

St Gregory's Catholic High School

Cromwell Avenue, Westbrook, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 1HG

Inspection dates 10–11 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Disadvantaged students attain and achieve less well than their peers.
- Not enough of the most able students make better than expected progress in English and mathematics.
- A minority of lessons require improvement because students are not sufficiently challenged and sometimes become disengaged in learning.
- Not all marking enables students to understand the next steps in their learning to enable them to improve further.
- Good practice in teaching is not sufficiently shared so as to improve all teaching to good and better.
- Attendance for disadvantaged students is lower than that for their peers.

The school has the following strengths

- Students' attainment across all GCSE subjects for grades A* to C is well above the national averages.
- Students make better than expected progress in sciences, languages and humanities.
- The leadership of the headteacher and his senior leaders gives strong capacity for the school to make further improvements.
- Across the school there are examples of good and sometimes outstanding teaching.
- Many students are eager to learn and have aspirations to excel in their studies and in the contribution they make to school life.
- The school represents a safe, caring and responsive community.
- Governance is strong and effective.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 27 parts of lessons taught by 27 teachers. Seven of the observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked closely at samples of students' written work across a range of subjects and year groups. They also observed behaviour around the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers, three groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors. Inspectors also met with two representatives of the local authority. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including: self-evaluation and development plans; data relating to students' attainment and progress; information on attendance; documents and records about behaviour and safeguarding; records of the monitoring of teaching and learning and of performance management; and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors reviewed the 90 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View), alongside the school's own records of parental and student feedback.

Inspection team

Patrick Geraghty, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Stephen Rowland

Additional Inspector

Nell Banfield

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- St Gregory's High School was placed in special measures in December 2013. Since that date it has been led by three headteachers. A permanent headteacher was appointed and took-up position in September 2014 along with a new deputy headteacher. A new governing body was constituted in March 2014.
- St Gregory's Catholic High School is an average-sized secondary school.
- Students' attainment when they join the school is significantly above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for support through the pupil premium is well below the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well-below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- At the time of the inspection, the school offered off-site alternative provision for seven students. Of these, three students were placed at the New Horizons School, two at Fullagar Construction and one at Cornerstones Construction.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good across the school and increase the amount of outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - access and use information about students to set work at the right level
 - develop the use of their questioning skills so that all students have opportunities to develop their reasoning, spoken language and extend their thinking
 - plan lessons using assessment information that will support and challenge all students
 - set and maintain high standards for the presentation of work
 - provide helpful comments to students when marking their books to help them know how to improve their work and later check whether they have acted on this advice.
- Ensure that the school's good and outstanding practice is shared across all provision so as to develop teachers' skills and to raise standards of all teaching, learning and assessment to good and outstanding. Ensure that teachers have the opportunity to develop their teaching skills through understanding and observing external best practice.
- Improve some students' achievement more rapidly at Key Stage 4 by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have sufficiently high expectations for all students' attainment and progress
 - continuing to close the gaps in achievement and attendance more rapidly for disadvantaged students so that they are broadly in line with their peers
 - enabling a greater percentage of the most able students to make more than expected progress in mathematics and English.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because new tracking, data and monitoring systems have to be further embedded, teaching and learning remain too variable and some groups of students are not achieving to their potential.
- The appointment of a highly experienced headteacher has improved significantly the school's capacity for accelerated improvement. He brings an urbane, reflective and aspirational drive to the management of the school. His highly capable new deputy brings an incisive approach to performance management, analysis and improvement across the curriculum.
- The strengthened senior leadership team has a clear focus on establishing high-quality provision and improved student achievement. Leaders are clear about their responsibilities and demonstrate a strong commitment to improvement. Senior leaders have the confidence of school staff and students.
- Self-evaluation is sharp, self-critical and accurate. Areas for improvement are clearly identified and appropriate actions are documented. New systems to monitor, track and evaluate school performance have been introduced. There is now more systematic use of data to better analyse performance and in particular the progress that students make. These systems now require to be embedded further so as to enable sustained performance and improved student outcomes overtime.
- Improvements in the attainment and progress of students in key areas, such as science, have been significant. However, those students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium continue to underperform and not enough of the most able students make better than expected progress in English and mathematics. The school has strategies in place to tackle these gaps and current school data indicate that these are having a positive impact on improving the performance of these groups.
- Focused staff training has started to impact on teachers' planning of learning. However, the school needs to promote further the sharing of good practice within the school to tackle some variability in the quality of lessons. School leaders acknowledge that teaching staff would benefit also from an increased understanding of the best external practice and methodologies.
- Middle leaders are now accountable for the performance of their departments and areas of responsibility. They are increasingly working well together and are beginning to use performance outcomes more astutely to target areas that require improvement.
- Performance management and professional development are used effectively to support and challenge weaker teaching. The appraisal system is increasingly effective and has a strong focus on rewarding good teaching.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 has a strong academic focus but, within that context, is broad and balanced. Effective links have been established with local colleges to promote different curriculum pathways at Key Stage 4. Off-site additional provision is now well planned and monitored. Literacy is well promoted across the curriculum. Careers guidance is effective.
- Partnerships with external agencies help to promote the care of students most in need. Tutorial provision, assemblies and acts of collective worship all prepare students to better understand life in modern Britain. The school has an excellent relationship with the local authority. The local authority has provided the school with support to build its capacity for improvement.
- The promotion of equality and diversity requires further improvement because too many disadvantaged students perform less well than other groups. New strategies have been put in place so that pupil premium funding has greater impact on the outcomes for disadvantaged students. Current school data indicate that the disparity in attainment and progress between disadvantaged students and their peers is becoming less marked but that the gap is not closing rapidly enough.
- The school, including the governing body, meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are effective, aspirational and remorseless in their drive for further and sustained school improvement. They offer robust challenge and exceptional support to senior leaders and staff.
 - Individual governors have links with subjects and are aware of how the school uses performance management to tackle underperformance and reward good teaching.
 - Governors have a good understanding of the pupil premium, how it works and its impact on students' performance. They scrutinise performance across all school provision assiduously.
 - Governors have established thorough systems and procedures to scrutinise financial and safeguarding

aspects of the school.

