

St Mary's Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106538
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	324422
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Cox

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,620
Sixth form	313
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Farrimond
Headteacher	Mr D W Burnett
Date of previous school inspection	June 2006
School address	Manchester Road Astley Tyldesley Manchester M29 7EE
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 43 lessons and held meetings with staff, governors and pupils. They looked at the work of students in their books and the school's records of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Minutes of governing body meetings were seen and a range of school policies, including those on safeguarding and health and safety, analysed. An analysis of 230 parental responses was also made.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The performance of students at the end of each key stage, including the sixth form.
- How effective teaching is in challenging all students and the pace at which they learn.
- The quality of support and care that the students receive throughout their time at school.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average and has mathematics and computing specialist status. The majority of students are of White British heritage and the proportion qualifying for a free school meal is smaller than the national average. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is smaller than the average as is the number of students with a statement of educational need. Nearly one fifth of the teaching staff was new to the school in 2008. The headteacher currently spends around a third of his time working with the Department for Children, Schools and Families as an education adviser. The school has a number of awards including Investors in People, Excellence in Work Related Learning and Healthy Schools.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is an outstanding school run by a caring and committed leadership team and staff. A significant strength of this school is its students, in the way they respond very well to what the school does for them. Students' progress throughout each key stage is good and their attainment is above average. Teachers are confident in the use of assessment data and have easy access to this through the developing virtual learning network helped by the specialism and the resources it brings. However, lesson planning to ensure that the full range of student abilities is met across all subjects is currently underdeveloped. Relationships between students and their teachers are excellent as is their behaviour and attitude to learning. Christian values of helping one another and looking for the best in everyone permeate school life and helps provide for the outstanding care students receive. Students' attendance is high and punctuality strong. They speak with pride of belonging to the school and are appreciative of the extent to which many teachers go to help secure their success. One student's comment summed up those of many, 'It's not just a school it's like belonging to one big family...It's about real people becoming better citizens.' The school is well placed to do even better. It demonstrates a good capacity to improve because improvements since the last inspection have been secured and the decline in student achievement in English and mathematics in 2008 halted. The school knows itself very well and is now able to challenge underperformance of students and teachers quickly because of the effective monitoring and tracking systems in use.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the practice of setting different work to challenge students across the ability range in all subjects to help raise student achievement further.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

Students come to the school with broadly average attainment and make good progress. Their attainment is above average as seen in the national tests by the end of Year 11. A rising trend of strong performance was evident in the three years prior

to 2008 in both key stages. The 2008 results for students in Year 11 in English and mathematics showed a decline. This was due to staffing issues, which have now been resolved. Currently students' progress as seen in lessons is consistently good and in some cases it is outstanding. A broader view of standards in all subjects indicates the trend is firmly above average and improving. School data shows that all groups of students are currently on track to meet the challenging targets set. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress in line with their peers because of the good support from staff and of other students. This was seen, for example, in an outstanding technology lesson when students helped other less able students with their practical work.

Students enjoy their learning: they talk of being happy at school and feel very safe. There is a high level of respect between each other and with adults. This helps to create a purposeful and secure learning community that contributes well to students' good achievement. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They move around the buildings in a calm and patient manner. They know who to seek advice from and look to others for good role models. This is not just to adults but also 'peer mediators' who offer advice and guidance. Students appreciate involvement in this initiative as givers and receivers of support and guidance. This is an effective method in building self-esteem and an excellent example of the strong Christian principle of helping one another.

Students have a generally good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and many participate in the physical education and extra-curricular sporting activities provided. Whilst student understanding is evident, the practice and attitude of a minority is contradictory. The Nurture Centre is an outstanding facility that helps develop the learning and social skills of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including some of their parents. Additionally, its impact on the emotional health of those that attend is impressive.

Students' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are above average. They face the challenges in learning and preparation for life after school very positively. There is excellent teamwork in lessons and a strong moral understanding of what is right and wrong. The eagerness of the students to take on responsibility in support of each other is outstanding.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

Students appreciate the extra mile that many of their teachers go in order to progress their learning. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and effective planning helps to build students' understanding well. There are times, however, when the planning does not take full account of students' range of ability. Where the better learning was seen students were enthused and motivated because of the variety of well matched tasks. For example, in a Year 10 law lesson the potentially dry topic of bail conditions was learned in an exciting interactive and rapid way. Expert questioning techniques extracted considered and well thought out responses from students of all abilities resulting in progress being rapid, secure and beyond students' anticipated levels. Where learning and progress were less strong the topics were mundane and uninspired and did not match students' needs well enough. In spite of this, the mature attitude and outstanding behaviour of students meant that the learning objectives were met. Students appreciate early entry for some subjects. They speak of being challenged and stretched when entered for external examinations in Year 9 and some AS level subjects in Year 11. Marking does not always indicate how students can improve. The school's methods of assessment are good but not all teachers use this information in their planning to drive learning forward for the whole ability range.

