress to their peers.

The school environment is one conducive to learning, with many attractive displays lining the corridors. Students care for the school environment well and show a good appreciation of the need to care for the wider environment through their participation in recycling and energy conservation projects. Students have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and the physical education department

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is successful in encouraging a very large percentage of students to take regular exercise through involvement in extra-curricular sporting activities. The school council is very active and their views and opinions are sought and acted upon by senior staff. The physical education programme also makes a strong contribution to developing the leadership qualities of students through its sports leadership programme. An excellent personal, social, and health education programme very effectively supports and develops students' knowledge and understanding of ethical and moral issues. Students are well prepared for the world of work or the next stage in their education. Their team-working and personal skills are particularly well developed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and all lessons are characterised by good relationships between staff and students. In the best lessons, teachers are enthusiastic and skilful in encouraging learning. These lessons have a clear purpose and an effective sequence of activities that develop knowledge, skills and understanding. They contain engaging work, pitched at the appropriate level for

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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the ability of students in the class and proceed at a good pace. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, however, because too many lessons are satisfactory rather than good or better. In these lessons, some teachers do not make effective use of the assessment information available to them to pitch activities at the different ability levels of students in their class. At times teachers talk for too long and provide students with insufficient opportunities to be actively involved in learning. Too often their questioning only checks students' knowledge and does not delve deeper in order to check and develop students' understanding.

There is good and effective marking in the school that gives students clear feedback about what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. However, this good practice is not consistently in place. As a result, although students know their targets and how well they are doing, they are less clear about what they have to do to improve their work.

The curriculum is regularly reviewed and has been developed well since the previous inspection. A broad range of both academic and vocational courses are offered to students in Years 10 and 11 that meet their needs and aspirations well. The range of vocational courses is extended through collaboration with a local college, although the leadership team is looking to further increase this vocational offer. The impact of the school's specialist status is evident in the wide range of science courses that are offered in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum is enriched by a variety of well-attended extra-curricular activities and opportunities which contribute positively to students' personal development.

The welfare of students, realised through comprehensive systems for their care, guidance and support, lies at the heart of the work of the school. The staff who have oversight of this provision are passionate about the well-being of the students. This commitment is embraced by all staff. The students know this, realise that they are exceptionally well cared for, and unanimously expressed their appreciation. Staff work very effectively with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that vulnerable students are extremely well cared for and supported. Students feel, and inspectors agree, that the level of guidance they get in various aspects of their life in and out of school is first rate. Year 7 students comment very favourably on the warm welcoming procedures, with older students as their mentors, as 'beyond our expectations'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The headteacher and her senior leadership team have been very successful in creating a caring ethos in the school in which all students are valued and respected.

The progress of students is tracked very well and action is taken should there be any sign of individuals or groups progressing more slowly than others. Leaders and managers at all levels strive to improve students' life chances and to ensure equality of opportunity for all students. However, some middle leaders have been more successful in tackling weaknesses in teaching and raising standards than others. Since the last inspection the school has experienced difficulty in the recruitment and retention of staff in some subject areas and the leadership team has made strenuous efforts to minimise the impact of these difficulties on students' learning. However, staffing issues have affected students' progress in some subjects, particularly in mathematics.

Governors are very supportive of the school and have ensured that all statutory requirements are in met. They provide a satisfactory and developing level of challenge to the school leaders. Planned training on the use and analysis of achievement data is an appropriate strategy in this regard.

The school's approach to safeguarding is exemplary. Staff entrusted with this responsibility show a high level of determination to cover all aspects based on the most recent guidance and technology. All potential areas of risk are assessed and action taken to eliminate dangers as far as possible. The school works closely with a number of agencies to ensure it is a welcoming yet safe haven for students. Its record keeping is exemplary.

The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. It embraces the diverse nature of the local community through its work with local Jewish and Muslim faith schools. This gives its students the opportunity to gain a good understanding of different faiths and cultures. Strong links with a school in Rwanda also extend students' understanding of their own and other cultures extremely well.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Sixth form students are very good ambassadors for their school. They speak very positively about the sixth form and the level of support and guidance they receive. With good teaching they make good progress in their learning. Standards at the end of Year 13 rose in 2009 and are now above average. However, there is some variation in the progress made by students in different subjects and the progress made by those students following vocational courses is not as strong as that of those studying academic AS- and A-level subjects.

The curriculum is well structured to meet the needs of the broad range of ability of students who join the sixth form. There is a wide choice of traditional A and AS courses and an increasing number of vocational courses such as travel and tourism.

Opportunities for students to study GCSE-equivalent courses are being expanded to increase student choice. Opportunities for leadership and community involvement are extensive, for example through peer mentoring, the leadership programme and numerous fund-raising activities. All sixth form students are members of the sixth form council and value the opportunity to influence sixth form life.

Sixth form leaders have a clear vision for developing the sixth form. There is a strong focus on improving outcomes with regular evaluation and curriculum review. Students' progress is monitored well through regular reviews and effective support is provided to those who are making less than expected progress.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A large percentage of parents and carers returned questionnaires to the inspection team. The overwhelming majority of parents were happy with their children's experience of school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St James' Catholic High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 358 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1146 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	128	36	220	61	10	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	138	39	212	59	7	8	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	120	34	207	58	22	6	6	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	110	31	228	64	15	4	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	112	31	227	63	13	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	101	28	226	63	23	6	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	97	27	233	65	22	6	3	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	92	26	233	65	14	4	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	97	27	237	66	15	4	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	128	36	211	59	15	4	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	84	23	229	64	23	6	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	137	38	213	59	4	1	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	148	41	202	56	6	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St James' Catholic High School, London NW9 5PE

On behalf of your inspection team, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you extended to us during the recent inspection of your school. We very much enjoyed our discussions with you.

The school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education, and the sixth form is good. The following points are the key strengths of the school.

- The school has a welcoming, friendly ethos. You all get on extremely well with each other and your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good.
- Staff know you very well and provide you with an outstanding level of care, guidance and support.
- You told us that you feel extremely safe in school and that you are confident staff will deal quickly and effectively with any concerns you raise with them.
- You enjoy school and your attendance is well above average.
- Many of you willingly take on the responsibilities the school offers you, such as peer mentoring, sport leadership opportunities and the school council.
- You have a very good understanding of how to live healthy lives and a large number of you participate in extra-curricular sporting activities.
- A wide range of academic and vocational courses are available for you to choose from, both in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
- Involvement in local community events, links with other schools and lesson activities are helping you develop an excellent understanding of the range of cultures and faiths found in this country and around the world.

To make your school even better we have asked the leadership team to make a couple of important improvements. In a number of lessons you are taught well and make good or even better progress; we have asked them to ensure that more of your lessons are like this. You also make better progress in some subjects than you do in others, and we have asked them to ensure that the progress you make in all your subjects is as good as that in the best. You can help by continuing to work hard in lessons and getting fully involved in the learning activities that are organised for you.

I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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