- Governors have an accurate and comprehensive view of the school's current performance and the ways and means that are required to enable further and sustained improvement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- Students' behaviour requires improvement. The vast majority of students are inquisitive and eager to engage and embrace learning. However, their enthusiasm for learning wanes where there is insufficient challenge and low expectations in some lessons.
- Students say that bullying is rare and that when it occurs it is dealt with quickly. A stronger emphasis has been placed over the last year on promoting an anti-bullying agenda. Leaders have made it clear that derogatory language is not acceptable and any such instances are closely monitored.
- Students generally conduct themselves well around the school and are polite and helpful. They demonstrate positive and courteous relationships with each other and adults. Students show respect for the school environment, which is tidy and well kept. School records indicate that students on alternative provision behave well.
- Students are eager to take on responsibilities. Under the new headteacher, student responsibilities and engagement in school life, including school improvement, have increased. Some 16% of students now have leadership roles within the school as ambassadors, school council members and mentors. Students are articulate and keen to engage and relish challenge and responsibility.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within tutorial provision, the well-focused religious education programme, special events and collective acts of worship, which are often organised and taken by students.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Safeguarding policies and procedures have been completely revised, changed and enhanced since the last inspection. They are regularly reviewed by senior leaders and the governing body. Staff have received training on child safety. School records indicate that students on alternative provision are secure and safe. The school works with a number of agencies to support disadvantaged and vulnerable students.
- Attendance rates have improved. The school promptly follows up any absence. Students are punctual to lessons. Attendance rates for students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium still lag behind those of their peers.
- The physical well-being of students is promoted through the curriculum and numerous extra-curricular sports and cultural activities. Parents feel that their children are happy in school and are kept safe.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching and learning require improvement because, in a minority of lessons, there remains too much variability in the progress that students make and in the quality of their engagement in learning. However, no inadequate progress or learning was observed by inspectors and much good and some outstanding practice was seen.
- In well-planned lessons, students are eager to learn because activities offer appropriate levels of challenge. High expectations and aspirations are promoted and students respond with enthusiasm and make good progress. In these lessons, teachers have a sharp focus on progress. Opportunities are created to promote the inquisitive nature of these students and engage them actively in debate and independent learning.
- The best practice was exemplified in a Year 7 mathematics lesson on measuring area. In pairs, students enthusiastically engaged in the task. Students demonstrated the progress they had made to their peers on the whiteboard and willingly answered their questions on process. When they finished the exercise a conveyer-belt of additional extension activities was available. Students did not wait for these to be offered but rather demanded and embraced them. Progress was excellent and the air of excited and productive learning was palpable.

- In a minority of lessons, learning is not sufficiently well planned to meet the needs of all students. Students are not sufficiently challenged, and teachers' expectations and aspirations are low. Teachers' questioning is too shallow and fails to promote extended thinking and a deeper understanding by students. Consequently, some of the most able students make slower progress and sometimes disengage from learning activities.
- Students' exercise books are marked frequently. The best marking gives specific guidance on how to improve and students give clear responses as to how they have used teachers' comments to enable improvement. However, in some exercise books, next-step indicators are limited, with little student reflection on the teachers' advice given and on the improvement achieved. Some students present untidy work.
- Literacy and numeracy are now well promoted across the curriculum and especially at Key Stage 3.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide appropriate support, which enables students to better access learning.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The provisional GCSE data for 2014 indicate that attainment is significantly above the national average across all subjects for grades A* to C. In particular, attainment in science significantly improved in 2014. The percentage of students who attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is significantly above the national average.
- In 2014 in both GCSE mathematics and English, students made expected progress in line with the national average and better than expected progress in sciences, humanities and languages. Inspection evidence and analysis of data indicate that this positive trend is set to continue, including improved progress in English and mathematics.
- The school's unvalidated GCSE data for 2014 show that those students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium underperformed and that not enough of the most able students make better than expected progress in English and mathematics. Disabled students and those with special educational needs made good progress from their starting points.
- In 2014, Year 11 disadvantaged students left school approximately one grade of a GCSE behind in mathematics and English when their performance is compared to their peers nationally. The in-school gap with other students was wider still at approximately two whole grades for GCSE in mathematics and English. School data scrutinised by inspectors indicate that strategies to close gaps more rapidly are now impacting at both key stages. Strategies to close gaps are well-focused and now offer good support from Year 7 to 11.
- In recent years students have been entered early for GCSE examinations in mathematics. This practice has ceased.
- A small number of students in Year 10 and 11 are educated in off-site alternative provision at a small number of venues. This provision is now effectively monitored and current school data indicate that students are making good progress.
- Observations of the quality of teaching and scrutiny of work in students' books indicate that students' achievement is improving across the school. The school's data for students' progress at Key Stage 3 indicate that they are moving rapidly forward in their learning.
- Year 7 students who join the 'catch-up' programme are making better progress in their literacy because of the additional support they receive. Across Key Stage 3, students demonstrate good improvement in developing literacy, numeracy and spoken skills.
- The proportion of former students not in education, employment or training is very low. Students are well prepared for their next stage in education with a very high percentage progressing to sixth-form colleges.

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	111454
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	450454

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	969
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Bell
Headteacher	Paul Heitzman
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2013
Telephone number	01925 574888
Fax number	01925 243816
Email address	sch_stgreg_clerical@warrington.gov.uk

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