The school offers a very wide range of courses within its curriculum which is innovative and personalised to meet the needs of all students, particularly those in the Nurture Centre. Opportunities for girls and boys are offered in the popular vocational subjects of hairdressing and construction, delivered in partnership with local businesses. Much goes on after school to enrich the learning of students including sporting activities and additional classes. All staff have the students' best interests at heart. Parents and students appreciate the well considered induction into the school and the transition from one key stage of learning to another. Initiatives to support those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, their parents and families are outstanding.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school is led by a dedicated and committed senior leadership team. It has an ambitious vision for the school as demonstrated in its high levels of care and support. Development planning is strong and priorities clear. The high turnover of staff, due to retirements and promotions has been handled well and those teachers new to the school feel well supported and included. The school's specialism has impacted positively on the recruitment of sixth form students and has helped raise attainment, particularly in Key Stage 3, by the use of new technologies in lessons. The planning and monitoring of the journey to improvement is regularly assessed. The school knows itself well through close evaluation of the performance of subjects and students. As a result the school demonstrated convincing evidence that the cause of the decline in attainment in English and mathematics last year will not be repeated. During the headteacher's secondment, opportunities exist for others to develop their leadership skills where responsibilities are shared.

The school fulfils its statutory obligations well. There are good opportunities to ensure all students do equally well and achieve their best. Safeguarding procedures are outstanding. The school meets its requirements. Health and safety, including risk assessment policies and practice, are robust, reviewed regularly and adhered to very closely. Governors hold the school to account very well demonstrating high levels of support and challenge. Much is done to solicit the support of parents in the learning and development of their children. The school is aware of the need to provide clearer lines of communication with parents and is, for example, developing its virtual learning network to better inform parents of student progress. Excellent links with the business community and other schools within the locality exist. These partnerships help strengthen the curriculum and the opportunities available to the students. The school does much to contribute to community cohesion and has strong development plans in place. There is evidence of good local and international community integration such as adult learning courses and the links with a Kenyan orphanage.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Sixth form students achieve well. Careful identification and support for those students at risk of underachieving have helped accelerate progress and improved achievement in all subjects. Retention of students is good and helps secure their success at A level. Students have good attitudes to their work and are well motivated showing independence and taking responsibility for their own learning. Most students progress onto higher education and current sixth formers have high expectations for their future. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community by helping younger students and improving the local environment, for example, through involvement in recycling projects.

Good teaching secures good progress in lessons: it builds on what students know and helps them close gaps in their understanding. Use of assessment is thorough and contributes to good evaluation of student achievement. Students are clear about the levels of their work currently and are eager to meet the challenges of the targets set. They are very positive about the range of subjects on offer and appreciate being consulted by the school to shape the curriculum. They enjoy the enrichment activities, particularly the range of visits offered, which helps to bring their learning to life in many subjects. They comment very positively on the help they are given in taking the next steps in their education. Despite some limitations relating to accommodation, available resources are used well to support learning.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A good proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire and they were highly supportive of the school and overall very satisfied with their children's experience. They acknowledged the strength of leadership and management and the care and support their children receive. An area where they felt some concern was communication between school and home, inspectors agree with this view. The school is aware of what they need to do and have development plans in place.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



26 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Mary's Catholic High School, Tyldesley, M29 7EE

Thank you for making me and the other inspectors so welcome at your school when we came to inspect it recently. We were very impressed with your mature attitude and behaviour. We enjoyed our time with you particularly at our meetings, but also when chatting en route to lessons, during lessons and at lunchtime. You help make St Mary's what it is and we judge it to be overall, an outstanding school.

You receive good teaching and make good progress in your learning. There are some outstanding aspects including the support, guidance and care you receive and your attendance. Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development provides you with an excellent moral framework that you happily work to.

Doubtless your teachers say to you there is always room for improvement. This is the same for your school. We have asked the headteacher and his staff to improve in the following area.

We want your teachers to be better at setting work for students of all abilities so that they are challenged in all lessons ensuring they reach their full potential.

I am sure that you will help the school achieve these improvements because you are mature, sensible and confident young people who are a credit to a school that thinks highly of you.

The very best of luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Cox
Lead inspector

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