

St James' Catholic High School

Great Strand, Colindale, London NW9 5PE

Inspection dates

7–8 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Over time, school leaders have worked diligently to create a learning ethos where pupils thrive academically and spiritually. They have focused relentlessly on sustaining high-quality teaching in a supportive and nurturing learning environment.
- All staff have high aspirations for the pupils in their care and are committed to helping them achieve highly. Pupils want to do well, work hard and attend regularly. As a result, by the end of Year 11, all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make significant progress from their starting points.
- The new headteacher has brought further clarity to realising the school's vision and values. Her astute evaluation of the school's strengths and areas requiring further development is accurate. Together with her experienced senior leaders and supportive governing body, plans are already in place to build on the school's many strengths.
- Governors are committed and experienced. They are proud of the improvements secured over time and the progress pupils make. They ensured stability while recruiting the new headteacher.
- Pupils' conduct around the school is very good. They show respect and courtesy towards each other and the wider community.
- Pupils are keen to be active British citizens and regularly involve themselves in charitable works. However, school leaders admit that a more consistent approach to further developing pupils' cultural, personal, social and health education would be beneficial.
- Students in the sixth form benefit from high levels of support and guidance. The majority go on to their chosen university or apprenticeship. Historically, there has been variability in the progress students make on A-level courses. School leaders are working hard to address this. They have rightly prioritised 16 to 19 study programmes as an area to develop still further.
- The most able pupils make much better progress than most-able pupils do nationally. However, some do not make the same substantial progress as other pupils at the school.
- The new headteacher is reviewing the performance management system to ensure a consistent approach and further utilise the skills of experienced staff.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders must ensure that:
 - recent developments in the sixth form continue so that all students make at least good progress on 16 to 19 study programmes
 - the most able pupils make the same substantial progress from their starting points as other pupils at the school
 - the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and opportunities for pupils' moral, social and cultural development are mapped cohesively across the school
 - performance management procedures enable consistent accountability for staff at all levels and allow staff to share their expertise.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Over time, school leaders have worked relentlessly to create a nurturing learning environment where staff and pupils can flourish academically and spiritually. Their drive to improve teaching has had a positive impact on teachers' knowledge, confidence and expertise. Teaching across the school is now at least consistently good and all groups of pupils make excellent progress from different starting points.
- Leaders have demonstrated an ability to address any arising issues. For instance, they identified that disadvantaged pupils were not making the same good progress as other pupils at the school. Consequently, they used pupil premium funding to ensure a strategic, whole-school approach, linking pupils' attitudes to learning with their academic progress. Leaders assessed the individual needs of disadvantaged pupils and implemented effective classroom strategies. This has proved highly successful. In 2016, disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, made far better progress from their starting points than pupils nationally and sometimes their peers.
- The new headteacher joined the school in January 2017. She has an astute and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and some areas that need further improvement. With the support of her experienced senior leaders and governors, the headteacher has begun to build on the academic success of the past few years. Together, they have identified some key priorities that will enable the school to maintain the highest standards of education for its pupils. These include continuing improvements in the sixth-form provision to eradicate variations in the progress made across subjects, and a review of teachers' performance management targets.
- Middle leaders are experienced and committed. They work closely with senior leaders to ensure that teaching is of a consistently high standard. Regular classroom visits, checks on the quality of pupils' work, and opportunities for staff to meet regularly and share their ideas are mapped across the year. They value the support offered by 'link' senior leaders and are clear about their role in ensuring that pupils make substantial progress from their starting points, which they do.
- Senior and middle leaders give high levels of support to both teachers and teaching assistants to ensure that teaching is at least consistently good, if not better, across the school. Professional development opportunities are numerous and provide bespoke support to individuals where necessary. Staff are encouraged to work together in order to share best practice and plan collaboratively. This has created a learning environment that enables less experienced teachers to thrive. As a result, those new to the profession value highly the support they receive and quickly establish themselves as competent teachers. Staff are highly positive about the school, enjoy working in this supportive environment and, consequently, many choose to stay. As one teacher explained, 'I feel valued and my talents are used to their capacity.'

- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well resourced and organised. Special educational needs funding is used effectively to provide a number of well-trained teaching assistants, who work closely with teachers to support pupils' progress. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and her team have built excellent relationships with parents and carers to meet the needs of individuals and their families. During registration time, bespoke activities are organised to meet pupils' individual academic needs. For instance, Year 7 catch-up funding is used to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and this has proved very successful. While the SENCo tracks pupils' progress across the curriculum carefully, she does not directly intervene should pupils begin to underachieve in particular subjects. This is deemed to be the responsibility of the subject heads.
- The taught curriculum offers a range of appropriate subjects. Pupils are given good advice and guidance when choosing GCSE courses and level 1 courses, such as construction, and hair and beauty. A range of extra-curricular opportunities are also available and the school is proud of its sporting successes and charitable commitments in the local community. However, some pupils were not as clear, when asked, of the range of opportunities open to them. School leaders know that further promotion of extra-curricular activities would be beneficial.
- Student leadership and an understanding of democracy is encouraged through sixth-form prefects, a competitive recruitment programme for head boy and head girl, and membership of the school council.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision for some of their week. School leaders ensure that it is meeting their needs by closely checking pupils' progress. Links with the providers and parents are strong. These pupils make similar progress to their peers.
- The local authority offers support and guidance as requested by school leaders. The school works effectively as part of a consortium with other local schools to challenge each other's effectiveness and plans for improvement. This has ensured that the school has benefited from effective external validation, review and opportunities for staff to share ideas.
- School leaders meticulously track pupils' behaviour for learning and link it to academic progress. There is a shared expectation among all staff that they have a responsibility to ensure that pupils are ready to learn, engaged with their learning and suitably challenged. As a result, academic aspirations are high, there is a shared positive work ethic and all pupils make very good progress by the end of key stage 4.
- Leaders have identified that the most able pupils still do not make the same excellent progress as other pupils at the school. This is now a priority area. A programme to ensure that staff consistently challenge and inspire the most able pupils is in place. Department 'most-able champions' ensure that the needs of the most able are high on everyone's agenda.

- Leaders are rightly proud of the Catholic ethos that permeates the life of the school and ensures that the school's mission statement, embodied in the words of John's Gospel, 'I have come so they might have life, and have it to the full' is realised daily. However, while pupils and staff are unified by their faith, school leaders accept that even more could be done to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. There are opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, and a PSHE programme. However, this is not mapped systematically across the curriculum. Instead, it is taught mainly through religious education and as and when teachers believe an opportunity arises. Leaders do not check routinely enough that all pupils have access to relevant information, advice and guidance, or opportunities to explore potentially sensitive issues. Leaders accept that more could be done to check that all pupils have equal access to the full range of information, advice and guidance available.

