

# St Gregory the Great VA Catholic Secondary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133644
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	381524
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ian Hodgkinson HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,198
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	195
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Andrew Auty (acting)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr John Hussey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14–15 January 2009
<b>School address</b>	Cricket Road Cowley Oxford OX4 3DR
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 35 teachers and 37 lessons, and visited briefly other lessons and activities. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors, and students. Inspectors looked at documentation, including students' books, the school development and action plans, records of assessment and tracking of students' progress, plans and monitoring information for the support of vulnerable students, records of the school's arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of students, and policies and procedures for promoting equality and countering discrimination. In addition, inspectors considered 183 questionnaire responses from parents and carers, together with those from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The success of the school in raising attainment and closing gaps in performance between key groups of students, and particularly in overcoming the underachievement of girls.
- The extent to which the quality of teaching and learning is consistently effective between subjects.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in raising achievement and driving improvement.
- The impact of changes to the curriculum in successfully supporting improved achievement for all groups of students.

## Information about the school

St Gregory the Great is larger than most secondary schools and has a sixth form of broadly average size. It is over subscribed and the number of students on roll has grown significantly since the last inspection. About half of the students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, and around a third of students speak English as an additional language. Mobility into and out of the school at other than the usual times of entry and exit is high, and a small number of students are refugees and asylum seekers. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. While the range of special educational needs and/or disabilities is wide, the main groups are those with moderate learning difficulties or with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The school has achieved the Healthy School Award and it received the International School Award in 2010. It was designated as a specialist music school in 2007.

**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?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

St Gregory the Great is a good school. It draws together students with very diverse backgrounds and aspirations and enables all to make a full and active contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. Students play a leading role in developing their school, for example in shaping its approaches to teaching and learning, the curriculum and anti-bullying strategies. The school's outstanding promotion of community cohesion, based on an exceptionally thorough appraisal of its provision in this aspect, has led to students becoming widely involved in an extensive range of local, national and international projects. Partnerships developed through the school's music specialism have driven some of these projects. Students rightly point to the school's celebration of diversity and its nurturing of positive, respectful relationships as key strengths. They feel safe in a caring environment. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Students' attainment is broadly average and has risen overall since the last inspection. Leaders and managers at all levels in the school have been successful in driving improvements to secure students' good learning and progress, and to close gaps in performance between subjects and groups of students. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 has been extensively and successfully revised to meet more successfully the interests and aspirations of all students. This has helped to overcome the underachievement of girls evident in GCSE results in 2009 and 2010, while sustaining the strong progress of higher-attaining students. The attainment and progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals, however, while improving substantially over the last year, still lag behind that of other groups. Strategies to raise the performance for this group have been less effective than for others. Students' attainment and progress have improved strongly and consistently in the sixth form since the last inspection. Comprehensive information, advice and guidance programmes throughout the school have significantly raised the aspirations of students, so that the proportions moving into further and higher education continue to rise.

Most students enjoy school and are well taught by teachers who have good subject knowledge and high expectations. Students value the good, clear feedback they receive on how to improve their work. Teachers' lesson plans state clearly students' individual needs, but teachers do not always adapt lesson activities in response to those varying needs, so that on occasions some students find it hard to engage or keep up. The development of students' independent learning skills is constrained by their lack of access to information and communication technology (ICT) in a number

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of subjects, and on occasions by teachers talking for too long in lessons. Students generally behave well in lessons and their conduct around the campus is polite and amiable. They are punctual to lessons during the school day, although a very small but significant minority are late to school in the morning, thereby missing some important learning in the first lesson of the day.

Under the very clear direction of the headteacher, the school adheres closely to its mission and values while ambitiously building on its strengths and developing many aspects of its provision. Senior leaders have a well-developed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, gleaned from effective systems to monitor students' progress and to check the quality of teaching and learning. Middle leaders now work much more effectively with senior leaders to secure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning than was the case at the last inspection. The school therefore has a good capacity to sustain further improvement.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching and promote students' independent learning skills by:
  - ensuring that lesson activities are well matched to students' abilities
  - widening the use of ICT across the curriculum
  - ensuring that teachers do not talk to the class for too long in lessons.
- Close the gap between the attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals and that of other groups in the school.
- Improve students' punctuality to school in the morning.

