



Mount St Mary's Catholic High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108097
Local Authority Leeds
Inspection number 277903
Inspection dates 1–2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Ellerby Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Leeds
Age range of pupils	11–16		West Yorkshire LS9 8LA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0113 2455248
Number on roll (school)	1135	Fax number	0113 2428486
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Cinta Culkin
		Headteacher	Mrs B King
Date of previous school inspection	20 November 2000		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	1–2 November 2006	277903

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Mount St Mary's High School is a slightly larger than average comprehensive Catholic school for pupils aged 11 to 16. The school currently operates from two sites which lie approximately three miles apart within the centre of Leeds. Its location is in an area identified as having pockets of significant socio-economic deprivation and many pupils are entitled to free school meals. A higher than average number of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of pupils at the school are White British, although there is an increasing proportion, currently approximately 20%, from black or minority ethnic groups. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The school acquired Specialist College status for mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) in September 2003. Following the closure of St Michael's Catholic College at the end of August 2005, the staff and pupils of St Michael's became part of Mount St Mary's High School with effect from September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mount St Mary's High School is a good school. It provides a caring, supportive and safe atmosphere which pupils and parents value highly. This was captured by one pupil who felt, 'Education at this school is good: it makes you feel like you are really getting somewhere.' Pupils arrive at the school with below average levels of attainment and most make at least the progress expected of them. Overall, standards of work are satisfactory and improving. The rise in pupils' achievements and standards over the last two years, particularly in Years 7 to 9, is impressive considering the school's recent amalgamation with another local school. Pockets of underperformance remain, however. Managers have correctly analysed the reasons for the underachievement of certain groups of pupils. One of the key challenges for the school is to continue to improve the standards and achievement for all pupils, particularly those in Years 10 and 11.

The development of pupils' personal development and well-being is good. Their spiritual awareness and moral values are outstanding, reflecting the school's strong Catholic ethos. Behaviour in and around the school is good with a few exceptions. Attendance has improved and is in line with national averages. Many pupils are involved in fundraising activities within the local community and there are good opportunities for pupils to develop their levels of responsibility. The school has given priority to improving teaching and learning across all areas. The systems for setting individual targets and tracking pupils' progress are excellent and well understood by pupils. Consequently, in most lessons pupils make good progress. However, in a few subjects where teaching is less effective, pupils are not sufficiently challenged.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets pupils' needs well. The designation of specialist status has had a positive impact in developing the curriculum, and access to improved resources is enabling ICT to be used effectively as a tool for learning. Results in mathematics and ICT show an improving trend. The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Pupils appreciate the encouragement given by teachers to help them achieve as well as they can. A wide range of support is provided for pupils with complex learning difficulties and recent improvements have been made in better capturing the progress these pupils make. Parents hold the school's work in very high regard.

Leadership and management are good. A highly experienced headteacher provides strong leadership and clear vision. This, along with an effective senior management team, has led the school successfully through a period of considerable challenge with sensitivity and with minimal disruption to pupils. The school regularly completes a thorough self-evaluation which is used effectively to drive improvement. Strategies put in place to address underachievement are mostly effective. However, in some areas of the school's work, monitoring and measurement of actions taken are not sufficiently rigorous to check the extent of impact. Good progress has been made in dealing with issues raised at the last inspection and the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve its provision further.

What the school should do to improve further

- To raise the achievement and standards of all pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Ensure that effective monitoring and evaluation for improvement is consistent across all areas of the school's work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's own judgement that achievement and standards are satisfactory. Most pupils enter the school with below average levels of attainment. Overall, standards reached by all pupils during their time at St Mary's are satisfactory and improving. In order to deal with previous underperformance across Key Stage 3, a wide range of strategies has been put in place and are beginning to take effect, including the better use of assessment and the setting of individual targets to extend pupils' achievements. This has resulted in a significant improvement in performance in the 2006 Key Stage 3 national tests. By the end of Year 9, most pupils are now making at least the progress expected of them and some are making very good progress.

GCSE results improved to in line with the national average in 2005, although they fell to below average in 2006. The school quickly identified the reasons for this dip and has put in place appropriate plans of action. Progress by the end of Year 11 is generally in line with expectations. Most pupils perform very well in English and mathematics but less well in science. Data on pupils' performance are analysed in great depth to identify and tackle pockets of underperformance. There are clear signs of improvement in some subjects, such as ICT and modern foreign languages, although strategies within some subjects are yet to prove as effective. Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are developed well in most cases.

Pupils identified as having particular needs receive good support and make satisfactory progress overall. Some individuals achieve very well. A number of other pupils within this group who have complex learning needs do not always achieve their predicted academic targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good with some outstanding features. One pupil summed up the feelings of many when he said, 'This school is a safe environment in which pupils of different cultures work together very well.' Another pupil called the school, 'marvellous Mary's'. In many lessons and around the school, pupils exhibit positive attitudes and senior pupils talk with enthusiasm about their future aspirations. They are encouraged to eat and drink healthily and to adopt healthy lifestyles through a growing access to competitive sports and physical exercise. The school council and the linked year group councils meet on a regular basis and have recently been active in working towards an improved choice of school uniform.

