

St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124460
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	340577
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Cook HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	1012
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bill Robinson
Headteacher	Mr Chris Smith
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Little Chell Lane Tunstall Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6LZ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 43 lessons, 16 as joint observations where an inspector and senior leader of the school observed teaching and learning together. Inspectors also held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and parents. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of school documentation including assessment records and documents related to the provision for vulnerable students. Inspectors also analysed the response to 331 parental, 152 student and 43 staff questionnaires.

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

- the impact of the Year 7 curriculum on students' attainment and the quality of teaching
- provision on outcomes for some of the most vulnerable students
- whether students demonstrate good independent learning skills
- whether student outcomes in the sixth form are improving.

Information about the school

The number of students attending this school has grown since the previous inspection confirming that it is a popular school. Approximately 10% of students are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is slightly below the national average.

The school has been awarded Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark, Healthy Schools Award and Eco Status.

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

2

Main findings

This is a school where exceptional care, guidance and support contribute to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For the most vulnerable students care, guidance and support is also outstanding and, as a result, they grow in confidence and are well prepared for the future. Students' attainment has risen since the previous inspection but is not yet high enough to show that all students make good progress. Senior leaders have demonstrated that their initiatives to improve the school have raised student attainment and the quality of teaching. Along with improvements to the curriculum and a growing and increasingly successful sixth form, there is strong evidence that the school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

Students' enjoy learning as a result of improvements made to the curriculum, the quality of care, guidance and support and teaching. Although teaching is satisfactory overall, some good and outstanding teaching was observed. Students, for example, made good progress in Year 7 creative curriculum lessons because good and sometimes outstanding teaching focused on developing students' independent learning and thinking skills. For Year 11 students, the introduction of 'Assertive Mentoring' has accelerated the progress they make, as evidenced by inspectors during visits to lessons. All Year 11 students have a staff mentor who both challenges and supports students to do their best. Year 11 students explained to inspectors how the 'Assertive Mentoring' support they receive helps them to know exactly what they have to do to get better grades in their GCSE exams. What holds this school back from being good or better is too much satisfactory teaching which results in students overall satisfactory progress. Teaching is improving but senior leaders know that more could be done. Joint lesson observations confirmed school leaders' views that greater emphasis is needed on providing challenge for the more able students in all year groups so that by the time they take their GCSEs more students achieve A* and A grades. Pitching the right level of expectation and challenge has not yet become the norm but there is evidence that this is work in progress.

Governors of the school acknowledge the good work of staff to improve the school and are determined that the momentum of change continues. The school's own self-evaluation recognises that governors could be more rigorously holding the leadership to account. In many ways governors do check on the progress of the school but not yet in enough detail. Sensible action has been taken to increase the number of governors on the governing body to increase capacity.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of teaching so that teaching is good overall and all

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students make good progress by:

- ensuring that learning activities match high expectations for students of different abilities through appropriate lesson planning
- ensuring that throughout lessons teaching enables student progress to be at least good
- using assessment data to develop more targeted support for students.
- Improve the capacity of governors by:
 - more playing a greater role in evaluating school performance
 - acting on evaluations to influence the strategic direction of the school
 - focusing attention on challenging and supporting the school's work to improve the quality of teaching.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is clearly observed in the way that students respect and value each other. In lessons students were seen thinking deeply about ethical issues. Inspectors also noted on numerous occasions the mature way in which students were able to listen to each other, discuss and share views and reach consensus in groups. Students' good behaviour and very positive attitudes were seen to be a crucial factor in how well they did in lessons.

The assessment data that shows how much progress students make from Year 7 to 11 indicates that in the past students have made satisfactory progress. During the inspection, inspectors spent a significant amount of time in lessons observing how well students were making progress and found that students' progress remains satisfactory. This is the case for all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Impressive examples of students showing how they could be learners was seen in Year 7 creative lessons where they used personal, learning and thinking skills known as the PLTs. Students were seen to make good progress in the Year 7 creative lessons and in Year 11 lessons where they knew exactly what they had to do to achieve a challenging target grade.

The percentage of students gaining five A* to C GCSE passes rose sharply in 2007 and rose again in 2008 to significantly above the national average. The provisional GCSE results for 2009 dipped a little but were still higher than results at the time of the last inspection. The students that took GCSEs in 2009 had lower starting points in Year 7 than the previous two years so the progress they made was still satisfactory. The same pattern of rising test results and a dip in 2009 can be seen in the percentage of students gaining five A* to C GCSE passes including English and mathematics. Good examination results and personal development is successfully preparing students for further education or the work. Evidence to illustrate this can be seen in the rising numbers of

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students going on to university. Every student who left the school last year went onto further education, training or employment.

The students let inspectors know, through discussions and questionnaires, that they feel safe and cared for in school. They are acutely aware that staff 'go the extra mile' to ensure that any concerns they have are dealt with. The take-up of school meals is good and students understand the value of a healthy diet as well as the need for exercise. More students are cycling to school as indicated by the well used, recently erected cycle racks. This highlights one example of how students are keeping fit.

There are good opportunities for students to perform music, dance and drama both in school and in the local community. Opportunities taken to represent their peers on year group and school councils also demonstrate students making good use of their skills and talents for others. The students' outstanding spiritual and social development can also be seen in their desire to champion and support a number of charities.

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	2
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Whilst there is good teaching taking place, there is not enough to ensure that students

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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make consistently good progress. Senior leaders provided inspectors with convincing evidence that the quality of teaching is improving. Most striking is the impact on the quality of teaching of the Year 7 curriculum and the assertive mentoring programme in Year 11. Both of these initiatives are encouraging teachers to provide activities that really engage students in challenging and interesting activities. These initiatives have also made teachers explicitly spell out how they want students to learn and what they want them to learn. One student, for example, in a Year 11 science lesson, was able to explain to the inspector exactly what detail she needed in her answers to questions if she was going to achieve her GCSE target of A*.

Teaching did not sufficiently challenge all students in about half of the lessons observed. Teachers' plans often recorded what they expected students of different ability to learn but then the work students did was often the same and so, as a result, were the outcomes. Consequently, missed opportunities to explain to students how well they were expected to complete tasks, or provide different work to match different student ability, made teaching satisfactory rather than good. The most common feature of teaching that was observed and judged satisfactory was a lack of noticeable expectation and challenge for the most able students. Senior leaders made the same observations alongside inspectors when visiting lessons.

There are a number of innovative features to the curriculum, in addition to the creative curriculum, which are enhancing learning in Year 7. One Year 8 student, for example, described the benefits of developing learning and thinking skills as laying the bottom layer of a pyramid upon which more learning could be built. Another very positive feature of the curriculum is what is described as the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) curriculum which focuses on the student outcomes that this inspection has evaluated. Inspectors observed some of the ECM lessons and were impressed with how well students were learning because they found the lessons interesting. The focus of one of the ECM lessons was all around the local Fire Services' concerns about hoax calls which effectively provoked and encouraged students to take this matter seriously. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has increasingly benefited from the collaboration between other similar schools and a local college. A good range of arts and sporting clubs further enrich the curriculum and enhance enjoyment. Still missing from the curriculum, and what would help it to be outstanding, is a more tailored approach to students' different abilities.

The ethos of the school is built on outstanding care, guidance and support. This was confirmed when inspectors found out how well some of the most vulnerable students are cared for and supported in their personal development and learning. Every effort is made to help students feel settled and confident when joining the school in Year 7. Students experiencing difficulties that affect their attitudes and behaviour in lessons benefit from time spent in the Learning Access Zone where they receive extra support and guidance which helps them get back on track.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	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?

There have been significant improvements in the school since the previous inspection which reflects the ambition and drive of the headteacher and senior leaders. Students' attainment, for example, has risen and will continue to rise if students keep up the good progress being made in Year 11. The curriculum has also improved from satisfactory to good. The quality of teaching is improving because there is a realisation that this is now the key to improved student progress. There is evident progress in improving the quality of provision and student outcomes in the sixth form. This overall strongly improving picture demonstrates that the school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

An extremely positive response to parental questionnaires highlights how engaged parents and carers are with the school. Parents and carers are well informed as to how well their children are making progress. One Year 11 student explained to an inspector that regular feedback goes home on how well he is doing, what targets he has and whether he has met them and what homework has been set. The Grapevine newsletter keeps parents up-to-date with what is going on in school and individual contacts and letters between staff and parents ensure that there is regular and good quality communication. Good partnerships exist with other agencies in areas such as health and social care which contribute to students' well-being. Partnerships adding to the Key Stage 4 curriculum have resulted in a number of students receiving recognition from the local authority for achieving full marks and distinction grades in BTEC examinations.