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

**2**

Students' attainment on joining the school is below average and students make good progress to attain broadly average standards by Year 11. Progress has been consistently good in the core subjects of English and especially mathematics since the last inspection. High numbers of students move on from GCSE to A-level courses in mathematics, reflecting the subject's particular success in promoting achievement for middle and higher attainers. The school has successfully raised students' attainment and progress in subjects where performance had been low for some years. GCSE results in the specialist subject of music remain below target, although over half of all students in Years 9 and 10 gained an 'access to music' qualification, while the subject broadens participation. The specialist school principles of 'participation, presentation and performance' have underpinned the school's strategy to support students' personal development and develop their independent learning skills. Many students as a result make excellent contributions to the life of the school and wider community, and participate fully and creatively in class activities. A minority, however, remain too passive in class where activities do not promote the students' engagement, and their learning slows as a consequence.

Accurate monitoring of students' performance, and a range of interventions to

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support students’ specific language and welfare needs, promote particularly good progress for students who speak English as an additional language, including some who have joined the school after the usual time of admission. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make generally good progress, especially where specific interventions or support, for example from teaching assistants, are given. Students’ attendance is broadly average, and the rate of persistent absence, while still above average, has fallen significantly since the last inspection. A small minority of students are not punctual to school in the morning, but overall students are well prepared for later life. Their literacy and number skills develop well, and a strong vein of leadership skills, enterprise and work-related learning permeates the curricular and extra-curricular programmes. Students develop a good understanding of how to stay physically and emotionally healthy through the school’s well-developed personal, social and health education and sports programmes. However, participation rates in the wide range of extra-curricular sports clubs made available to students by the school are variable.

*These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes*

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

**How effective is the provision?**

Relationships between teachers and students are good and ensure that most students enjoy their learning and engage quickly in lessons. Teachers’ good subject knowledge enables them to offer very clear explanations. Students generally respond well to teachers’ high expectations of them, especially where teachers promote students’ active involvement in learning. The use of assessment to show students how to improve is now a strength, both in the teachers’ own marking and in the

<sup>1</sup> 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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increasingly effective use of student self- and peer-assessment. However, teachers do not always use assessment information to adapt tasks and methods to meet the varying needs of individuals or groups in their classes. Instances were seen where long periods of teacher talk and quick-fire questions and answers left a few students with weaker language skills or comprehension disengaged.

The curriculum has been well planned to offer students a broad choice of pathways, well suited to meet their needs and interests, particularly in Key Stage 4. Students, parents and carers are very well informed about their options, and their choices are supported by a very thorough programme of careers advice and guidance from Year 7 onwards. The broad curriculum at Key Stage 4 is delivered through close collaboration with other local schools and colleges. The vocational element is largely delivered off site and is yielding good pass rates. It is also helping to secure high rates of progression into further education and employment. Higher attainers, too, are offered a challenging range of options to prepare them well for sixth form studies. The curriculum supports the development of students’ basic skills and their personal qualities well, although their opportunities to use ICT to support their learning in range of subjects are limited. The music specialism is promoting increasing opportunities for students to participate in performance on local, national and international stages.

The school works very effectively in partnership with primary feeder schools and external agencies to support its most vulnerable students. Students with physical disabilities have full access to all areas and are fully consulted on curriculum modifications so that they are fully included, for example in sport and physical education lessons. The school works effectively to liaise with families, for example to reduce the extent of persistent absence, and recognises the need to redouble its efforts to promote better punctuality to school in the morning. Specific strategies to engage parents and carers of students known to be eligible for free school meals in their children’s learning are underdeveloped.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, the headteacher and senior leaders have successfully united the staff into a collegiate team, and have moved middle leaders to act corporately rather than as individual heads of department. The ambition to further improve the school is widely shared. Monitoring of progress against challenging

