



St Mary's Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106538
LEA Wigan
Inspection number 277584
Inspection dates 28 June 2006 to 29 June 2006
Reporting inspector Ms Julie Price Grimshaw HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Manchester Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Astley
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Tyldesley, Manchester M29 7EE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01942 884144
Number on roll	1679	Fax number	01942 884357
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr J Farrimond
Date of previous inspection	22 May 2000	Headteacher	Mr D Burnett

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 28 June 2006 - 29 June 2006	Inspection number 277584
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic High School is a larger than average mixed comprehensive school; there are 1,679 students on roll aged 11-18. The number of students eligible for free school meals is just below the national average. The school's population is largely white British with a small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly lower than the national average. The school was awarded specialist mathematics and computing college status in September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's self evaluation shows a secure understanding of its strengths and areas for future development, and inspectors agree that overall effectiveness is good. Standards are good, and although students' progress at Key Stage 4 is more rapid than that at Key Stage 3, achievement is good overall. Most of the teaching is good, and there are a few examples of outstanding practice; however, there is too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching, especially at Key Stage 3.

The school provides a safe learning environment, and students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. The school cares for its students well, and good support is provided for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Work with external agencies is emerging as a strength of the school, and there is a clear commitment to the inclusion of all students.

In the main school there is a good range of curriculum activities, complemented by a varied and extensive extra-curricular programme. Leadership and management are good overall. Development planning is of good quality; the school has identified a number of key issues and has begun to implement appropriate strategies to bring about improvement. However, systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are not currently sufficiently robust.

Specialist college status has had a positive impact upon the work of the school, especially in mathematics. Links with feeder primary schools and the wider community have been strengthened.

The school provides good value for money and clearly demonstrates the capacity to make the necessary further improvements.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall sixth form provision is good. The standard of students' work and their progress show clear signs of improvement. These improvements reflect the school's recent focus on a more robust use of target setting in tracking progress, so that any instances of underachievement are more speedily identified and addressed. Students know their targets. Regular assessments inform them of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The curriculum is satisfactory, although at present the opportunities for vocational study are limited. The school clearly recognises the need to develop this aspect of provision, and has already begun to address this issue. Teaching is generally good, but does not always fully engage the students in the development of ideas. Students receive good quality advice and guidance as they move from one stage of their education to the next. The number of students completing courses is high. Leadership of the sixth form is active in implementing procedures that support improvements in attainment and progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of all students during Key Stage 3.
- Implement a more rigorous monitoring system in order to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning.
- Ensure that the sixth form curriculum is more closely tailored to meet the needs of all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, achievement and standards are judged to be good. Students enter the school with above average levels of attainment. The progress which they make in English, mathematics and science during Key Stage 3 is relatively slow, but recent data indicates that this is improving, especially in mathematics. Over the last three years, standards at Key Stage 3 have been above average. The proportion gaining higher grades in national tests was above average in all three core subjects.

Progress accelerates during Years 10 and 11, so that students' achievement across the Key Stages 3 and 4 is good overall. The progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that of other students, and there is little difference between the achievement of boys and girls. At Key Stage 4, achievement and standards are good. For the last two years, the percentage of students gaining five or more higher grades at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) has improved. The same is true of the proportion gaining five or more A* to G grades.

Achievement and standards in the sixth form are good and most students make at least expected progress in relation to their results by the end of Year 13. There are signs of more rapid progress amongst current year groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. Attendance is slightly above average and improving. The school provides a safe and secure environment in which students are happy and behave well. There is a wide range of opportunities that promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school works hard to promote healthy living through its improved catering service, fair trade vending, fitness activities and various special events. Suitable sex education and guidance in keeping safe and well are provided. The school is reviewing a 'pupil development curriculum' in the light of new roles and a strong commitment to inclusion informs planning.

Many students are actively involved in school life, but a minority are not fully aware of the work of the student council and feel that their views are not always considered. Student and parent surveys have been conducted and action taken in response to concerns. However, a small number of parents are not clear about the new lines of pastoral communication. Students feel that bullying is dealt with effectively and they are appreciative of the help and support available. Students are encouraged to engage

with the wider community and there is a very broad range of charitable, sporting and arts opportunities. Innovative enterprise education and effective careers guidance for all students ensure that they develop skills and understand the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching is good; however, it is less effective in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The majority of students and students enjoy their lessons and this reflects the mutual respect between teachers and learners. Consequently, most lessons are conducted in a purposeful and harmonious atmosphere. In the best lessons teaching is dynamic, a range of strategies is used and learners' interest and concentration are sustained. In these lessons teaching is vibrant and the combination of teachers' enthusiasm and subject expertise results in good progress and learning that is with understanding.