Governance

- Governors are committed and experienced. They share school leaders' high aspirations for the school and are rightly proud of the successful learning environment they have helped to shape. They are clear about the school's strengths and the demonstrable impact of leaders' focus on improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Most notable is their ability to steer successfully the school through a time of potential instability following the previous headteacher's departure and the recruitment of a strong new leader. Minutes of governors' meetings show that while they are genuinely interested in the information provided by school leaders, they could ask further searching questions to ensure that they routinely challenge leaders' decisions.
- Governors take their safeguarding role very seriously. They are well trained and regularly monitor that checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school are in line with statutory guidance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and they have established a culture of keeping children safe. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff to work at the school, and records are detailed and updated regularly. Some governors have done safer recruitment training. Leaders have good links with external agencies and the outcomes of referrals are checked carefully.
- Training has ensured that all staff are vigilant and clear about their safeguarding responsibilities. Pupils and staff have received information about different aspects of safeguarding including female genital mutilation, extremism and radicalisation. Staff are aware of the 'Prevent' duty. Helping pupils to stay safe online has been a priority area and, consequently, staff, parents and pupils are knowledgeable about this area of safeguarding. The 'student services team' offer wrap-around care for pupils, track attendance and communicate, when relevant, with parents.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching and learning is at least consistently good. The whole-school focus on high-quality teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum has had a profoundly positive impact on pupils' progress, particularly the disadvantaged. The majority of teachers have worked at the school for a number of years. They are experienced, have excellent subject knowledge and know pupils well.
- The 'St James' lesson strategy' is used consistently throughout the school. Teachers use information about pupils' prior knowledge and understanding effectively to plan interesting and tailored activities that ensure excellent progress. Teachers regularly model subject-specific writing so that pupils are clear about the choices they make with their written expression. Practical activities are regular and valued highly by pupils. While still inconsistent, a whole-school focus on ensuring the quality of teachers' questioning is having a positive impact on pupils' depth of understanding.
- Teaching assistants are deployed appropriately, encouraging and supporting lower-ability pupils or those with specific learning needs to tackle set tasks. They are well trained and some pursue teaching careers because of the experience they gain at the school.
- Pupils are well motivated, keen to learn and interested in their studies. They enjoy practical activities and work well together when asked to participate in group tasks. Pupils quickly settle to tasks, are proud of their work and are genuinely interested in the subject matter.
- Leaders have cultivated a love of reading across the school. Pupils heard reading during the inspection did so confidently and clearly, and were enthusiastic about their chosen books. Staff give appropriate direction to pupils about suitable reading texts.
- 'Maths mastery' has now been incorporated into the mathematics curriculum. Teachers regularly set tasks that explore real-life concepts and pupils are becoming increasingly confident in attempting tasks that require reasoning and problem solving.
- Strategies to support the most able pupils are in place. Following the successful programme to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, leaders have instigated a similar one for the most able. A most-able pupils' coordinator and subject-specific 'champions' ensure that teachers are given a range of ideas to ensure that these pupils are stretched. 'Challenge' activities are now available in most lessons. However, leaders admit that these are optional rather than directed and, consequently, some most able pupils do not attempt them.
- School leaders have rightly identified that more needs to be done to encourage pupils to be actively involved in their own learning, rather than relying on teachers to provide 'the answers' or information. This is a whole-school focus and aims to prepare pupils for more independent study when they go on to the next stage of their education or training at the end of Year 11.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders have created a nurturing and supportive learning community where pupils can thrive both academically and spiritually. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their beliefs and show respect and kindness towards each other. As one parent commented, 'St James' is a friendly welcoming school where the pastoral care is excellent.' Other parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children are happy, well looked after and feel safe at school.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are strong. Consequently, pupils are quick to ask for advice and support should they need it.
- The 'Curriculum access and support team' (CAST) provides effective support to less confident pupils, both at informal times of the day and in helping pupils in their learning.
- E-safety has recently been a priority and pupils and parents have received appropriate training so that pupils can be safe online. Bullying is rare and pupils explained that should it occur, staff deal with it swiftly and effectively.
- Pupils are proud of their school, attend regularly and are keen to do well.
- Leaders check that those pupils who attend alternative provision do so regularly and that their conduct is of the same high quality as other pupils in the school.
- Leaders ensure that pupils receive regular impartial advice, information and guidance about the choices they make, both in their behaviour and as they prepare for the next stage of their education and training. Pupils value this highly.
- Deep learning days focus on specific issues and allow pupils the opportunity to explore these in depth. However, leaders accept that a more cohesive approach to the PSHE programme and pupils' moral, social and cultural development would be beneficial.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' conduct around the school site is calm and ordered. They mix well together during informal times and are supportive of each other's needs and feelings. The 'gospel values of honesty and reconciliation, care and compassion' permeate throughout the school community.
- During teaching sessions, pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. They are consistently engaged and enthusiastic, particularly enjoying practical activities such as in art and drama. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers and the views of others. They are keen to do well in their studies, work very hard and take pride in their work. Consequently, they make excellent progress throughout their time at school.