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targets at student, subject and whole-school levels is enabling all staff to recognise strengths and weakness in performance and plan for improvement. The overall school development plan, however, currently lacks specific details on strategies and timescales, and does not establish clear links to school self-evaluation. Monitoring of teaching and learning has been extensive and brought about clear improvements, for example in teachers’ marking. Across the school, most gaps in performance between subjects and groups of students have been closed, as a result of effective action to promote equality of opportunity across the school’s very diverse intake. The promotion of community cohesion is outstanding, and at the heart of the school’s work. The governing body is rigorous in holding the school to account for its performance. It has shown considerable skill in turning a substantial budget deficit into a healthy surplus as the school has expanded. The high regard parents and carers have for the quality of communication they have with the school is due in part to the systems the governing body has set in place for seeking stakeholders’ views. The governing body is rigorous in promoting a safe site and ensuring the well-being of staff and students, and safeguarding requirements are fully met.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Attainment increased sharply in 2010 and this improvement has been maintained in examination results for 2011. Attainment is broadly average, despite students’ lower-than-average attainment on entry to the sixth form, and students make good progress. Progress is particularly good for higher attainers, and the proportion of students attaining A\* to B grades has improved particularly swiftly to close the gap with the national average. Students develop well as independent learners and can speak confidently about effective learning strategies. They receive good teaching, with many examples of effective questioning, deep discussion and the development

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of independent learning. Subject teachers provide good feedback to students on their progress and how to improve.

Challenging targets for achievement are monitored closely by students’ individual mentors. Students receive highly effective information, advice and guidance, which enable even those in vulnerable situations to succeed in their studies and chosen careers. Students make strong contributions to the development of younger pupils in the school, for example as trained mentors or as leaders in the vertical tutor group system. The sixth form is well led; provision is regularly monitored and evaluated, and expectations are high. The curriculum provision is sound, and is under review with the intention of broadening the offer of Level 3 (A level) courses. Some further opportunities are provided in partnership with other schools and colleges, but constrained by different structures to the school day in some partner institutions.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	2
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**

Parents’ and carers’ responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, and to surveys of their views conducted by the school, suggest that parents and carers have a generally highly favourable opinion of the school’s provision. They have particularly positive views about the quality of teaching and the leadership and management of the school. A number of respondents wrote to praise the quality of the school’s communication with them. A high proportion clearly feels that their children enjoy school. Inspectors also feel that the school has strengths in all these areas. The largest number of negative comments received by inspectors related to concerns about lessons being disrupted by poor behaviour. However, parents’ and carers’ general questionnaire responses suggested that most feel that the school manages student behaviour well, and inspectors found that in most lessons students’ behaviour was good. Some concerns were expressed about a lack of regular homework. Direct evidence about this was difficult to see at an early stage in the academic year, but inspectors found that the school’s own surveys had identified this as a cause of concern for some parents, carers and students. The school is therefore undertaking its own review with a view to updating its homework policy.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Gregory the Great VA Catholic Secondary 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 183 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,198 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	63	34	112	61	6	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	59	32	115	63	4	2	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	60	33	98	54	13	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	59	32	94	51	14	8	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	56	31	109	60	7	4	2	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	49	27	99	54	21	11	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	20	110	60	24	13	3	2
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)	53	29	106	58	8	4	2	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	48	26	113	62	9	5	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	39	21	110	60	15	8	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	21	103	56	13	7	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	75	41	96	52	4	2	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	68	37	100	55	8	4	2	1

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



16 September 2011

Dear Students

### **Inspection of St Gregory the Great VA Catholic Secondary School, Oxford OX4 3DR**

Thank you for the welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited the school for its recent inspection. It was very good to see the positive relationships between students of diverse backgrounds which the school helps to promote. You clearly respond extremely well to the opportunities that the school gives you to take a lead and get involved in projects in the school and wider community. Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

St Gregory the Great is a good school. You are well taught and achieve well to attain broadly average results by Year 11. Sixth form provision is also good and sixth form students' attainment and progress have improved strongly in recent years. The school is well led and managed so that the whole school community has a strong sense of shared values. Leaders and managers have taken effective action to close most gaps between the progress of different groups of students by carefully monitoring performance and improving the quality of provision. You now have a very broad range of course options to suit your interests at Key Stage 4, and are given very thorough advice and guidance about which pathways to take.

Our report indicates the following ways in which the school can get even better.

- Ensure that teachers consistently adapt lesson activities to meet the needs of all groups of students in their classes, and regularly promote students' independent learning skills.
- Close the gap between the attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals and that of other groups of students.
- Improve students' punctuality to school in the mornings.

I am sure that you will continue to play your part in ensuring that the school improves, particularly in improving punctuality to ensure that lessons get underway promptly. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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