In less effective lessons there is too much teacher talk, too little challenge and learners are not actively engaged by the teacher in developing ideas. Question and answer techniques involve only a minority of learners. Consequently learning becomes passive, interest dwindles and the rate of progress slows. This lack of involvement reduces the opportunities for independent learning.

Students are aware of their current levels of performance in terms of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. The relationship between this awareness and their future targets is less clearly understood, and practice in assessment and target setting varies. However, there are some very good examples of students being involved in assessing their work in pairs and small groups. In the sixth form there is a clear and understood use of the connection between targets and grades.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation of the curriculum in the main school as being good. It is a developing and improving curriculum designed to meet the needs of all students in Key Stages 3 and 4. Statutory requirements are fully met. A recent review has begun to bring about significant improvements to the Year 7 curriculum; for example, more time has been allocated in mathematics and English for those students requiring additional support.

A suitable range of academic and vocational courses is being offered at Key Stage 4, with three pathways offered. These enable students to choose a traditional timetable, a mixture of common core and vocational subjects, or the opportunity to focus on preparation for work. Work related courses, enterprise schemes and support for charities

provide opportunities to develop essential life skills. The programme for citizenship meets requirements, but is being reviewed to increase its impact.

The school provides the opportunity for able students to take GCSE examinations in mathematics, French, media studies and statistics prior to Year 11.

The curriculum is complemented by many extra-curricular activities, which are well supported and contribute to the well-being and enjoyment of the students. Students benefit from residential trips and a wealth of cultural experiences, including foreign travel.

In the Sixth form the curriculum is satisfactory and improving. It is currently being broadened to include some new and popular advanced levels and vocational courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares for its students well. Through the committed and visionary leadership of the deputy headteacher and a task group of representatives, a broad range of support workers is developing a powerful partnership. This ensures that vulnerable students, those with difficulties and/or disabilities and the small number in public care are well supported. The school works within a local excellence cluster to offer enrichment activities for able and talented students. The new 'Nurture Centre' is beginning to make a profound impact on the lives of individuals. The co-operation of the police, health professionals and other key workers enhances the quality of support offered.

Students receive effective guidance when making choices at times of transition, but there is some inconsistency in the quality of feedback and advice about individuals' progress. The school is reviewing the role of form tutors in monitoring student performance. The chaplains are an integral part of the guidance team, helping students to reflect and to develop self-esteem. Child protection procedures are robust and clearly understood. Careers advice is effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Overall, leadership and management across the school are good. Members of the senior leadership team work closely together and share a corporate vision for the future of the school. Recently, a number of appropriate strategies have been introduced with the aim of improving the overall quality of provision; however, most are in the early stages of development and impact is not yet fully evident. The school has made progress in establishing procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching of learning. Whilst these systems enable managers to gain a broad overview of strengths and areas for development, they are not yet sufficiently robust in identifying and addressing some aspects of weaker practice.

There are some examples of effective leadership at middle management level; for example, in mathematics and technology, where consistency in departmental practice is evident.

Members of the governing body are clearly committed to the school. They are involved in the selection of new staff, as well as day to day activities, such as leading assemblies. In meetings, governors assist school leaders by exploring issues in detail.

Resources are deployed well across the school, and steps have been taken to act upon issues raised at the last inspection; for example, standards of accommodation have improved. The quality of development planning is good overall, and a coherent cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation is currently being refined.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for sharing your views with us. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

We think that St Mary's is a good school. We believe that the staff care about your personal development and are committed to supporting you during your time at school. There is a good range of subjects and courses offered in the main school, which means that each one of you is able to follow a programme of study in Years 10 and 11 that suits you well. We are pleased that the school is working to further develop the range of options available in the sixth form by introducing new courses, and this should extend opportunities for all students.

You told us that the lessons you enjoy most are those where you take a very active part, and that some of your teachers work really hard to make lessons interesting for you. You also said that very occasionally you are asked to do less interesting tasks, such as copying, and that you do not find this helpful or enjoyable. We think that the majority of the teaching in your school is good and some is really outstanding. Most of you behave well, both in the classroom and around the school in general.

At the moment, students in Years 10 and 11 make faster progress than those in Years 7 to 9. We would like everyone from Year 7 through to Year 11 to make really good progress, and we have asked the school to think about what can be done to help improve the achievement of those in Years 7 to 9. Of course, you have an important part to play here, by working hard and focusing on what you need to do to improve further, so that you make as much progress as you can.

Mr Burnett and all the staff are keen to help you get the very best from your time at St. Mary's. We were pleased that so many of you were happy to be at the school, and we hope that you will work even harder in order to achieve your full potential.