- Leaders carefully track the behaviour of all pupils and quickly intervene. The school's 'behaviour for learning continuum' enables the heads of student learning to implement appropriate support and ensure that staff have strategies to deal effectively with pupils whose behaviour is more challenging. An ongoing leadership priority is to ensure that all staff consistently implement the behaviour system and this is regularly checked. The number of pupils excluded from school for a fixed amount of time has dropped this year as a result.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils arrive in Year 7 with achievement that is significantly above the national average. At the end of Year 11, in 2016, across a number of subjects, including English and mathematics, pupils made progress that was significantly higher than the national progress score and in the top 10% of schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils attaining a grade C or above in both English and mathematics GCSE was much higher than pupils achieved nationally in 2016.
- Equally, the proportion of pupils who achieved the highest GCSE grades was significantly above the national average in business studies, English language, English literature, geography, history, religious studies, French and Spanish.
- From different starting points, all groups of pupils made far better progress in 2016 than pupils did nationally. However, the most able pupils did not make the same significant rate of progress as other pupils at the school. School leaders have prioritised the progress of this group and teachers have a range of strategies to support current most able pupils.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language made progress much higher than the national progress score across a range of subjects in 2016.
- The progress pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made from their starting points in 2016 was higher than the national progress score across a range of subjects. Information provided by school leaders indicates that more needs to be done this year for this group to maintain the level of progress achieved last year.
- Pupils' work seen during the inspection indicates that pupils make consistently good progress across all year groups and subjects. This includes those pupils who are disadvantaged and the most able. Staff are committed to ensuring that pupils make strong progress. They run a plethora of interventions and 'help' sessions, mainly but not exclusively, for Years 10 and 11. These are regular, numerous and well attended. Pupils value the opportunity to receive extra help and support, particularly as they prepare for examinations.
- The whole-school literacy programme ensures that all pupils have the skills to access learning across the curriculum. Reading is given a high priority and the vibrant library supports this. Pupils receive regular advice on how they can improve their written expression.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- School leaders have rightly prioritised 16 to 19 study programmes as an area for development. They are keen to maintain the inclusive and supportive ethos of the sixth form, while ensuring that students make consistently strong progress in their chosen courses. The reviewed 16 to 19 study programmes include a range of A-level and vocational courses.
- Historically, students' progress in some A-level subjects has been variable. Leaders analysed the reasons for this and have taken swift action. Better information, advice and guidance at the end of Year 11 ensures that students are choosing courses where they have the aptitude and interest to achieve highly. A focus on developing students' independent learning skills has proved highly successful. Some short-term staffing issues have been resolved and, consequently, teachers have the subject knowledge and experience to ensure that students make excellent progress.
- Leaders are not complacent. While their actions to date have already had a significant impact on 16 to 19 study programmes, they know that more could be done to promote the sixth form in the wider community. They are particularly keen to attract the most able students who are tempted by other post-16 providers. This work is ongoing.
- Students spoken to during the inspection were exceptionally complimentary about the support they receive, the opportunities available to them and the high standard of teaching. They receive relevant information about how to keep themselves safe and know whom to talk to should they have any concerns. Students are given helpful advice, guidance and support when applying to their chosen universities or apprenticeships.
- Students were keen to explain the number of charitable works and fundraising events they undertake to support the wider community. They are proud of the school's ethos and keen to demonstrate their commitment to their beliefs.
- Work experience placements and visits to universities ensure that students are given relevant employability skills and understand their choices. The school careers adviser supports students to make informed decisions. A number of sports activities encourage students to maintain healthy lifestyles and work effectively together.
- Students are diligent, hard-working and smartly attired. They have high aspirations for their futures and utilise their teachers' support to achieve this. 'Bridging' courses during the summer holidays ensure that students continue in their studies.
- The governing body encourages and supports students to achieve their target grades by providing financial bursaries. This scheme has proved very successful.
- The majority of students who retake their English and/or mathematics GCSE achieve a grade C or above.

School details

Unique reference number	101364
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	10023659

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,107
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	213
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Margaret Brady
Headteacher	Carolyn Laws
Telephone number	020 8358 2800
Website	www.st-james.barnet.sch.uk
Email address	admin@st-james.barnet.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 February 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- St James' Catholic High School is a larger than average-sized 11 to 19 secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is in line with the national average.

- Over two-thirds of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest group is Black African.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. The majority are advanced bilingual.
- The proportion of students who receive special educational needs support is below the national average.
- Pupils with a statement of special educational needs or those with an education, health and care plan is just above the national average.
- Pupils' attainment on entry into key stage 3 is above the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at the Grasvenor Project and the Barnet pupil referral unit.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching, learning and assessment across a range of year groups and subjects in key stages 3 and 4. Some of these observations were undertaken jointly with school leaders. No sixth-form lessons were observed due to students sitting mock examinations. Inspectors visited registration periods and observed an assembly.
- Discussions were held with members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and a range of staff, including newly qualified teachers.
- Inspectors took account of the 48 responses to Parent View and 56 responses to the staff survey. No pupils responded to the pupil survey. However, inspectors met informally and formally with groups of pupils and sixth-form students throughout the inspection.
- The inspection team scrutinised a wide range of documentation including records relating to student behaviour and attendance, minutes of meetings, information on the progress made by students, the school's self-evaluation and the school's assessment system.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, policies and procedures.

Inspection team

Helen Matthews, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Alison Moore	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Webster	Ofsted Inspector
Sean Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Ceri Evans	Ofsted Inspector
Vicky Linsley	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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