

St Peter's Catholic High School Visual Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106537
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	309158
Inspection date	18 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Jim Kidd

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 on roll	
School	937
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Terrence Sweeney
Headteacher	Miss Helen Jerstice
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Howards Lane Orrell Wigan Lancashire WN5 8NU
Telephone number	01942 747693
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; personal development and well-being; teaching and learning; the curriculum; care, guidance and support; and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's evaluation of its performance, relevant policies, parents' questionnaires, summaries of reports by the local authority, interviews with members of staff, discussions with students and observation of the school at work, including visits to lessons.

Description of the school

This average-sized and over-subscribed school serves a wide area. There is a full spread of social circumstances represented in the school. There is a small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups but very few are new to learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. St Peter's is an Eco School, holds the Healthy Schools Award and has been a visual arts college since 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Peter's is an outstanding school. Pupils achieve at the highest levels personally and academically and parents typically comment, 'Our children have become confident in the work they produce because the teaching staff have given them the belief that they can always do well.'

Pupils are proud of their school and feel safe within it. One boy spoke for many when he said, 'Bullying is very rare here because it is not St Peter's way and we look after each other.' Pupils are correct in their belief that their teachers and learning support assistants care for them exceptionally well. The excellent support and guidance that pupils receive lead to them being fully aware of what they need to do to improve their standards. As a result, and from above average levels of attainment on entry to the school, pupils make excellent progress in their academic work, irrespective of their levels of ability, and consistently surpass their very challenging targets. GCSE results have risen year on year since the previous inspection and at a much faster rate than nationally. The percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics continues to be high and in 2007, more pupils reached A* and A than ever before.

Visual arts college status is central to all aspects of the school's work and a wide range of subjects has benefited from curricular initiatives promoted by the specialism. The science and architecture week and the many school productions, for example, are a direct result of cooperation across subject areas. Corridors and classrooms are adorned with pupils' artwork and both boys and girls take immense pride in producing assignments through a variety of media. Primary schools and nurseries take full advantage of visits from teachers and pupils who wish to share their expertise in the visual arts with them but the impact of specialist status on other parts of the local community is underdeveloped.

Pupils behave impeccably in lessons and around school. They enter assembly in perfect order and are fully engaged by the thought-provoking themes introduced by their teachers. They greet visitors warmly and are delighted to tell them about how much they enjoy all aspects of school life. They feel valued and also valuable and have the highest respect for the adults who work with them. They treat their peers with the utmost consideration and sensitivity and older pupils act as role models for their younger counterparts. As pupils say, 'We are one big happy family here. St Peter's makes us all feel happy!' Child protection procedures are in place and fully meet statutory requirements. The high levels of achievement in English and mathematics prepare pupils very well for life beyond formal education.

The school council has an enviable reputation among pupils and plays a major role in encouraging them to eat healthily and stay fit. Members organise activities designed to care for the environment and, along with prefects, they write letters to pupils in the local primary schools to welcome them to St Peter's.

Since the previous inspection, the school has placed considerable emphasis on developing the quality of teaching. As a result of very well received in-service training, the sharing of expertise and good practice across departments, and a willingness of all staff to do their very best for their pupils, the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers demonstrate expert subject knowledge and have very good relationships with their pupils. High levels of challenge, sophisticated questioning techniques to encourage pupils to think more deeply about the subject-matter and a wide range of methods to meet individual learning needs are the key

features of lessons. Pupils respond positively to the many opportunities they have to work together and they act as a resource for each other with a maturity which belies their years. From lower-attaining pupils improving their fluency in French to new entrants considering the nature of history, fun and enjoyment are the order of the day and pupils often astound themselves at what they achieve.

The curriculum offers pupils a wide range of courses at both key stages and the flexible Three Pathways approach in Key Stage 4 ensures that pupils' needs, interests and aspirations are met closely. Pupils report a high degree of satisfaction with their subject choices and are grateful for the opportunities to follow an increasingly wide range of academic and vocational courses, both on and off site. There is a rich variety of extra-curricular clubs, sometimes including voluntary classes in examination subjects. When formal lessons cease at the end of the day, the school remains alive with activity and pupils continue to be fully engaged with what it has to offer. Sport is an important part of school life and St Peter's has a national reputation, particularly in Rugby League.

The outstanding leadership of the school has ensured impressive progress since the previous inspection. Accurate self-evaluation and the establishment of highly effective strategies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and the achievement of its pupils place it in a very strong position to make further improvement. The headteacher, very well supported by the senior management team, has high expectations of both pupils and staff and insists upon accountability at all levels. Leaders of academic subjects and pastoral care have a keen understanding of performance in their areas of responsibility, and also demonstrate an astute awareness of whole-school provision. They feel supported by senior staff and welcome the opportunities they have to challenge the leadership and play a full part in the running of the school. Governors have close links with the school, are fully supportive of it, but are not afraid to hold the senior and middle leadership to account.

St Peter's is a school which prides itself on fostering the highest standards of pastoral and academic care. Teachers, non-teaching staff and governors speak with one voice about what it tries to do. In their words, 'Our school is about children and young people. They are our very purpose.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the impact of visual arts college status in the local community.

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Annex A

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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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?	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.

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you so much for your warm welcome when I visited your school recently. You were very helpful and friendly to me and I enjoyed talking to you in lessons and around school. I would now like to share with you what I think about your school.

St Peter's is an outstanding school, and I know you are very proud to attend it. Your behaviour is excellent and you treat visitors, other pupils and adults with respect. Your staff care for and support you very well indeed and you play your part too by looking after younger pupils whenever this is needed. There is no doubt that pupils new to your school settle down very quickly and look up to older pupils as role models.

You make outstanding progress in your lessons because you work hard and benefit from excellent teaching. The school's results at GCSE have risen every year since 2004 and in 2007 more pupils reached the highest grades than ever before. The standards you reach in art are also very high and visual arts status has a major effect on the success of so many other subjects. I have asked your teachers to make sure that the visual arts make a greater impact on the life of the local community.

Your progress in personal development is also excellent and your attendance is much higher than in most other schools. The school council has a high reputation and does as much as it can to encourage you to express your views, eat healthily and care for the environment. Sport is a very important part of your school and everyone was delighted when your team won the English School's Rugby League trophy.

The vast majority of you are very happy at St Peter's and are right in your belief that you have so many choices of subjects for GCSE. Your teachers are concerned to make sure that you enjoy your education and the school leaders are excellent at making sure that it improves all the time.

Thanks again for your impressive contribution to the inspection. It was a pleasure to watch you learn.