

St Simon Stock Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118904
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339320
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1063
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Powis
Headteacher	John McParland
Date of previous school inspection	7 January 2007
School address	Oakwood Park Maidstone Kent ME16 0JP
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors spent approximately half of the inspection time visiting the lessons of 38 teachers, observed form tutor periods, and held meetings with representative governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at students' work, teachers' planning and assessment information, the school's planning documents and the arrangements for safeguarding students. In addition, 154 parents' and carers' questionnaires were analysed.

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

- students' achievement and how effectively the school uses assessment data to track and improve students' attainment, particularly of girls and those with the most complex learning needs.
- the impact of the school's specialist status on the curriculum and students' outcomes
- the sustainability of recent improvements in sixth form achievement
- the accuracy of self-evaluation to review and improve the school's performance.

Information about the school

Most of the students at this average-sized school are from White British backgrounds. An increasing number are from a range of minority ethnic groups, and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is higher than in the majority of schools. Because of its faith status, the school draws its students from over 40 partner schools. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average and covers a broad range of needs. The school holds specialist technology college status. The headteacher is due to leave the school at the end of the spring term to take up another headship.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Simon Stock Catholic School is a good school. Students feel exceptionally safe which enables them to thoroughly enjoy a full school life, make good progress and develop high aspirations for the future. A strong emphasis on Christian beliefs and time devoted to reflection are seen in students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and in the respect with which students and staff treat each other. Students develop strong social skills within this highly inclusive school. They are exceptionally polite and mix well. The school's positive ethos and excellent care, guidance and support encourage initiative. Students make an outstanding contribution to the wider community.

The overall outcomes for students are excellent. Although teaching and the curriculum are good, there is room for more improvement in some aspects of these to increase students' progress still further. These are factors in why the school is not yet outstanding.

Students' above average attainment and often outstanding wider personal skills prepare them very well for the next stages in their education and working lives. Overall attainment when students join the school is slightly below the national average, but GCSE and A-level results are above average, representing good achievement for students. The school has worked hard to eradicate some differences in the performance of subjects evident in the last inspection.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding, which helps students to enjoy learning. They are enthusiastic and engaged in lessons because of the good overall teaching. An interesting and relevant curriculum effectively enables students to develop their interests and aspirations. Occasionally, some lessons, although satisfactory, fall short of the standard of the best lessons which are well paced and give students opportunities to investigate things for themselves. Sometimes, teachers engage students in whole-class discussions for too long so that they do not have enough time to be actively engaged and test out their own thinking in individual or group research. Although there are many examples of good practice, on occasions teachers' questioning is not sufficiently probing or challenging for all, and opportunities are missed to involve students in assessing the quality of their own work.

The headteacher provides exceptionally strong leadership and is very ably supported by other senior leaders. As a result, there is an outstanding shared view of the school's values and direction, driving improvement forward. All aspects of the school's work have improved since the last inspection. Areas, such as self-evaluation and support for students with learning difficulties, identified as weaknesses then, are now significant

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strengths. At subject level, monitoring and evaluation are accurate and well developed, giving the school a good overall capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to the quality of the best so that students' achievement is even better by:
 - ensuring that all lessons are conducted at a fast pace
 - developing teachers' questioning skills to make sure that all students are challenged in their thinking
 - providing students with more opportunities for enquiry-based learning
 - giving students more activities to help them to assess the quality of their own learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' outstanding outcomes are directly attributable to their excellent behaviour, good attendance and the very positive relationships with staff and each other. These features, when combined with the good range of activities, help to make learning enjoyable and effective. Students are highly motivated and collaborate and learn well from one another because their views are valued.

