

St Paul's Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126101
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315428
Inspection date	7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Marcia Headon HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	647
6th form	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Bailey
Headteacher	John Flower
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Jane Murray Way Burgess Hill RH15 8GA
Telephone number	01444 873898
Fax number	01444 873899

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. During a one-day visit, the inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards and achievement in the sixth form, especially as represented in the 2007 performance data; the impact of the specialist status; and the effectiveness of the academic guidance in ensuring students know how they can improve. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF), national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and students and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

St Paul's Catholic College is an oversubscribed specialist sports college, with a second specialist subject of geography. Students transfer mainly from a family of Catholic primary schools over a very wide area. Since the last inspection in March 2004, the school has moved from its previous site in Haywards Heath to new purpose built accommodation in Burgess Hill. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is below average. Slightly less than 10% of the students come from minority ethnic groups and the proportion whose first language is believed not to be English is well below the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is below average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'The most impressive thing about St Paul's is its atmosphere: when you enter the school you are struck by something indefinable which, coupled with its ethos, makes it a unique caring place where children flourish.' This quotation from a parent encapsulates the outcomes of this inspection. St Paul's is an outstanding school where all learn, thrive and succeed together. Students and staff have real pride in their school and all talk of the importance of their community.

A major key to the success of the school is the excellent leadership and management of the headteacher and senior team, supported by high quality middle management. They share a strong vision of a school where the achievement of every individual matters, but the well-being and happiness of each student are equally important. The school uses the phrase 'high challenge/low stress' and students confirm that this is put into practice fully. 'Teachers are always prepared to help you, even to the extent of replying to an email about work over half term so I was not kept wondering', remarked one student. Parents, many of whom say their children have 'blossomed' during their time at this school, appreciate the support given.

Students join the school with just above average levels of attainment; when they leave, their GCSE results are exceptionally high. In 2007, 83% of the students achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, at 77%, was significantly above the national average. Results in Years 9 and 11 have consistently been exceptionally high for the last three years. A particular strength of the school is the achievement of students with LDD, but all groups of students make excellent progress. This is a direct result of the outstanding teaching and learning supported by high quality guidance and support.

Teachers are expert in their subject areas and this makes for lessons that challenge and stimulate students of all abilities and ages. The pace of lessons is very good, learning is reviewed at the end of each session, and the school environment makes it an exciting place to learn. Excellent displays of students' work motivate and encourage high quality learning. For example, the work in the art corridor is dazzling. The detailed use of assessment information means that students' progress is tracked closely and targets set are appropriate and challenging. There is also significant involvement of students in open and honest assessment of their own performance and that of their peers. Students themselves know that each may have differing learning needs and know that their teachers understand this and plan lessons carefully to meet their needs. 'E-learning' is integral to the life of the school and enhances learning. Students speak enthusiastically of the ability to access all work and lessons online, even from home, allowing them to revisit or catch up on areas where they are less certain. The school acknowledges that access to the 'virtual learning environment' by parents is currently limited but it is developing.

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students are highly appreciative of the many opportunities available to them at school, their behaviour is exemplary and they grow up as mature, articulate citizens with a deep commitment to the school and wider community. They understand their rights and responsibilities and this is reflected in very good relationships and their very positive attitudes to learning. Students feel very safe at school and report that any bullying is dealt with quickly and very effectively. Students are acutely aware of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle and speak positively about the choices of food available, and the number who participate regularly in sports and physical activities is

a strength of the school. Well above average attendance is testament to students' enjoyment of their education. The care, guidance and support provided throughout the school are outstanding. Students with LDD and those who are vulnerable are particularly well looked after. The school is a highly inclusive community and staff conscientiously provide strong pastoral care in keeping with its Catholic faith. Parents see the impact of this and one said, 'We have seen our son develop into a confident young man at ease with his faith.'

The curriculum in the main school is excellent and offers students appropriate courses that are very well matched to their needs. The range available has been extended to provide greater flexibility and choice that motivates students and provides pathways to further education, training and employment. Very good careers advice gives students a clear view of their future. The specialist college status permeates all areas of the school and has had a very significant impact upon teaching and assessment in subject areas. Students are enthusiastic participants in the innovative enrichment programmes that have been introduced as a result of the specialist status, and an impressive feature of the school is the strong emphasis placed upon developing leadership skills amongst students, especially through the highly successful and very innovative student leadership programme. Links with the community are strong and students benefit from work experience which prepares them very well for their future economic well-being. All leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance and seek to improve continuously the excellent overall quality of students' learning experiences. The school sets itself challenging targets, which they met at GCSE in 2007. There are high expectations of staff but they rise readily to the challenge. The school is supportive of the professional development of staff and encourages fresh approaches and innovation in teaching strategies. Creativity is encouraged; for example, the limestone pavement built in the geography department develops understanding in an innovative manner. Systems for the safeguarding of students are thorough, reviewed very regularly, and meet current government requirements. Governors have a clear commitment to the ethos and direction of the school and are very well informed about students' achievements and the quality of teaching and learning. They are fully involved in the life of the school. Strong teamwork has created excellent capacity and drive for continuous improvement. As a result, staff and governors have a very clear and realistic understanding of what the school does well and they know how they wish to improve it further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Standards in the sixth form are above the national average and this reflects outstanding progress, given students' attainment on entry. Their personal development and well-being are excellent. Sixth form students take on a range of responsibilities both in the school and in the wider community, for example, mentoring younger students, coaching students in primary schools and working for local charities. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Teachers work in close partnership with the students and this generates an atmosphere of trust that encourages learning. Teaching is of high quality because teachers involve students, listen to their views on their lessons and incorporate their suggestions into future planning. There are high expectations of the students and work is demanding. However, in the sixth form there is not currently a sufficiently wide range of vocational courses on offer. Students work hard and make very good use of study time. Care, guidance and support from teachers are outstanding and students appreciate the approachability and helpfulness of staff. Students are well prepared for the world of work and higher education through good careers advice. Sixth form leaders and managers have a very

clear vision and a commitment to improvement and this has a positive impact on outcomes for the students.

What the school should do to improve further

- strengthen the provision for vocational education in the sixth form.

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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	16-19
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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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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	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	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	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	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	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

8 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Paul's Catholic College, Burgess Hill, RH15 8GA

Thank you very much for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking with you and your views were very important in helping me to reach judgements. I thought the display of Irish dancing in the Year 7 assembly was spectacular.

It is very clear that you are proud to attend St Paul's Catholic College and rightly so!

I have judged your school to be outstanding.

What I liked most was:

- your commitment to your work and the results which you achieve
- your well developed sense of community and the way you care for each other
- the mutual respect between the staff and yourselves and your exemplary behaviour
- the opportunities you have through the student leadership programme
- the displays of your work around the school – especially the art work
- the high quality teaching and pastoral care which the staff give to you
- the excellent leadership of Mr Flower and his senior team.

To improve even further, I have suggested that the school should:

- strengthen the provision for vocational education in the sixth form.

I am sure you will continue your enthusiasm for learning and I wish you all the best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Marcia Headon Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools