

St John Plessington Catholic College

Old Chester Road, Wirral, Merseyside, CH63 7LF

Inspection dates 30 April–1 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students make outstanding progress from Years 7 to 11. GCSE results are significantly above average for almost all groups of students. Achievement in mathematics and English is particularly impressive.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of their students. They plan for a range of activities in lessons that challenge, engage and fire students' enthusiasm. This ensures that students make outstanding progress.
- The behaviour of students is exemplary. They are happy, safe and have real pride in their college. They value the strong relationships they have with each other and their teachers. These relationships, built on a foundation of mutual respect, create an atmosphere where outstanding learning can take place. Students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable are extremely well supported.
- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher supported by passionate and determined colleagues are central to the success of the college. They share an unwavering belief that all students can achieve their potential. This belief is transmitted to students, raising their aspirations, self-belief and as a consequence, their achievement.
- The governing body are strong and firmly behind the headteacher and his vision of high academic standards. They diligently monitor the work of the college and robustly hold senior leaders to account for the quality of teaching and the standards achieved by students.
- The sixth form is good. Students achieve well and make a positive contribution to the life and work of the college. However, in some lessons they rely too heavily on their teachers and are not given enough opportunities to work independently and find things out for themselves. When this happens their progress slows.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 58 part-lessons taught by 56 different teachers. Joint observations of lessons were also carried out in partnership with two members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders and heads of subject departments. Inspectors also met with a group of teachers and groups of students of differing ages. A telephone conversation was also held with the Director of Schools for the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury education service.
- Inspectors took into account the views expressed by parents in the 13 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Students' work was examined as were the college's key policies, minutes of governing body meetings, the college's analysis of how well it is doing and its development plan. Information showing the progress that students are making in each of their subjects was also analysed.

Inspection team

Charles Lowry, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Derek Davies	Additional Inspector
John Leigh	Additional Inspector
Timothy Gartside	Additional Inspector
Bimla Kumari	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this college

- St John Plessington Catholic College is a larger than average, mixed Catholic comprehensive school; located in Bebington on the Wirral, about 12 miles to the north-west of Chester city centre.
- The college is a member of the Diocese of Shrewsbury's family of Catholic schools.
- The college converted to become an academy on 1 December 2012. When its predecessor college, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding.
- The number of boys attending the college is slightly higher than the number of girls.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is extra funding the college receives for students entitled to free school meals, those in the care of the local authority or the children of parents serving in the armed forces.
- Most students are of White British heritage and consequently few of them are at an early stage of learning English.
- The proportion of students who require extra help with their learning including those supported at school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- All students are educated on the college site.
- The headteacher is a national leader of education and the college is designated as a national support school. In this capacity, the headteacher and a number of his colleagues are working with another school in the diocese to help it improve.
- The college meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement in the sixth form so that it matches the rest of the college by:
 - giving students more opportunities to work independently in lessons so that they deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students join the college at the start of Year 7 with standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are low. By the end of Year 11 they achieve significantly above-average results in most subjects at GCSE. The proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress in mathematics and English is also well-above average. This represents outstanding achievement.
- Disabled students and those who require extra help with their learning achieve well. This is because their teachers take account of their needs when planning lessons. Teachers also make sure that these students are well supported in lessons so that they are able to take a full and active part.
- When students enter the college they are set challenging targets for achievement in all their subjects. Students' progress, against these targets, is rigorously and regularly monitored. Students identified as underperforming receive effective extra help from their teachers so that they quickly get back on track. As one student said, 'You're not allowed to fail here'.
- Students are helped to understand how they can achieve their targets by agreeing an achievement plan which is regularly reviewed with a member of staff. This provides each student with information about what they need to do to make the most of all the learning opportunities that the college provides.
- The college has a policy of entering all students early for GCSE English and mathematics. The reason for this is to give students more than one opportunity to achieve their target grade in each subject. When asked, students say that they value the opportunity this policy gives them to maximise their achievement. Consequently, they strive to do their best and achievement in both subjects is outstanding.
- Students who are entitled to free school meals achieve significantly higher results at GCSE than their peers nationally, including in English and mathematics. In 2012, the results of this group of students were about half of a GCSE grade lower in English and mathematics, than their peers in the college. This gap is much narrower than that found nationally and represents excellent achievement for this group.
- There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls with both groups making significantly above-average progress by the end of Key Stage 4.
- Students' achievement in academic A and AS levels in the sixth form is broadly in line with national averages. Given the students starting points, this represents good progress.
- Most of the parents who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire feel that their child is making at least good progress. Inspectors wholeheartedly agree with this view.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The quality of teaching, particularly at Key Stage 3 and 4 is outstanding. This is why students in the main college make outstanding progress over time and in most subjects.
- Teachers know their students well and have high expectations of their performance. Teachers lesson preparation is meticulous and they ensure that lessons have an interesting range of activities that challenge, engage and enthuse students; appealing to the different ways that they learn. As a result, students enjoy their learning and are motivated to do well.
- Teachers use skilful questioning to challenge students, make them think and check their understanding. When teachers spot misunderstandings they adjust learning activities so that students, once more, are able to make exceptional progress.
- Group work is used effectively in many lessons to enable students to learn from each other and find things out for themselves. For example, in one outstanding Year 10 physical education lesson, students worked in small groups to help each other improve their skills in a game of

basketball. The students made excellent progress because they were motivated by the task, valuing the opportunity to act in the role of coach; sensitively offering advice and support to their peers to help them improve. However, opportunities for students to work in this way are not always taken in the sixth form. In some lessons, students are given too much direction by the teacher. As a result, opportunities are missed for the students to take ownership of their learning, think for themselves and deepen their understanding of the subject.