Students' attainment in GCSE is generally above average, particularly in the important measure of five plus A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, with 2009 seeing the school's best performance to date. In 2009, the attainment of students who speak English as an additional language was also above average. The school broadly meets its specialist targets, making a positive impact on students' overall achievement. Performance in English and mathematics has been consistently strong. Changes made to the teaching of science and history, as seen in lessons, have brought about significant improvement in attainment since the last inspection, for example in triple science (this is the combination of work on physics, chemistry and biology). In particular, the introduction of some separate teaching groups for girls and boys in English, science and religious education is helping girls to make better progress than previously, bringing girls' performance overall into line with that of boys.

At the time of the last inspection, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities were not doing well enough. This pattern has been reversed and all groups of students make similarly good progress. This is a direct result of improved assessments coupled with the close monitoring of students' progress and the prompt and effective action taken if any student begins to fall behind.

Students are exceptionally mature, proud of their school and reflect on many issues directly related to their own experience and more broadly on global issues. Many students participate in a broad range of sporting activities, which help them to be fit and healthy. Community values are central to the school's work. Students act as mentors and learning coaches, giving support for reading, they run the school shop and enjoy

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being school councillors or ambassadors. They regularly organise assemblies and help those in need, such as through community service and regular fund raising.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Students do well academically because of effective teaching and a good curriculum. Teachers have good subject knowledge and awareness of students' levels of attainment, and use this well to plan work which is well matched to students' needs. Regular marking and effective systems for students to understand the level of their work mean that they understand how their work links to coursework and examination requirements and what they have to do to improve. Teaching is not yet outstanding as in a minority of lessons teachers talk too much and do not give students enough opportunities to do things for themselves or to evaluate the quality of their own work, or that of their peers, as it progresses.

Well-trained teaching assistants assist students to make progress. Assessment information is used accurately to identify those students who would benefit from additional support. The curriculum, particularly in Key Stage 4, gives students clear

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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pathways into sixth form or further education courses. The 'golden curriculum' for some students in Years 7 and 8 is proving successful in strengthening their literacy and numeracy skills by being part of a supportive peer group. The school's technology specialism provides students with additional opportunities. For example, a group of students have improved their literacy and leadership skills by compiling a high-quality brochure about the activities related to technology. In lessons, information and communication technology is used to illustrate and enliven learning. The school offers an exceptional range of extra activities. The school holds awards including School Achievement, Healthy School and a range of sports awards.

The recently introduced mixed-age tutor groups have added to the supportive attitudes between students within different years as they share difficulties, resolve problems and empathise with others' situations. Provision for vulnerable students is excellent and staff awareness of their needs ensures that they are well supported. Transition between all key stages, into Year 7 and towards the sixth form and exit to university, college or work, is well organised and highly valued by students and their parents. This is especially important in the additional 'guided choices' evening so students with learning difficulties choose subjects where they will be successful. Attendance, already above average, is improving year on year because of the positive impact of the 'Carmel Centre' and supported learning centre.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff at all levels are proving very successful in their commitment to ensuring the best outcomes for students. Staff feel their contribution has a positive impact, know what the school is trying to achieve and share in the agenda for raising attainment. Action taken since the last inspection has raised achievement and the quality of teaching and learning, although more remains to be done to bring all teaching to the quality of the very best.

The governing body plays an effective and strategic role in the school. It has a good understanding of aspects of school life, for example through inviting subject leaders to give reports at meetings. Governors are looking for additional ways to engage parents further.

Procedures to ensure that students are kept safe, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, are thorough. The school is highly effective in

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ensuring that there is no discrimination and that there is equality of opportunity for all students. For example, the gap is closing between the achievement of girls and boys. Those students with the most complex learning and emotional needs are now doing much better than they did in the past. The attention paid to the progress of individuals and groups ensures that no-one is marginalised and any emerging gaps in performance are tackled effectively.