Senior leaders are effectively monitoring and evaluating student outcomes and the quality of provision. They are aware of which groups are not achieving as well as others and where further action is needed to improve the quality of teaching. The outstanding care and guidance and good curriculum are helping to promote equality of opportunity. Community cohesion is promoted well as seen in the racially harmonious school community and the way students see themselves as responsible citizens who need to be aware of others needs. The governing body appreciates that its capacity to impact on the work of the school is satisfactory. Action has been taken to increase the number of governors so that the delegation of responsibilities is more manageable. Safeguarding procedures in the school fully meet statutory requirements.

This is an improving school. Student achievement is satisfactory and so there is more to do before value for money can be judged as good or better.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Senior leaders' efforts to improve the sixth form have been having a good impact. The upward trend in results is an outcome of the robust action initiated by senior leaders to improve target-setting and tracking of student progress and to increase the proportion of good teaching. Students' attainment over the last three years has improved to being broadly average. Learning and progress are satisfactory. Some students do not achieve higher grades at A level because their written communication skills impede their progress.

There is good evidence that teaching is improving but overall teaching is satisfactory and not yet consistently bringing about good student progress. Nevertheless, an outstanding sixth-form dance lesson was observed by one inspector where students of different abilities were given high quality written oral and written feedback. Students, as a result of the feedback, were able to understand exactly what they needed to do next to make progress.

The number of students attending the sixth form has increased by one third over the last two years, reflecting the attraction of the good curriculum on offer. Attendance is good. Students are effectively encouraged and nurtured to make the most of independent study time. Care, guidance and support are outstanding and students benefit hugely from personalised guidance on education, training and employment opportunities that they can take up in the future. Inspectors judged the good curriculum, outstanding care, guidance and improving quality of teaching equalled good provision which is raising student aspirations.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Ninety eight per cent of parents and carers agreed or strongly agreed that they are happy with their children's experience of this school. For almost every single question the percentage of parents who positively agreed or strongly agreed ranged from 91% to 98%. The only less positive area, but still one which most parents were positive about, was the question that asked if teachers are interested in the views of parents and carers. Inspectors found that the schools' engagement with parents is good. Senior leaders have begun to develop opportunities for parents to take a more active role in the life of the school. Senior leaders explained that this work has just begun but are confident that it will reinforce the strong partnership that exists between parents and school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College 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 340 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1012 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	135	40	194	57	5	1	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	174	51	164	48	3	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	162	48	154	45	21	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	150	44	176	52	8	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	139	41	195	57	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	113	33	203	60	13	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	102	30	219	64	11	3	0	0
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)	133	39	183	54	7	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	131	39	196	58	4	1	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	130	38	188	55	8	2	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	92	27	219	64	8	2	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	148	44	185	54	3	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	174	51	161	47	0	0	1	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.



13 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Margaret Ward Catholic School and Arts College, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6LZ

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing you at work. We were impressed with your behaviour and mature attitudes and the way you respect and value each other. Inspectors were also impressed by the way you are developing spiritually and we were privileged on a number of occasions to listen to your thoughtful comments and views. The care, guidance and support you receive are excellent, for example, the 'Assertive Mentoring' Year 11 students are receiving.

Inspectors visited a lot of lessons over the two days. Some of the best teaching was seen in Year 7 lessons where you were enjoying the creative curriculum. A number of Year 8 students told us how much the creative curriculum helped them to become better learners. In some of the lessons we visited it was really clear what teachers expected you to achieve by the end of the lesson. We found that when your work was matched to what you needed to learn next you made good progress. Most of you make satisfactory progress overall. More of you could get higher grades in your GCSE results and hopefully the 'Assertive Mentoring' will make that happen.

Your sixth form is also improving so it is no surprise that more of you are choosing to attend. The examination results for sixth-form students have been rising since the last inspection but inspectors agreed that they should still be higher.

Inspectors believe the headteacher and senior leaders are effectively improving your school and will carry on doing so. The governors are helping but know they can do more. We left the school with two key tasks to do:

- ensure teaching is good in more lessons so that you consistently make at least good progress
- increase the role governors play in helping the school to improve by looking in detail at what is being done to improve your school so that they can offer support and also ask questions if they think more could be done.

Yours sincerely

Mr Andrew Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector

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