

St George Voluntary Aided Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116507
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	326413
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Christopher Russell 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	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	431
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Godfrey Doyle
Headteacher	Mr Graham Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	28 September 2005
School address	Leaside Way Swaythling Southampton SO16 3DQ
Telephone number	02380 322 603
Fax number	02380 322 606

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St George College is a small boys' school that admits students from a wide geographical area. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased significantly in recent years and is above the national average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly below average. The school was designated a specialist science and humanities college in 2005. The current headteacher has been in post for almost two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St George is a satisfactory and improving school; a number of aspects of the school's work are good. The parents who responded to the parental questionnaire were almost universally positive about the school and its recent improvement.

Students' achievement and standards have been low for a number of years. Examination results are improving and students are making satisfactory progress. This is mainly because the quality of teaching and learning is improving. Almost all lessons are at least satisfactory and a growing number are good or outstanding. However, the overall picture is variable and a significant proportion of less effective lessons remain. In particular, some lessons lack a variety of activities and provide too few opportunities for students to work independently or with each other. Lessons also do not always meet the specific needs of students sufficiently closely. The quality of marking and written feedback to students is variable and, in some cases, students are given insufficient guidance about how to improve their work.

An improving curriculum is also contributing to students' better achievement. At the time of the last inspection, the curriculum was inadequate. A wider range of options are now available, including much greater access to vocational courses at Key Stage 4.

The school provides good care, guidance and support. In particular, the way in which the school sets targets and monitors students' progress has been strengthened. This is allowing staff to identify students who could achieve more, so as to provide them with targeted support. However, staff do not make full use of information about students' potential and current achievement when they plan their lessons. Students' personal development and well-being are good. As the quality of lessons has improved, students' enjoyment of learning has increased, although students are sometimes rather passive in weaker lessons. Older students are very clear that behaviour has improved significantly in the last two years. Students make a wide range of contributions to the school and local community, and have a good awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle.

The headteacher has set a very clear vision and direction for the school and has successfully driven through a wide range of improvements in a relatively short time. There is a strong sense of common purpose and ambition among the staff and morale is high. The way in which the school's effectiveness is monitored and evaluated has been strengthened and senior leaders have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to make this a good school. Much is being done to enable middle leaders to contribute fully to the school's development: the quality of middle leadership, which has been inconsistent, is improving rapidly. The school's work as a specialist college is satisfactory. A notable area is the school's strong contribution to the city's celebration of Black History Month. The school's capacity to continue its improvement is satisfactory; the work that is being done to strengthen middle leadership is increasing it rapidly.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - all lessons are varied and interesting for students
 - teachers use assessment data more extensively when planning lessons so that work matches the needs of individual students more closely
 - marking provides students with clear advice about how to improve their work.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly average. They make satisfactory progress as they move through the school and attain average standards. Students of all abilities and from all backgrounds make satisfactory progress.

The progress made by students taking GCSE examinations in the past three years has been below average. Examination results improved in 2008: these students made better progress, although their overall progress was still below average. In particular, a greater proportion of students achieved five or more higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. There is clear evidence to demonstrate that students are increasingly making greater progress and that students taking examinations this year are on target to achieve more.

The school is meeting its specialist targets in humanities and mathematics. With improvements in its science provision, it is also on target to meet or exceed its targets in science this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students have mature and considerate attitudes to each other. They report that they feel safe in school and that, where bullying occurs, it is almost always minor name calling. Behaviour in lessons is secure and often good, although this is sometimes because teachers manage behaviour effectively rather than because students always show the initiative in behaving well. Students' attendance was below average in 2007 and 2008; it is now improving and is close to the national average. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their enthusiastic participation in the wide range of extra-curricular physical education and sporting opportunities makes a strong contribution to their ability to lead healthy, active lives.

Students enjoy a wide range of opportunities to contribute within the school and more widely within the city, for example through the active college council or the school's involvement in the city's Black History Month. These opportunities help students to develop important wider skills, such as in leadership and teamwork. However, opportunities to develop these skills in lessons are often lacking.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Senior leaders have worked hard to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning and to eliminate inadequate practice; much has been achieved.

Where teachers plan lessons that interest students and include varied activities, students respond very well, showing real excitement in their learning. However, these lessons are in the minority. Less effective lessons typically have the following characteristics: planning that is not based sufficiently on students' targets and current attainment; too much talk by teachers and a lack of variety in learning activities. The way in which lessons meet the needs of students

from all groups, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and with English as an additional language, is improving, but senior leaders recognise that teachers could do more to enable these students to make greater progress.

Teachers typically give good oral feedback to students. Some marking is helpful and provides clear guidance to students, although much marking is sporadic or too vague to be helpful.

The quality of teaching and learning in the specialist subjects of humanities and mathematics is strong; in science it is improving rapidly. The humanities department has been used to provide examples of teachers using more active teaching styles.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has developed well in recent years. Having identified that lower-attaining students were not well served by the previously narrow academic curriculum, the school has worked to broaden its curriculum to include a wider range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4. The curriculum at both key stages continues to develop as senior leaders focus on providing opportunities to meet the needs of all students as closely as possible. Leaders are mindful of the challenge of developing the curriculum, given the school's small size, and are looking to form further partnerships with other local schools. A range of visits and visitors to the school helps to enhance the curriculum, as does a range of extra-curricular opportunities, which are particularly strong in sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students are provided with a good range of care and support. Vulnerable learners are identified and supported well. Arrangements for safeguarding are rigorous and comply with government requirements. Effective systems for managing behaviour and supporting students have resulted in improvements in behaviour and a fall in the number of exclusions. A range of strategies are helping to reduce absence. The school's intake has changed significantly in recent years, with a significant influx of students from Eastern Europe and an increasing number of students with English as an additional language. Much has been done to support these students and to ensure that they are well integrated into the life of the school. Support for students with English as an additional language, which was weak at the time of the last inspection, is now more secure. The recent appointment of a specialist teaching assistant is helping the school to provide more targeted, specific support to these students.

The school collects and analyses information about students' progress more regularly. This is enabling it to target additional support to students much more effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

This is a school with a very clear direction and a strong focus on improvement. The systems that enable leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work have been strengthened and senior leaders are doing much to develop leadership and management across the school. A rigorous system is in place to evaluate the work of subject departments each year. Middle leaders are being trained to enable them to observe lessons accurately and feed back to staff

to help them to improve their teaching. Improved data about students' targets and progress are helping senior leaders to hold staff accountable for students' achievement. Middle leaders' self-evaluations of their areas of the school are improving, although the overall quality is variable. Middle leaders are increasingly able to contribute to the school's development, although improvements are still at a relatively early stage and the full impact on outcomes for students is yet to be seen.

Governors provide useful support to the school. Their ability to challenge leaders is being enhanced by the improving quality of data about students' progress. The local authority has worked closely with the school to support its improvement. The school has made good use of this support, for example to provide an external view when they evaluate the work of subject departments.

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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?	3
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	3

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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
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**

17 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St George Voluntary Aided Catholic College, Southampton, SO16 3DQ

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. We found that the school was satisfactory overall and improving, with a number of good aspects.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Improvements in teaching and learning are helping students to achieve more. Students taking GCSE examinations last year made more progress than those who took them in 2006 and 2007. However, while we saw many good lessons, we found that the quality of lessons is still too variable. Some lack variety and interest or do not match your particular needs and abilities. The curriculum has also improved a lot in the past few years and more courses are now available. We also found marking to be variable: while some is good, some does not give you specific enough advice about how to improve your work. We have asked the school to work on these areas.

The school looks after you well and helps you to develop as young people. For example, you clearly appreciate the wide range of opportunities for extra-curricular physical education and sport, and they help to keep you healthy. You are mature and considerate to each other and make a considerable contribution to school life. Behaviour in lessons is often very good, although this is sometimes because teachers are good at managing your behaviour rather than because everyone shows initiative in behaving well. Students' attendance has improved this year - congratulations on this improvement.

The way in which leaders monitor the school's performance has improved a lot recently. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They know what to do next to help the school to improve further. You can help by ensuring that everyone continues to attend well and takes responsibility for their own behaviour in lessons. This will help you to benefit from the improvements in lessons.

Yours faithfully

Christopher Russell

Her Majesty's Inspector