- Teachers mark students' work regularly. The feedback students receive is detailed and gives advice on how the work can be improved; consequently students are able to learn from their mistakes.
- The college has been very effective in developing students' literacy skills and this is having a positive impact on their use of English in all subjects; developing their writing, improving spelling and increasing their knowledge of subject specific vocabulary. Younger students also receive effective additional help to improve their literacy skills from members of the sixth form. Sixth form students work with their younger peers to help improve their reading. When they need to, students can apply their mathematical skills to help their learning in other subjects, for example, in science and technology.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The students at St John Plessington are the jewels in the crown of this outstanding college. They are a credit to the college and their families. Their behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and around the building. They are happy, safe and secure. Students are invariably polite and courteous towards each other and their teachers. They are keen to do well and value the care and support of the adults who work with them. Their enjoyment of learning and commitment to their studies are reflected in their above-average attendance and high academic achievement.
- Relationships between all members of the college community are warm, friendly and based upon mutual respect. As a result, the college is a calm, orderly place of learning that students are proud to be members of.
- Parents who expressed a view were very positive about the behaviour of the students. This view was reinforced by the students themselves who, in discussion with inspectors, said that standards of behaviour are high.
- Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and understand the many forms that bullying can take including cyber, racist and prejudice based bullying. They say that bullying is extremely rare but that when it does occur it is dealt with effectively.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is an inspirational and dynamic leader who is well supported by a committed and talented team of teachers. The headteacher's vision that every child can succeed is shared by all members of the community; who are united by a common set of values that underpin the life and work of the college. This is a truly inclusive place of learning where everyone matters.
- The management of teaching and learning is rigorous. Teachers regularly receive feedback on their performance and welcome the training opportunities provided by the college to inform their practice. Well-established systems allow teachers to share their ideas about what works best in the classroom.
- Performance management systems are robust and are used to support college improvement. All teachers have targets that relate to their training needs and hold them to account for the standards achieved by their students. The review of teachers' performance by senior leaders is demanding and is used to make decisions about teachers' pay.
- The additional finance the college receives through the pupil premium is used effectively. Evidence for this is the outstanding achievement of those groups of students who are helped by this funding. Leaders and governors have directed much of this additional funding into

increasing the number of teachers in order to reduce class sizes. This has contributed to the outstanding progress that students make in lessons.

- The college is outward looking, keen to support improvement in other schools and share good practice. The college's work with another school in the diocese has been particularly effective in bringing about improvement in that school. The college is seen as a beacon of good practice and has a contract with the National College for Teaching and Leadership to provide training programmes for serving teachers with the aim of developing their skills.
- Equal opportunities and challenging discrimination in all its forms are central to the college's philosophy. Equal opportunities are promoted through the curriculum. The broad range of subjects offered by the college ensures that the curriculum is balanced and meets the needs and aspirations of the students; preparing them well for the next stage. An increasing number of students are entering the sixth form after completing their GCSEs and the number of students who go onto university after A level continues to rise. Consequently the proportion of students who leave the college and continue in education or go into training or employment is above both local and national averages.
- The spiritual, moral social and cultural development of the students is at the heart of the college's work. It is an essential part of the college's vision and philosophy and helps students grow into caring and responsible young people ready to take their place in the world. The governors have directed resources to ensure that every student is given the opportunity to participate in the wide range of additional activities provided by the college. The rich variety of clubs, overseas' trips and volunteering opportunities add to the students' understanding of other cultures and helps them to develop their interpersonal and communication skills. Other excellent opportunities include the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.
- Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and child protection systems meet all current requirements.
- **The governance of the college:**
 - The governing body are knowledgeable and focused on maintaining the college's current high standards. They share the headteacher's vision and hold him robustly to account for the standards achieved by the students. They have a detailed and accurate knowledge of the college's strengths, including the quality of teaching, and areas for development. They ensure that resources, including the additional funding the college receives through the pupil premium, are used effectively. They also make certain that salary progression is linked to teachers' performance.

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>

College details

Unique reference number	139031
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	420051

This inspection of the college was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of college	Academy converter
College category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the college roll	1450
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Marks
Principal	Mr T Quinn
Date of previous college inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0151 645 5049
Fax number	0151 643 1516
Email address	headteacher@stjohnplessington.com

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