



St Simon Stock Catholic School

Inspection Report - Amended

Unique Reference Number 118904
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 280430
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Robin Hammerton HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Oakwood Park
School category	Voluntary aided		Maidstone
Age range of pupils	11–19		ME16 0JP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01622 754551
Number on roll (school)	832	Fax number	01622 691439
Number on roll (6th form)	181		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	M Powis
		Headteacher	J McParland
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2000		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	17–18 January 2007	280430

Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to administration error

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Introduction

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, working with three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized comprehensive school with specialist technology status. It works in the 'ME16+ consortium' with local schools and a college to provide a range of sixth form courses. Most students are White British, coming from a wide geographical area because of parental preference for a Catholic education. About one in ten comes from other ethnic groups and there is also a fast growing group who speak English is an additional language. The student population is fairly stable with few leaving or joining the school other than the usual times. Students come from a range of backgrounds but few are seriously disadvantaged. The proportion identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Simon Stock Catholic School provides a satisfactory education for its students with areas of significant strength but also others that are inadequate.

Most parents and students are rightly pleased with the strong, caring, family ethos in the school. Students are all well known as individuals by staff and are given very good care. They enjoy coming to school, work well together, demonstrate generally excellent behaviour and their personal development is consistently good. These strengths lead to a strong feeling of well-being and togetherness in the school community. The school is correctly proud of this but finds it hard to assess itself objectively in many aspects. Its self-evaluation is too optimistic, and not systematic enough, so the school thinks it is better than it is. The progress and particular needs of key groups of students are not well enough analysed. The school is improving but needs to identify more clearly the impact of its development activities. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is highly dedicated, and cares deeply for the students.

Most students achieve satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment and ability and overall standards throughout the school are broadly average and improving. The proportion of students gaining higher grade GCSEs is above the national average. Standards in English are generally good but those in science and history are too low across the school. Generally, in Years 7 to 11, girls do not make as much progress as boys. Many students with learning difficulties receive inadequate support, have unclear individual targets, and make unsatisfactory progress. Some lower attaining students, who are not necessarily on the special needs register, do not achieve well enough. The students for whom English is an additional language are looked after well but there is no specific programme to meet their particular needs when they join the school.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall, and good in the sixth form, but does not provide appropriate courses for all students at Years 10 and 11, especially some who are lower attaining. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but good in Years 10 and 11. Students' progress is fastest in these two year groups, despite the above shortcoming in the curriculum.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory overall because the teaching and the progress of students are satisfactory. However, there are a number of features which are better than this. For example, the school provides a good range of courses and the ME16+ consortium enables students to access an even broader range of academic and vocational options. Students are listened to carefully to ascertain which new courses should be provided. There is a good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Students are looked after very well and given outstanding, well-informed advice about their course and career options. They have good opportunities to develop personally. For example, some students take part in community service, such as work in a hospital and in schools. The new leadership in the sixth form is effective and improving. New systems have

recently been put in place to monitor and improve teaching and learning and to track students' progress more efficiently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide better targeted support for all students with learning difficulties and monitor these students' progress more rigorously against their individual small step targets.
- Ensure that school self-evaluation is made more realistically against clear, understood criteria; and ensure that the impact of improvement activity is evaluated dispassionately and robustly.
- Evaluate more thoroughly the progress and needs of particular groups of students, including girls, lower attainers, and those for whom English is an additional language; and improve specific provision for these groups.
- Raise standards in science and history.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Attainment on entry at Year 7 varies from year to year but overall it is slightly above average. As students progress through the school, there is a complex pattern of achievement. Many attain test and examination results with which they are rightly pleased. For others, and some groups of students, there is room for improvement. Overall, achievement is satisfactory.

At age 14, there has been some improvement in standards over time. In 2006, achievement was good in English. Students achieved satisfactorily in mathematics and science. Some girls and lower attaining boys in Years 7 to 9 have underachieved over time whereas the achievement of lower attaining girls has been improving.

