

St Gregory's Catholic School

Reynolds Lane, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN4 9XL

Inspection dates 15–16 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Achievement is outstanding because students make excellent progress and attain consistently above average GCSE results, especially in English, mathematics and science.
- The sixth form is outstanding. With high-quality teaching and guidance, students gain the qualifications they need to proceed to further or higher education. At the same time they mature into thoughtful young adults, prepared to help others in the future.
- The headteacher moved the school into a higher gear by significantly improving the quality of teaching. This led to far higher standards in 2011 which have continued to improve – more top GCSE grades in 2013, for example.
- Governors, senior and middle leaders and managers work together to support staff so that they can continually reflect and develop their practice.
- The harmonious and happy atmosphere around the school reflects how well all staff promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teaching is outstanding with examples of exemplary practice in all subject areas and all years. Students learn extremely well because enthusiastic teachers give them stimulating tasks, well-structured paths towards understanding and clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding, in lessons and around the school. They are polite, considerate, and welcoming to visitors. They all get on well together and have excellent, respectful relationships with staff.
- All students, especially those with particular physical or learning needs, receive sensitive, practical and effective care and support to help them enjoy school life and succeed. All students feel safe and secure.
- Numerous, successful activities in the community benefit the school's students as much as they do primary school pupils and adults in the local area.
- Many students value the fact that students of all faiths or none are welcomed into the community.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 46 part-lessons, several of which were jointly observed with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors observed an assembly and review sessions with tutors at the end of the day.
- Inspectors held meetings with several groups of students, members of the senior leadership team, leaders in charge of subjects and other aspects of the school's work, other staff with positions of responsibility, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors discussed lessons they had seen with teaching staff and examined a range of documents including: the school's own evaluation of its performance, improvement plans and data about progress, standards, 2013 results, exclusions, attendance, behaviour and community work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of students' work in lessons.
- Inspectors took into account 105 parents' responses to Ofsted's online, Parent View, questionnaire and questionnaires completed by over 50 members of staff.

Inspection team

Clare Gillies, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jennifer Barker	Additional Inspector
Nick Cross	Additional Inspector
Jason Hughes	Additional Inspector
Jason Wye	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary school.
- There are more boys than girls.
- About four out of five students are White British with the remaining students being of other White backgrounds or from minority ethnic groups.
- A close-to-average proportion of students speak English as an additional language, of whom a small number are at an early stage of learning English.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The most common needs relate to hearing impairment and autistic spectrum disorders. The school has a specially resourced provision for up to 15 hearing impaired students.
- A low proportion, under 100 students, is eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for specific groups including looked after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families. The school has a very small number of looked after children and no children of service families.
- About 30 students are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding, which is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in English or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- A small number of Key Stage 4 students attend alternative, off-site educational provision full time and about 20 students attend one day a week at either K College (construction, catering, motor vehicle and hairdressing), Hadlow College (animal management) or the Better Life in South Borough (BLIS) Café (Princes Trust).
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school holds a British Council International School award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To raise standards to the highest level:
 - share good practice among staff and increase the repertoire of teaching techniques so that all teachers prepare work that matches students' individual needs
 - extend the exemplary marking seen in some books to all subjects and make sure that students respond to the advice, comments and questions they receive.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The percentage of students attaining five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics dramatically improved in 2011. Since then, the percentage has been well-above average and has not dropped below 70%.
- Every student achieved five or more A* to C grades in 2013. The percentage of GCSE pass grades was over 90% in more than half the subjects taken and the percentage of A*/A grades improved following a successful focus on pushing the most able to achieve high grades.
- Pupil premium funding financed smaller Key Stage 4 classes in English and mathematics last year. Eligible students attained less than one-sixth of a grade lower than other students in both GCSE English and mathematics. The gap in attainment, already very small in English, narrowed significantly in mathematics in 2013.
- Well over half the disabled students and those who have special educational needs attained A* to C grades in English and mathematics, a much higher-than-average proportion than did so nationally. Students who speak English as an additional language attain at least as well as other students and their fluency increases rapidly.
- Early entry for GCSE mathematics did not prevent the most able students from attaining high grades. Those who gained A*/A grades studied an advanced mathematics course in Year 11, while others re-took the examination and improved their results. Over 70 students take GCSE statistics each year and attain very high standards.
- The standards attained reflect Key Stage 4 students' outstanding progress, regardless of whether they receive extra funding for any reason. All students make more than the nationally expected progress in English and mathematics. Students attending off-site provision make outstanding progress towards their qualifications.
- Hearing impaired students make at least the same progress as their peers. Some stay on into the sixth form and proceed to university, others follow further education courses; all achieve their goals.
- Key Stage 3 students receiving pupil premium and/or catch-up funding in Year 7 also make outstanding progress. For example, last year their reading improved significantly. Extra funds are spent thoughtfully, for example, on reading programmes software and one-to-one support. All students' reading and writing are good overall, though spelling is not always accurate enough.
- Sixth form A-level results give students access to the places in higher education they pursue. Several subjects regularly exceed the national percentage of A*/A grades. AS results were less strong in 2013 and the school identified that students' literacy skills, especially students who speak English as an additional language, were not strong enough for high grades in science and technology subjects. Action has been taken and, consequently, present students are doing better.
- From standards at the start of Year 12 that are below those seen nationally for sixth forms, students make at least good, and often outstanding, progress, particularly in Year 13. Overall, the value added in the sixth form is above average.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Almost all subject leaders and many teachers enable students to learn consistently well and, often, exceptionally well. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, plan stimulating activities, select interesting resources and know their students' learning needs. It is not surprising that almost all parents would recommend the school to others.
- Learning gets off to flying start in lessons and keeps going at speed. Students are attentive and

