

St Damian's RC Science College

Inspection report

Unique reference number	106270
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	384919
Inspection dates	28–29 February 2012
Lead inspector	Shirley Gornall HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	771
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Jones
Headteacher	Sheldon Logue
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2010
School address	Lees Road Ashton-Under-Lyne Oldham OL6 8BH
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Introduction

Inspection team

Shirley Gornall
Jim Bennetts

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 23 lessons taught by 23 teachers, of which ten were joint observations with members of the school's senior team. They also observed an assembly and a chamber choir practice. Inspectors held meetings with students, parents and carers, members of the governing body, staff and a school improvement officer from the local authority. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, and considered feedback from the parents' forum. They observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents including students' books, the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plan, safeguarding policy and single central record, behaviour records and minutes of governing body meetings.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average and includes Indian, Pakistani, African and Eastern European students. The majority of these speak English as an additional language but few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly average. A few students join the school at times other than the normal starting points.

When it was inspected in December 2010, the school was judged to require special measures. Since then, the school has undergone considerable change. A new headteacher took up post in January 2012 following a period when the school was led by an executive headteacher. Sixteen teachers have left the school and new staff have been appointed. The school moved into new purpose-built premises in spring 2011.

The school has received two monitoring inspections and, on its most recent one, was judged to be making good progress. Students' achievement is above the current floor standard which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4. The school has specialist status for science.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.
- The school provides a satisfactory and rapidly improving quality of education. Students' achievement is satisfactory. The progress of all groups of students, including those who are disabled or with special educational needs, is accelerating and attainment is rising. However, students' skills in mathematics are weaker than those in English and require further improvement.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall with an increasing amount that is good or outstanding. Lessons are often stimulating and challenging, underpinned by excellent relationships between staff and students. On occasions, teachers do not anticipate or respond quickly enough to students' varying work-rates or misconceptions. Some teachers have excellent questioning skills but others do not encourage students to develop their verbal responses sufficiently.
- Behaviour is good and the positive attitudes of the vast majority of students contribute to their improved learning. Relationships in school are largely harmonious and mutually respectful. Attendance levels are above those found in most secondary schools.
- Leadership is good. The new headteacher has quickly gained the confidence of staff, students, parents and carers. Together with the executive headteacher, he has fostered a sense of self-esteem and aspiration throughout the school community. Partnership with another high school has had a strong impact on securing rapid improvement. The school demonstrates good capacity to improve further. The principle that everyone should 'aspire to learn' epitomises its strengthening ethos as an inclusive, ambitious community. Parents and carers are increasingly involved in the life of the school and appreciate the high-quality information they receive.
- The school's overall effectiveness is not yet good because students' achievement is only satisfactory. This is a result of unevenness in teaching over time.

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Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment across the curriculum, especially in mathematics, by ensuring that gaps in students' learning are addressed, so that middle-attaining students make better progress.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better by:
 - ensuring that teachers' lesson planning anticipates students' needs
 - responding rapidly to students' varying work rates and any misconceptions they may have about their work
 - challenging students to give fuller verbal answers to extend their thinking.
- Provide further opportunities for students to offer feedback on school improvement and influence decision-making.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter Key Stage 3 with prior attainment that is, on average, higher than that found nationally. They make satisfactory progress and leave school with results that are similar to the national average but are now rising. In 2011, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was the same as that found nationally. Standards were above average in science subjects and English literature, but were below average in design technology and geography. The proportion of students making expected progress from their starting points was similar to that found nationally in English, but was much lower in mathematics. Achievement was lower than anticipated for middle-attaining students. Evidence from lesson observations and from the school's assessments of students currently in the school indicates that their progress is accelerating and standards are rising. An increased proportion of Year 11 students have already secured grade C or better in GCSE mathematics, but some gaps remain in mathematical learning for other students.

Achievement is rising for all groups of students in most subjects. Higher-attaining students achieve particularly well in science subjects and in English where they are encouraged to extend their thinking through testing their own hypotheses. Middle-attaining students have achieved less well than their peers in the past, but inspection evidence confirms that their progress is now accelerating in response to ambitious target-setting and more focused teaching. Students with special educational needs generally make progress commensurate with that of their peers, while disabled students flourish in response to the school's inclusive ethos and sensitive support.

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There are no significant gaps in achievement between students from different minority ethnic backgrounds.

Students develop their literacy skills consistently across most subjects. They read accurately, although their levels of enthusiasm for individual reading are variable. Most write fluently and apply appropriate conventions when writing for different purposes and audiences. The vast majority of students willingly answer questions in class and some have the confidence to lead assemblies. On occasions, however, their spoken responses are perfunctory and their ideas not fully articulated. Parents and carers report that their children are achieving well in most subjects.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing amount that is good or better. There has been considerable fluctuation in staffing, which has now largely stabilised. Intensive work has been undertaken, with the effective support of the local authority and partner school, to improve the quality of teaching and ensure there is consistency of approach across the school. This has resulted in raised expectations and means that students have a clear sense of what is expected of them in lessons. Teachers' planning is detailed and often of good quality, but on occasions insufficient attention is paid to anticipating which concepts students may find difficult and planning for how these will be addressed. The school has focused tenaciously and productively on developing teachers' questioning skills. Questioning was particularly effective in an outstanding history lesson where the teacher enabled students to deepen their understanding of the outbreak of the First World War through discussion that required their detailed understanding of cause and effect. In an excellent textiles lesson, the teacher's skilful questioning supported students' evaluation of their work. In other lessons, questioning leads to underdeveloped responses that do not sufficiently extend students' thinking.