At age 16, the percentage of students with five A*– G grades has risen and a higher proportion of students than nationally attains five A*– C grades including English and mathematics. Many students make their fastest progress in Years 10 and 11. However, when compared to their ability and prior attainment, more students could have been expected to achieve higher grades and too many girls continue to achieve less well than expected. Those students who enter Year 10 with high attainment in English and mathematics continue to make good progress in these subjects.

Students who speak little English and those with learning difficulties, except most with statements, do not make sufficient progress because their needs are not targeted systematically enough. In general, students achieve well in modern foreign languages, information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education but standards are too low in history. Results in science are below expectations given the students' ability.

In the sixth form, students achieve soundly overall, with the most academically able students attaining good results in A-level courses. The percentage of higher grades

in academic and vocational courses has risen over the last three years. However, results in some subjects are lower than expected, most notably in science, history and mathematics. As in the rest of the school, results in English are strong.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students benefit greatly from the many opportunities they are given to grow into young adults. Their moral and social development is strong and reinforced in many aspects of their schoolwork. Spiritual and cultural development is also good, with students speaking highly of the way in which their understanding and thinking have been stimulated. Parents and students point out some instances of lapses in behaviour but generally the behaviour of students around school and in lessons is excellent. They are confident, friendly, helpful, keen to learn and very supportive of each other. Attendance is above average. Many contribute to the life of the school in such activities as the school council, work for charitable causes and participating in sport and music. However, there is not yet an expectation that every student, or form group, should seek to make a special or personal contribution to the school community.

Students enjoy school, feel secure and work safely. They strongly commend the work of staff in dealing with any bullying through 'reconciliation and forgiveness'. They eat healthily in the school restaurant. Sixth form students provide good role models for younger students and are well prepared for managing their future lives at university or in employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and at their best in Key Stage 4.

In Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form, most lessons have interesting content and relationships are good, which helps learning. Some lessons are very well planned and delivered.

In these lessons, teachers often use assessment objectives to plan the learning and provide feedback to students about how they can improve. Activities are varied and there are often good opportunities for pair and group work. However, in too many lessons, teachers talk for extended periods so that students are not actively enough engaged. The pace of learning is rather slow. Students show very positive attitudes but do not progress as fast as they might because work is not sufficiently well matched to their needs. In years 7 to 9, marking is inconsistent and comments are often too

general to help students make their work better. In the sixth form, marking is more informative, telling students how to improve.

In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are good overall and particularly strong in some subjects, helping many students to make good progress. For example, technology is taught very well, which befits the school's specialist status. This motivates many students, including numerous boys. The pace of learning is usually faster. Students are given more opportunities to work independently and practically, showing great motivation. They are given good guidance and advice from teachers and feel they can succeed as work is often more closely matched to their needs. Students, especially those with higher attainment, know what they need to do to reach their targets, helping them advance their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

From Years 7 to 11, the curriculum is satisfactory and covers requirements. Most students' needs are met in an enjoyable and interesting way by the courses offered and the ability banding arrangements. Students in upper bands are often challenged and enthused well. In the lower bands, this can also be true but the situation is more variable. The ways in which students in these bands can progress through different levels and courses appropriately for their needs are not always as clear. For example, no specific literacy and numeracy intervention programmes are in place to support students who need them in Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, there is one non-GCSE course for students of lower academic attainment but only a narrow range of work-related courses. The school has, however, recognised the issue about girls' achievement and is piloting single sex groups in Year 9 in English and religious education.

The ICT, technology and PE curricula are particularly good and make a strong contribution to students' motivation and enjoyment as well as raising standards. The extra-curricular programme is broad and varied: it is very good in PE and there are many revision classes and homework clubs. Good opportunities exist for day and residential visits, including trips to France and Germany to support foreign language learning in each year group. Students enjoy joining in school productions.