respond quickly to instructions. They learn particularly well when they discuss and carry out tasks in pairs or small groups or use mark schemes to evaluate their own and each other's work; they listen attentively when sharing their ideas.

- Examples of imaginative and enjoyable teaching include: preparing freeze-frames to summarise a Greek myth; describing a picture that another student has to draw; linking sport photography to basketball; examining a pig's lung and heart to understand types of tissue; designing antibodies to attack viruses and linking a speech in Othello to political rhetoric. All these activities generated outstanding learning.
- Teachers often link work to previous learning so students can see the progression of a topic. Many teachers mark work carefully with clear guidance on how to improve it and give students a point for reflection or a question to answer. Such exemplary practice is not evident in all books and students do not always respond to the guidance given.
- Most teachers skilfully prepare work to match students' different abilities and rates of progress. They adjust questions to challenge lower attainers or the most-able students. A few teachers do not adjust their plans so successfully. Similarly, the focus on developing students' reading, spelling and breadth of vocabulary is usually clear but not consistently applied by all teachers.
- The highly qualified teaching assistants contribute to the success of many lessons. They discuss work in advance with teachers and carefully judge how much, and what type of support to provide. They help hearing impaired students to participate fully in lessons. These students also receive excellent teaching in the specially resourced unit.
- Many students stay on into the sixth form because, 'We know we will be taught well.' Teaching in these years is predominantly outstanding with high-quality discussions, encouragement for individual research and a style that prepares students well for their future studies.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students are very happy, proud to attend the school and keen to learn. Attendance has improved and most students attend regularly, following the school's increased meticulous checks and regular contact and support for families.
- Bullying and racist incidents are rare and tackled firmly and fast. There are a few exclusions but very few students have more than one. The tutor review groups of students of different ages generate excellent relationships between students. Year 7 students also benefit from regular contact with Year 12 'buddies'.
- The school's International status award is reflected in the welcome it gives to minority ethnic students, some of whom need help to learn English; this is delivered most effectively by experienced teachers.
- Outstanding leadership by specialists, fortnightly case meetings and excellent links with relevant agencies all contribute to outstanding pastoral care for each student. This is particularly evident for hearing impaired students as well as for vulnerable students and others eligible for extra funding. Leaders of the different areas of learning keep a close eye on all students' progress and pastoral needs and step in quickly when necessary.
- Staff visit, and regularly contact off-site providers to monitor students' progress and attitudes to learning, which are usually positive and lead to success in completing the courses they undertake.
- Through all their work, particularly in religious education lessons, students know that discrimination is not tolerated. Hence, Key Stage 4 and sixth form students, fully aware of the different types of bullying, discuss homophobia with sensitivity. Students' personal development is taught well, mainly through subjects, assemblies, review sessions and days when outside agencies deliver topics such as crime.
- The school's work in the community is hugely worthwhile. An information and communication

