

St Damian's RC Science College

Lees Road, Ashton-Under-Lyne, Lancashire, OL6 8BH

Inspection dates

11–12 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The exceptional leadership of the headteacher has raised standards in the school more than ever before.
- Standards in English, mathematics and science are good due to much improved, good quality, teaching and highly effective performance management.
- There is high-quality support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by a team of staff, including the school chaplain.
- Students are polite, well mannered and courteous. They respect and value their teachers.
- Arrangements to keep students safe are good. Safety is a priority.
- Students say that behaviour has improved 'beyond recognition'. They behave extremely well and show very mature attitudes to learning.
- The senior leadership team and middle leadership teams are strong and provide great capacity for further improvement.
- The leadership and management of behaviour, attendance, achievement, teaching and learning are clear strengths of the school.
- Members of the governing body have strong educational expertise. They, in partnership with the staff, are relentless in their drive to make the school outstanding. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and achievement, through careful monitoring.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do not always receive high-quality support for literacy in lessons.
- Not enough teaching promotes outstanding progress because it does not always challenge the most able students.
- Targets for students' achievement are not consistently aspirational.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors took account of the 62 responses to the online Parent View survey.
- The inspection team observed 31 part-lessons and made a series of short visits to nine other lessons. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, senior and middle leaders, over 80 students, including representatives of the pupil forum and the entire cast from the school's production of 'Fame'.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wealth of other evidence provided by the school, including self-evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings and examples of performance management.
- Inspectors also examined a wide sample of students' work, scrutinised school improvement planning, evidence of students' current achievement and policies relating to behaviour management and anti-bullying. Inspectors also checked the single central record.

Inspection team

Sally Kenyon, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Osama Abdul Rahim

Additional Inspector

Timothy Gartside

Additional Inspector

Alan Brine

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average sized secondary school for students between the ages of 11 and 16.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (government funding to help schools support children of armed forces families, students who are looked after by the local authority and students who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well below the national average.
- The proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Two students are educated off-site. One attends Tameside College and the other 'Brighter Placements' and 'The Experience.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching, particularly for the most able, by:
 - planning questions and activities carefully to allow the most-able students to develop their ideas
 - ensuring that all targets are aspirational and reflect outstanding progress
 - sharing more widely best practice in assessment and moderation of students' work.
- Further accelerate progress for disabled students and those who have special educational needs by:
 - allowing students time to consider questions and to plan and develop their responses
 - ensuring that students consistently receive the necessary support with writing and spelling.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students start school with abilities typical for their age, although the proportion of more able students is slightly higher than average. Students typically make good progress in lessons and the large majority leave with at least five good GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics. The proportion of students achieving 'A-A*' grades is above average in many subjects and continues to rise.
- Progress in mathematics was an area of weakness at the previous inspection and it is now a clear area of strength. Students make good progress in mathematics due to good quality teaching. Standards in English have recovered well from last year's dip in performance and students were observed by inspectors making consistently good progress in both these subjects. Progress in science and religious education is also strong.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to accelerate reading for all Years 7 and 8 students. This has led to a healthy competition of who can be on the 'million words tree', a real status symbol for avid readers.
- Students who attend off-site provision achieve well and have very good attendance records.
- Half of the Year 11 cohort has been entered early for GCSE English. Results are already better than last year's. All students made expected progress with many making much better than expected progress. Those students who achieved 'B' grades instead of 'A-A*' will be re-entered in the summer.
- Equality of opportunity is central to the school's ethos. Any gaps in the attainment of different groups have been identified and are being addressed to good effect. Students who are eligible for the pupil premium are making much better progress. For all abilities in mathematics last year, the number of pupil premium students making better than expected progress was above the national average.
- In 2013, the gap between the pupil premium students and their peers in English was half a GCSE grade and in mathematics it was one full grade. This demonstrates a year-on-year improvement in the outcomes for this group. The gap is forecast to narrow further this year. Inspectors observed no difference between the progress of those eligible for the pupil premium and that of their peers.
- Some disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress but this is not consistent, principally because they do not always receive the literacy support they need. However, their progress is now rigorously tracked by the new special educational needs coordinator and schemes of work are being reviewed to ensure that they always get appropriate literacy support.
- Most targets are aspirational and more challenging targets are set for the most able students. However, on a few occasions teachers are allowed to set lower targets for some students which impedes their progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- The large majority of teaching observed by inspectors was good and some was outstanding. In a Year 11 science lesson students made outstanding progress due to the teacher's in-depth subject knowledge and planning. Students explored the reactivity of metals. Any misconceptions they held about ionic and covalent bonding were quickly dispelled by the teacher. Challenging questions ensured that students thought in detail about the subject; progress in books was similarly rapid.
- Some teachers really challenge students to think for themselves. For example, in a Year 8 religious education lesson, students responded to the question 'Why do people get married?' A thought-provoking debate ensued, facilitated well by the highly skilled teacher. The notion of love was discussed along with arranged marriage, forced marriage and people seeking

citizenship through marriage. The classroom atmosphere was vibrant; students were very eager to have their say.

