

St Mary's RC High School 'A Specialist Science College'

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116992
Local Authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	302345
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	701
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Burbage
Headteacher	Clive Lambert
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Lugwardine Hereford HR1 4DR
Telephone number	01432 850416
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This smaller-than-average Roman Catholic school takes pupils from all over Herefordshire. Pupils come from a range of economic backgrounds, although overall the level of deprivation is lower than average. The boy-to-girl ratio varies from year to year. Currently 57% of pupils are girls and twice as many girls than boys took the 2006 GCSE examinations. Most pupils are of White British heritage and the remaining 4% are from a range of ethnic backgrounds. On entry to the school pupils are of above average ability, although there is variation between different year groups. The school has about half the national average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school became a science specialist college in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It is a school that achieves superb outcomes through its unique way of doing things. The leadership team have allowed staff to get on with the job and staff have responded splendidly. Standards are well above average and achievement is outstanding. Although the school is smaller than average, pupils benefit from an extensive curriculum that is carefully matched to the needs of all. Vocational choices have grown significantly and are available to all, regardless of ability. Teaching and learning have improved further since the last inspection, so that they are now outstanding.

Leadership and management are outstanding because there is a clear shared vision and an awareness of what needs to be done next. The headteacher has created a real buzz in the school about teaching and learning. Improvements have happened largely as a result of the informal sharing of good practice because staff are so committed to doing the very best for pupils. Heads of department have played a very important role in this and a key factor has been the creation of a whole-school group that spreads good practice across the school. The skilful nurturing of these two elements, the recent adoption of higher aspirational targets and the school's very good track record of improvement confirm the school's outstanding capacity to improve.

The school has taken full advantage of its specialist status to develop further the use of its site of special scientific interest and extend the science curriculum. The specialism has contributed to increased links with a range of partners. The science department's effective approach to making clear to pupils how they can achieve at the highest levels is being spread through the school.

Pupils think their school is rather special. A Year 10 pupil captured this perfectly when he commented, 'This school is more like a family: everybody knows each other'. This family atmosphere is a key reason why care, support and guidance are good. The monitoring of pupils' progress is undertaken very well by departments, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The school is aware of some inconsistencies in monitoring, particularly around its use of data. This has delayed the impact of some initiatives and has previously resulted in some gaps in the system for maintaining an overview of the progress made by individual pupils in all subjects.

Pupils feel very safe and contribute very positively to the community both in the school and beyond. There are a host of opportunities for pupils to help others and take responsibility. The school has been so successful in developing a 'giving' culture that almost every Year 10 pupil wants to serve as a prefect. Substantial sums of money are raised for charity and the school council is playing a leading role in improving the school. Not surprisingly, pupils enjoy school enormously, attend well and behave impeccably. The very high standards achieved and the excellent work-related learning prepare pupils really well for the future. This completes a picture of outstanding personal development and well-being. In view of the outstanding outcomes, it is easy to see why the vast majority of parents are highly supportive and strongly agree that the school is doing a very good job.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a more consistent approach to the use of data in monitoring the work of the school and the progress made by pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are well above average and achievement is outstanding. The GCSE results in 2006 were well above average overall, and above at five or more grades A* to C with and without English and mathematics. Results in English were amongst the very best in the country and those in other subjects were very strong. The gap between the school's results and those achieved nationally has been substantial for a long time but recently this gap has widened further. All pupils gained qualifications, with almost all attaining five A* to G GCSE grades. When the attainment of pupils when they entered the school and the comparatively low levels of deprivation are taken into account, achievement is outstanding. This is because all groups of pupils achieve consistently well through both key stages. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make outstanding progress and there is no difference between the achievement of boys and girls.

In 2006, the results at Key Stage 3 were well above average for the proportion of pupils attaining above Level 5 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. This picture was similar at the higher Level 6 and Level 7. Attainment in other subjects is also above average. Achievement at Key Stage 3 is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, are outstanding. Pupils are polite, extremely well behaved and they make an outstandingly positive contribution to the community. In addition to the big sums raised for charities, pupils also contribute positively through a wide range of activities. Pupils act as prefects, sports coaches and peer mentors and listen to younger pupils read. Friendly relationships exist with adults and pupils' ideas are listened to well. The school council has been reinvigorated and is working hard to improve the school. They are delighted at the school's decision to give the council a dedicated budget so they can implement improvements more rapidly.

Pupils eat healthily, including those bringing packed lunches, and they enthusiastically take part in physical activity. At lunchtime, many pupils were playing tennis very sensibly. Safe practices are adopted and pupils indicate that they feel safe and secure in the school. Largely because pupils enjoy coming to school attendance is good, and behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. The school is rightly taking further steps to improve attendance. Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being because they attain very well and have high levels of basic skills and awareness of the world of work. Pupils also have excellent independent learning and team-working skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. No inadequate lessons were seen and the vast majority were good or better. In the most effective lessons, pupils are clear what they need to do and work with a determination to succeed. This response is down to the teachers' consistently high expectations and the careful choice of a good range of activities. This was evident in an

imaginative Year 7 history lesson in which pupils enjoyed analysing the evidence and coming to their own conclusions about what might have happened. The team teaching observed in a Year 9 English lesson was outstanding because of the very high levels of commitment engendered amongst all pupils. Although small in number, learning support assistants make an excellent contribution.

The marking of pupils' work is generally good, with guidance frequently given as to how improvements can be made. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well, especially in the promotion of pupils' independent learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It has improved significantly as the school has made changes to ensure it fully meets the needs of all learners. The school has excelled in developing partnerships with local providers and schools to provide a very good range of vocational courses. Pupils of all abilities are benefiting but this contributes most to the progress made by those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The school's Catholic ethos permeates the curriculum and is a major contributing factor explaining why the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. This was evident during the inspection, when Year 8 pupils were applying their mathematical skills in the context of aid provided for third-world countries. From Year 9, more-able pupils can study a second foreign language. Many departments organise enrichment activities for gifted and talented pupils. The curriculum supports healthy lifestyles consistently well, including in French lessons, where pupils order healthy food from a bistro. Industry, enterprise days, science festivals and work-experience placements contribute to effective work-related learning. Here again, the school makes excellent use of local partnerships to extend the curriculum. Progression routes beyond GCSE are well established because the school has very strong links with local colleges.

The school provides a very good range of enrichment activities and high levels of participation. Pupils have exceptional opportunities to organise a range of activities. During the inspection, Year 10 were enjoying their role in organising the 'Eisteddfod'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Central to the ethos of the school is the emphasis given to caring for all members of the community. The very good links with outside agencies enables the school to care very well for the small number of vulnerable pupils. As a result, they achieve very well and permanent exclusions are virtually non-existent. Individual plans, to ensure pupils' special needs are met, are based on an accurate analysis of need and are communicated effectively to all. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress, partly as result of the excellent support they receive.

The transition from primary schools is managed well so pupils settle quickly in their new school. Pupils have adults and trained pupils they can speak to about any problems. Mentoring undertaken by adults and peer support from pupils contributes to the positive attitudes to learning and the outstanding behaviour. Careers guidance is comprehensive. The school has taken great care to ensure only high quality healthy food is available.

Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and appropriate responses have been made to ensure all pupils make at least good progress, particularly in GCSE courses. However, the role of heads of year and form tutors in maintaining an overview of pupil progress is relatively under-developed. Safeguarding procedures meet all government requirements. The school is aware of some health and safety issues related to the premises.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and senior leadership have set a clear direction for the school which, in the headteacher's own words, is 'an unstinting desire to improve'. Membership of the senior leadership team is flexible and roles are shared widely, resulting in a wealth of ideas about how the school can be improved. Heads of department contribute significantly to the high standards and achievement because of the attention they give to carefully monitoring pupils' progress. Excellent links with a range of partners have improved provision.

The school makes accurate judgments of the overall quality of learning and has detailed information of the strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers. Heads of department, particularly in core subjects, are using data well when they carry out reviews of their work of their subject areas. A relative weakness in monitoring is that there are not always enough measurable outcomes identified in planning, and progress is not always checked at an early stage. This explains the delay in improving the consistency of homework. However, the small size of the school and the exceptionally positive ethos is such that very good improvements have been achieved without as much formal monitoring as occurs in many schools.

Governors are outstanding. They are very supportive and informed and have made a significant contribution to the school's outstanding standards and achievement. Financial planning is a particular strength; governors and the school's business manager work well together and have used their expertise to recover from a financial deficit. The school now gives excellent value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

6 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's RC High School 'A Specialist Science College', Lugwardine, Hereford
HR1 4DR

Thank you for your contribution to the recent inspection of your school. Those pupils interviewed had great difficulty in thinking of ways in which the school could be improved. This is because your school is outstanding in almost every area. You did a good job in telling us about all the excellent aspects of your school and we agreed with your views.

The best things about your school are the fantastic outcomes. Your achievement, personal development and well-being are outstanding. These outcomes are no accident; they happen because you experience outstanding teaching and because the school has worked hard with others to ensure you are on the right courses at Key Stage 4. We agreed totally with the Year 10 pupil who said that the school is like a family because everybody knows each other and the school cares for you like a parent would. Ultimately, a lot of the credit must go to your headteacher who has managed to get the best out of the staff.

We have suggested an area for improvement to do with how the school uses information about your achievement to monitor what is happening. We think improvement here would allow heads of year and form tutors to be more involved with you in checking your progress and also allow the school to review the effectiveness of any new ideas more quickly. You can help by continuing to take advantage of all the many opportunities you are given to make a positive contribution to the school and community.

Well done for the part you have played in making your school very special. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick Her Majesty's Inspector