technology skills project, delivered by sixth form computer science students, continues to be very successful. Local primary schools appreciate St Gregory's staff and students leading sports, literacy and numeracy events. Students following the Prince's Trust programme master useful skills working in the local area.

- Students raise funds enthusiastically for numerous charities, reflecting the students' empathy for those less fortunate than themselves.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- In recent years, the headteacher and senior leaders have successfully combined the school's ethos and outstanding care of students with major improvements in teaching and standards. A Year 11 student observed that, 'The headteacher never stops seeking improvement.'
- Leaders make sure that teachers know the quality of the work expected and have time to reflect on their own practice – linked to high-quality professional support and development.
- Leaders below senior level are well supported in developing their professional skills, and best practice in teaching is shared well.
- Teachers know that they are accountable for students' progress and that their movement up the pay scales is linked to students' performance.
- School data on students' progress and attainment are useful because they generate clear, easily accessible information. Based on their starting points, students' progress is monitored in all years by groups, such as gender, pupil premium or special educational needs.
- Senior and middle leaders' analysis of examination results has contributed to the better results and well-considered changes in courses where necessary. The high quality leadership of both the sixth form and of the special resource unit for hearing impaired students also contributes to the school's success.
- The school improvement plan reflects how well the school knows itself and how accurately leaders monitor the quality of teaching. Feedback to staff is always constructive and supportive. Morale among teachers is high. One observed that, 'Every morning I feel happy that I am coming to work.'
- The curriculum offers the right combination of academic and vocational courses for students in Years 10 to 13. Those not suited to a full academic programme achieve valuable vocational qualifications at off-site establishments. For example, the introduction of BTEC medical science in Year 12 has been popular. Leaders and managers ensure that provision for courses off-site is helpful to students' achievement and that they are safe in these situations.
- Year 7 students benefit from a day a week when they study learning and problem-solving skills, how to manage information and establish good relationships. The curriculum reflects the school's determination to give all students equal opportunities to succeed.
- In all years, high-quality careers advice and guidance help students to choose option subjects and prepare for the world of work and education beyond school. Sixth formers feel confident they receive excellent support for university applications.
- Contact and communication with parents is excellent.
- In previous years, the local authority was closely involved with the school when results were not moving upwards. Currently, it now gives appropriate 'light touch' support to this outstanding school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Having fully backed the drive to improve teaching and witnessed its positive impact, governors are rightly confident that standards can improve further. A senior leader observed that governors 'always want data' so they can interrogate the information and evaluate future plans. Governors actively challenge leaders and hold them to account for the school's

performance.

- Governors bring a wealth of valuable expertise to their work. They monitor spending and its impact carefully, particularly extra funds for pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up students, disabled students and those with special educational needs. They oversee performance management to check that all staff have challenging targets for students' progress. They are equally attentive to safeguarding and child protection procedures which meet statutory requirements.
- Every year, all governors spend a day visiting lessons and talking to teachers and students. Last year they focused on how well literacy was being promoted, knowing that this is an area which needs constant focus. Governors seek external support and training whenever needed.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	118907
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	426638

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1016
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bruce Wilmot
Headteacher	Stephen Adamson
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2008
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