The number and regularity of fixed term exclusions is decreasing. Positive use is made of a special room to calm pupils who exhibit occasional challenging behaviour. The effective promotion of good attendance and punctuality has resulted in improved figures which are now in line with the national average.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as exemplified by a wonderfully spiritual Year 10 assembly in which several pupils took a very active and symbolic role. Older pupils have a wide range of opportunities to engage in work experience projects and to undertake vocational courses which add significant support and guidance to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors confirm the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning as good. The school invests time and energy in developing teaching and learning styles and there is clear evidence of the positive impact of the national strategy. Planning and preparation are major strengths of good lessons. There is mutual respect between teachers and pupils so that almost all lessons are conducted in a harmonious atmosphere. Consequently, pupils enjoy their lessons. Most teachers have good pupil management skills so that behaviour in lessons is generally good. In a small number of the lessons, teachers' skills did not cope adequately with pupils who are easily distracted.

The setting of targets for each pupil is being used effectively to improve standards. Pupils know their targets, how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well and undergoes continuous revision. It fulfils statutory requirements, is broad and evenly balanced. Well planned provision caters for a wide range of ability as well as social and ethnic backgrounds. The strong Catholic ethos and the benefits of specialist college status are particularly evident. Numeracy is well taught and all subjects promote literacy and skills in ICT. Imaginative provision is made for vulnerable pupils and those at risk of serious disaffection.

Time, staffing and resources are equitably deployed to provide the required range of subjects in Years 7 to 9. A good choice of GCSE and other accredited courses reflects pupils' academic and vocational aspirations and parents' preferences. A robust personal, social and health education and citizenship programme (PSHCE) shows pupils how to live healthily and safely. Citizenship and work related learning feature in many school and extra-curricular contexts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for pupils are good. Effective child protection systems are in place and appropriate safety checks on new staff meet with the latest national requirements. A range of health and safety, medical and accident reporting and recording systems are effective for both school sites and for regular external visits. School staff and a wide range of multi-agency professionals provide significant pastoral and emotional support to a number of vulnerable pupils and for those with English as an additional language. The provision for pupils' PSHCE is of a very high quality and plays a significant role in their personal development. A well attended breakfast club adds to the school's positive welfare provision. Good assessment and tracking systems are utilised well to ensure that pupils are aware of their individual targets for improvement. However, the present systems of monitoring and measuring the progress of pupils with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not sufficiently effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school judges the quality of its leadership and management to be good. Inspectors agree. The headteacher is an inspired and an inspiring leader. Her drive to raise achievement and her vision for the future are infectious. She has created a culture in which staff feel valued, supported and challenged. They welcome their increased accountability. The headteacher and the leadership group have together brought the school through the challenges and stresses of absorbing St Michael's with the minimum of disruption.

Despite being on two sites, three miles apart, the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Staff and pupils recognise that this is an improving school. The school's own evaluation paints an accurate picture. It knows what it does well and what it might do even better. The majority of its work is robustly monitored. Consequently, the development plan is well focused on strategies to drive up standards. However, in some aspects of the school's work, especially where there is underachievement, the effectiveness of new strategies is not always clearly measured to determine the degree of their impact.

The governors are kept well informed. As a result, they give their support and feel able to challenge appropriately. Good links exist with parents and outside agencies, including the local authority. Financial management is robust. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school and for helping us with the inspection. So many of you told us how much you like your school and how it has improved. We were also grateful to those of you who helped us find our way around your school building. This letter aims to outline what we found in our two days at your school, which we hope you will find useful.

We found Mount St Mary's to be a good school. It provides a safe and caring environment in which you can learn. Many of you told us that the teaching and learning are good, and we agree. Your teachers work hard to make sure you are doing as well as you can and that you are clear about what you can do even better. The standards of your work are improving. We were particularly impressed by your behaviour, spiritual awareness and the respect you give to other pupils and teachers. The school supports and guides you well. You have a very committed and experienced headteacher who, along with her senior team, is continuing to improve the school and your achievements. The school's managers know what they do very well and what they need to do better. Most of the action they have taken so far is proving successful.

Inspectors noted two key areas for the school to improve further. These were:

- to continue to improve the standards of your work and your overall achievement, particularly in Years 10 and 11
- to check thoroughly the impact of actions taken to bring about improvements in all subjects and areas of the school.

You can help the school to achieve these by: attending school regularly; continuing to work as hard as you can in all lessons; and maintaining your good behaviour.

Thank you again for your help in this inspection and we would like to wish you all every success for the future.