In the sixth form, the curriculum meets students' needs well, while ME16+ provides a good range of academic and vocational courses for students of different abilities and needs. There are clear progression routes for students in Year 11 moving into the sixth form. They are given good guidance and advice when choosing the courses most suited to them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students receive very good pastoral care and support, stemming from the school's Christian ethos. Every student is truly known and respected as an individual. School staff and the chaplaincy team work closely to nurture each one. If any student needs extra support, after a difficult time or a stay in hospital for example, it is given in abundance. The attendance and behaviour of students, particularly those needing any additional guidance, are closely followed. Exclusions are rare. Most students are set challenging targets and report that they are appropriately advised about their standards and progress. School leaders show very strong commitment and care to students, but they are less adept at tracking the needs and progress of particular groups. This leaves some gaps in support for these groups. For example, insufficient proactive work is undertaken to meet the needs of the growing number of students unused to being taught in English.

In the sixth form, students receive particularly strong support. They are cared for very well indeed and given excellent guidance about their course and career options.

Students are safeguarded diligently and risk assessments are carried out thoroughly. The school works closely with other agencies. General communications with parents are effective. However, although parents are pleased with the care the school provides, many say the school is too slow to respond to them about specific incidents or individual causes for concern.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher is a passionate and committed leader who has led many important developments. These include significant improvements to facilities, the move to specialist technology status, the introduction of ME16+, motivating and training staff and dealing robustly with important staffing issues. He is very clear about the importance he places on each individual student. The deputy headteacher works closely with the headteacher and contributes well. Other senior leaders provide sound support, being committed and sure of their individual responsibilities.

Although the staff work hard on it, school self-evaluation is inadequate. It is not sharp enough in many aspects, including the achievement of key groups of students, and is too often descriptive rather than analytical. The school finds it difficult to make dispassionate evaluations of its work, or to apply objective criteria. Some areas needing improvement, such as provision for students with learning difficulties, although not ignored, have not been identified with sufficient detail or clarity. However, the school has identified key strengths and areas for development in teaching with some accuracy.

The school improvement plan is effective in driving change. It is well constructed and clear about what actions need to be taken by whom and in what timescale. It involves staff well, has a high profile, and makes a positive difference. The school is improving and has satisfactory capacity to continue its improvement. This is held back from being good by the limitations in self- evaluation which mean that the areas needing improvement are not identified with sufficient precision. In turn, this makes it harder to measure progress and success robustly.

Middle managers, including subject and student progress leaders, make a good contribution. They are clear about what they want to improve and have the scope to make a difference. Many are experiencing good professional development.

The management of provision for students with learning difficulties, and for those with English as an additional language, is inadequate. The additional educational needs coordinator works hard and effectively and is bringing about improvement. However, the demands on her time are substantial and, although she receives some support, overall there is insufficient resourcing to manage these aspects of the school successfully.

The governing body is well organised and committed. When they have reliable information to work with, there are several examples of governors making a useful contribution by challenging and supporting senior staff. However, governors too readily accept the school's over-positive self-evaluation, which reduces their ability to fully challenge the school to improve.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

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	1	
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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

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?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	4	
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	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

We really enjoyed meeting you when we visited your school recently. We were very impressed. Our inspection report says that you are confident, friendly, helpful, keen to learn and very supportive of each other. This doesn't mean that occasionally some individuals don't do things they shouldn't do, of course. But, generally, your attitudes and behaviour in school are excellent. Very well done!

Overall, we found that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Some things about the school are really good and others need to be improved. The main good things are the way you are cared for and looked after as individuals, the advice and guidance you get, your personal development and, of course, your excellent behaviour. Your school is a really good community to belong to – and it is all of you who do so much to make that true. Many of you do well in tests and exams but there is still room for improvement. More of you get higher results in some subjects than others. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who don't speak much English, and some of you who just find some things a bit difficult, need better help. The school needs to get better at working out how well it is doing and being clearer in working out what needs to be done to improve.

It was good to see so many of you enjoying your lessons and joining in with clubs, teams and activities outside lessons. We were also really impressed with the way you carried on with PE in the pouring rain and how you really enjoyed yourselves! It'll be good when your sports hall is back in use.

Your school is good at asking you all what you think. As the staff and governors work on the key points we have raised in the inspection, they may well ask you for your ideas. Your point of view matters, so please be thoughtful about this. Keep working hard, try to reach your targets, and enjoy being in school.

With best wishes for the future,