- Unfortunately, not all teaching allows students, particularly the most able, to think about and explore ideas so deeply, which restricts their progress.
- The pupil forum has been instrumental in raising the quality of teaching. Its members have introduced a system for teachers to give them feedback on their work with an opportunity for them to respond and improve their work. Excellent examples of this were seen in modern foreign languages and in science. Also, on every desk there are clear expectations for presentation in books. High expectations are constantly re-enforced.
- Assessment, monitoring and tracking are rigorous, particularly in English, mathematics and science. However, not all teachers assess students' progress accurately enough, particularly in other subjects, where assessments can be over-generous.
- Some good support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs was seen, and physically disabled students achieve well due to the high expectations and inclusive school ethos. However, in a small minority of lessons students did not receive enough support for writing and spelling and, consequently, did not make good progress.
- In many lessons, social, moral, spiritual and cultural themes are explored. For example, issues of exploitation and equality were debated in one Year 11 English class and a Year 10 girl wrote a beautiful poem about discrimination, which has been published. However, assembly time is not always used to inspire students and some students say that assemblies are repetitive.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. This good behaviour is seen in lessons and at social times. The overwhelming majority of students regulate their own behaviour; consequently, little supervision from staff is needed. Bus drivers say that the students' behaviour is excellent and almost all parents who responded to Parent View feel that their child is safe in school and that the school ensures that students are well behaved.
- The vast majority of Year 11 students are prefects and proudly wear their distinctive tie. Year 7 students help out in the very busy library at lunchtimes; students are keen to partake in the running of the school.
- Fixed-term exclusions have fallen dramatically and, when they do occur, they are usually only for one day. The number of students repeatedly excluded is low, an indication that the behaviour system is working well. Referrals to the internal seclusion unit have similarly fallen as the quality of teaching has improved.
- The school site is well designed and the use of natural materials to create wooden walkways and dry stone walls creates an attractive school environment where students organise themselves into friendship groups. The Eco group grows tomatoes in the summer and tends to a lovely memorial garden.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Arrangements include risk assessments and good communication for staff on duty at social times. Students say that on the rare occasions that bullying occurs, they know they can tell any member of staff and it will be dealt with and taken seriously.
- Students have a very strong awareness of cyber-bullying. Mobile phones are not allowed to be used in school and this rule is well observed. Students similarly know that racism and homophobia are totally unacceptable, but work around homophobic bullying has not had the same high profile as racism and cyber-bullying.
- Attendance is well above the national average and continues to improve. The attendance of students who are eligible for the pupil premium has increased significantly and is similarly above the national average.

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership is good and there is excellent capacity for further improvement. The leadership of the headteacher is strong and assured; he leads by example. He and his team have the full support of staff and the overwhelming majority of parents. The headteacher knows his staff and students well, and monitors the quality of teaching daily.
- The tenacious leadership and management of teaching have made the biggest impact on improving achievement. As a result of well-focused staff training, many teachers have improved their performance. Underperformance has been unequivocally tackled. Many staff who received high salaries and whose performance did not meet expectations have left. There is a very clear relationship between performance and pay progression.
- Newly qualified and recently qualified teachers are well monitored and supported. Some very good practice was seen in lessons taught by those who are relatively new to teaching.
- The curriculum is well matched to students' needs. There is a small and appropriate offer of vocational subjects but the mainstay of the curriculum is traditional and academic. Students receive good quality information, advice and guidance involving their parents. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities on offer.
- Students recently performed the musical 'Fame'. They say that opportunities like this build their confidence and help them make friends across different year groups. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the school is rich and varied, indicative of the inclusive ethos. Lots of charitable work takes place, for example, Year 7 students sell stationery at break-time to raise money to send clothes and toiletries to children in Africa.
- Middle leaders know their departments well and rigorously track the progress of students as individuals. They lead teaching and learning communities where they share good practice, discuss teaching ideas and review schemes of work. However, a number of leaders, including the head of modern foreign languages and the special educational needs coordinator, are newly in post so the impact of their work cannot yet be seen.
- The local authority provides 'light-touch' support for this good school. It has helped governors with some training around school performance data. It feels that the number of students travelling considerable distances to attend St Damian's is a very good indication of the school's success.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have aligned themselves to departments and are using their specialist subject knowledge well to provide a good balance of support and challenge. They have sought training through the local authority and, as a result, have a much better understanding of the school's performance data. They have supported senior leaders to tackle underperformance.
 - Governors undertake a thorough analysis of examinations and the Chair of the Governing Body conducts unannounced learning walks through classrooms and attends pupil forum meetings so that she understands first-hand how well students are achieving. Governors track the progress of the pupil premium students through their termly meetings with middle leaders. They know where pupil premium funding is spent and know that gaps in achievement are narrowing, but their criteria by which to measure the impact of the funding are too generic and not specific enough to this target group.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	106270
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	426182

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 of pupils on the school roll	770
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Jones
Headteacher	Sheldon Logue
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2012
Telephone number	0161 330 5974
Fax number	0161 331 4744
Email address	admin@st-damians.tameside.sch.uk

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