The school is very cohesive, as shown in the quality of relationships between all groups of students, whether of the Catholic community or other faiths. The school promotes community cohesion within the local and global community well through links with local primary schools, community groups, active work with businesses and other institutions. There are growing links with schools abroad through exchanges and twinning arrangements. The school is further strengthening the international dimension of its work, for example, by closer links with a school in China.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students make good progress, and both attainment and achievement have risen since the last inspection. Students take responsibility for their own well-being and make a very positive contribution to the school community. Attendance is well above average. Teaching is good overall. Teachers have strong subject knowledge which underpins clear explanations and questioning, and there are plenty of opportunities for students to work collaboratively, pursuing their own enquiries and research and refining their independent learning skills. However, as in the rest of the school, sometimes teachers do not take advantage of students' enthusiasm because they talk for too long and miss

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the chance to challenge students' understanding through questioning or investigations. The curriculum matches the needs and wishes of the students well. In addition to a good range of A- and AS-level courses, the school has increased its flexibility in recent years, for example with the addition of vocational courses in business studies, personal finance and computer skills.

The sixth form is underpinned by outstanding care and guidance. Students benefit from regular, tailor-made advice on their capabilities and progress. They have individual aspirational targets and are given good quality feedback on their written work. They are confident, mature and well-rounded individuals both socially and academically, ready to take a lead in whole-school activities. Students organise many school activities and social events, sing in the choir and participate in a range of sport and fitness activities. They also undertake community service by working in local schools, charity shops, a local hospice and helping with the 'Listening Paper for the Blind'. Good leadership is driving up standards through action based on thoughtful and detailed monitoring of teaching and students' progress. Leaders take the views, opinion and feelings of students seriously so that support is well focused, and student behaviour and confidence in the school are excellent. These conditions give the sixth form a good capacity for sustained improvement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
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

Views of parents and carers

The large majority of parents and carers are wholly positive about all the school provides, making comments reflecting the school's strong ethos such as, 'A caring school ' really wants the students to do well but not just about results. A lovely environment for any young person.' The overwhelming majority indicate that the school is well led and that 'the headteacher will be greatly missed'. Many parents of students in Year 7 commented on how quickly their children had settled into the school and the success of the personal tutoring system. A few parents believe that the school does not take account of their views. The inspection found that the school makes considerable effort to consult parents through a variety of surveys, parents' evenings, newsletters, email and the school's website. The governing body is considering ways to improve communications with parents and carers further.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Simon Stock Catholic School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 154 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,053 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	47	31	100	65	5	3	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	74	48	83	54	4	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	66	43	83	54	4	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	60	39	77	50	12	8	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	55	34	85	55	11	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	46	30	90	58	15	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	35	23	107	70	10	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	52	34	90	58	6	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	51	33	91	59	8	5	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	61	40	79	51	9	6	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	24	84	55	17	12	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	71	47	75	49	4	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	81	53	63	41	7	5	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Simon Stock Catholic School, Maidstone, ME16 0JP

Thank you for the warm and polite welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. You are right to be so proud of St Simon Stock Catholic School. It is a good school. Inspectors were able to see how you enjoy coming to school so much. I am writing to let you know about our findings. I can only highlight a few of these and hope that you will also take time to read the whole report.

- Behaviour is outstanding and the school is a cohesive and positive community.
- You develop exceptionally well personally which, together with the good progress you make, gives you an outstanding basis for further study or work.
- Examination results are improving well in Year 11 and the sixth form.
- You really get involved in everything the school offers and many of you make an outstanding contribution to school life and community events.
- Good teaching and a curriculum based on your needs and interests help you to do well.
- You have a good understanding of your targets and what you have to do to improve further.
- Your responses in the questionnaires show us that you feel valued and that teachers and adults listen well to what you have to say. You also confirm that the school is well led and managed.
- The school's specialist technology status enriches your experiences.

The school is keen to become even better in the future. We have suggested that you would make even better progress if all teachers gave you opportunities to:

- do more for yourselves, for example through research projects, and not have to listen to teachers' input for so long
- think about how well you understand lessons by asking challenging questions
- assess the quality of your own work through more self- or peer-assessment.

We know that you will do your best to help the school to build on its current strengths. Best wishes for every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector

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