Students consider that their teachers provide lessons that challenge them more strongly than before. A clear example of this was seen in a Year 8 English lesson where students considered the poetic techniques used by Robert Browning. They used sophisticated vocabulary and made insightful connections between texts. Many lessons include opportunities for students to assess their own work and that of their peers. As a result, students are confident as to the criteria they need to meet to achieve their targets. This was demonstrated particularly well in a high-quality religious education lesson in which students advised their friends on how to improve their written accounts of viewpoints on euthanasia. Sometimes teachers do not gauge the rate at which individual students will complete their work, and this slows the progress for some individuals who complete work before their peers or who struggle to understand particular ideas. Teachers' marking is generally of a good quality, providing students with a balance of praise and advice on how to improve their work. Marking in English, humanities and science is particularly good. Students read the comments provided by their teachers and there is increasing evidence that they act upon them, including through attending to spelling corrections. In some cases, marking, while regular, is less helpful in advising on improvement. The

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curriculum has been adapted to provide greater teaching time for English and mathematics and to ensure that all teachers focus upon developing students' literacy skills. These adaptations are having a positive impact on teaching, leading to improvements in students' achievement.

Parents and carers agree that their children are achieving better standards in response to more consistent teaching.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The vast majority of students behave courteously and enjoy positive relationships with their peers and with school staff. Their conscientious attitudes and enthusiasm for all that the school has to offer have helped to improve learning. They show appreciation for the new school building and play their part in keeping it tidy. Lessons proceed in an orderly way. The school has a firm behaviour management policy that students generally respect. Students, parents and carers report that behaviour on the school's buses has improved and that students feel safe travelling to school. There are very few incidents of bullying or racist behaviour and the school's policies for dealing with these are consistently implemented. Students consider the school to be a safe and harmonious place where individual differences are celebrated. Their principled and tolerant attitudes were evident when debating ethical issues in religious education and geography.

Students relish the responsibilities they are given as prefects, librarians, liturgy group and eco-committee members. They enjoy representing their school in sports and music. As one stated, 'we are proud to belong to St Damian's and we want to make a difference.' They feel, however, that the school council does not have a sufficiently high profile.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a strongly articulated commitment to the school's continuing improvement. As deputy headteacher, he worked closely with the executive headteacher to develop robust and effective management systems. The consistent implementation of agreed processes by leaders at all levels is raising the quality of teaching and ensuring that all students achieve better results. School-to-school support has had a significant impact on strengthening leadership and teaching. Students' progress is tracked carefully and underachievement is identified quickly. Parents and carers comment positively about the quality and frequency of information they receive about their children's progress. The roles and responsibilities of the school's leaders have been redefined so that there is a close linkage between academic and pastoral support; all staff are focused on ensuring that students achieve their very best in all dimensions of their lives. Attendance has improved in response to the school's assiduous monitoring and support for individuals. A vine tree depicts students' individual contributions to the school's collective strength: 'Each pupil makes up the vine of St Damian's and together our community grows stronger through our attendance'.

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The spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of students' learning are widely evidenced. In a thought-provoking assembly, Year 9 students celebrated their individual talents and reflected calmly on the religious significance of making a positive individual contribution. The chamber choir's enthusiastic performance of music from *Les Misérables* was a similarly moving experience. The school functions as a harmonious and increasingly outward-facing community where discrimination in any form is not tolerated. The work of the inclusion team is a strength of the school. Barriers to individual students' achievement are identified and addressed, including through the effective involvement of external agencies. Safeguarding is given high priority by staff and the governing body. Child protection procedures are clear and rigorously applied. A useful forum has been established that enables parents and carers to give feedback and contribute to the school's improvement. Governance has been strengthened through training, development and redefined responsibilities. The school's success in tackling weaknesses identified in its previous inspection, together with its clear management systems and strong succession planning mean that it has good capacity to secure further improvement.

Glossary

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.
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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



1 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St Damian's RC Science College, Ashton-Under-Lyne, OL6 8BH

Thank you for the help that you gave to Mr Bennetts and me when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up your time to join discussions with us. You will be deservedly proud to learn that your school no longer requires special measures because it is providing you with a satisfactory and improving education.

Your achievement is satisfactory and improving. The results obtained at GCSE level in 2011 were similar to the national average overall, and above average in science and English literature. Your work provides strong indications that results will continue to rise in the future. We think most of you are now making better progress, as a result of improved teaching and your own conscientious attitudes. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increased amount that is good and outstanding. You told us that your teachers are providing you with more challenging lessons and marking your work thoroughly so that you know how to develop your skills. The new school building provides a pleasant learning environment where you have good facilities to 'aspire to learn.'

Most of you behave very well and your attendance is higher than that in most secondary schools. We think you make a strong contribution to making St Damian's a safe, happy and tolerant place. You told us that you would like the school council to be more active, and we have asked staff to ensure that this happens. The school's leadership has undergone significant change. We think that Mr Logue and his team have the right principles and systems in place to take the school from strength to strength. This will be helped by working in partnership with Mr McCarron's school. In order to make St Damian's even better, we have asked that leaders ensure your attainment rises further in all subjects, but especially in mathematics. We have also asked that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is increased by teachers noticing quickly when you do not understand your work in lessons. We think that in some lessons you need help to give fuller spoken answers.

We know that you will play your part in improving your school further. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

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