

St Catherine's Catholic High School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 107581 |
| Local Authority | Calderdale |
| Inspection number | 324601 |
| Inspection dates | 13–14 January 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Jane Austin HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 799 |
| Sixth form | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Tom Miskell |
| Headteacher | Mrs Sheard |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 September 2006 |
| School address | Holdsworth Road Holmfield Halifax West Yorkshire HX2 9TH |
| Telephone number | 01422 245411 |
| Fax number | 01422 240008 |

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|--------------------------|--------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Catherine's is a smaller than average secondary school with more boys than girls on roll. It serves an area of above average social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. Almost all students are White British. Recently, a small number of students from Eastern Europe joined the school and 11 are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly higher than average, although the number with a statement of special educational needs is below average. There is a small sixth form run in partnership with the neighbouring secondary school. The school has held specialist technology status since September 2005. It holds the Investors in People award. The local authority in which St Catherine's is situated operates a selective secondary education system.

When the school was inspected in September 2006 it was judged to require special measures. Since then there has been considerable turbulence in staffing, particularly at the most senior levels, which has stabilised only recently. The headteacher was appointed in January 2008. An interim executive board (IEB), with responsibility for governance, has been in place since April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

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. It is providing a satisfactory standard of education for its students and gives satisfactory value for money. Since her appointment, the headteacher has provided clear direction for the school and the pace of improvement has accelerated considerably. Her focus on putting in place essential systems and procedures that enable the school to move forward in the short term as well as developing the capability to improve in the longer term, is reaping benefits. The new tracking system shows that students are now making satisfactory progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 because the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. However, more remains to be done since standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 are well below average. Teaching is not promoting learning at sufficient pace to overcome students' legacy of underachievement. In too many lessons planning and activities do not take sufficient account of the needs of individuals or groups of learners to raise their rate of progress to good.

Students are upbeat about the way in which the school has improved and speak warmly about their enjoyment of new opportunities, for example, the enterprise week. They appreciate the new system that rewards successes such as good behaviour, hard work, meeting deadlines and being punctual. Students are responding positively to a better climate for learning and a curriculum more closely matched to their needs and aspirations. Overall, behaviour and attendance are satisfactory. Improvements to the tracking system have raised the quality of academic guidance so that it is now satisfactory. Students are motivated by knowing how well they are progressing towards their targets; they value the additional support they receive if they are falling behind.

The headteacher has introduced a fresh, coherent approach to ensuring the needs of all students are identified and met. The new learning development unit is showing early signs of success, for instance, by including students who were previously reluctant to engage with formal education and supporting those in danger of exclusion. A more thorough approach to identifying and providing for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been introduced and these pupils are making satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher's high expectations and clarity of purpose are enabling leaders and managers at all levels to develop the capability to move the school forward. Despite inadequacies in the sixth form provision, this is evident in the improvements made since the previous inspection. The school, very well supported by the IEB, has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 4

Provision in this small sixth form is inadequate. The provisional 2008 A-level and AS-level results show standards were below average with low numbers of students gaining passes at the higher grades. In the main, students did not reach their target grades and at AS level too many students failed to gain a pass grade. Achievement was better at A level than AS level but was inadequate overall. Across both Years 12 and 13 approximately half the students are currently falling behind their target grades in one or more subjects. A number of suitable strategies are in place to support them.

The sixth form offers a satisfactory range of A-level courses and other qualifications in cooperation with its partner school and other local establishments. These reflect the abilities and aspirations of students who have lower attainment when they join Year 12 than is typical for school sixth forms. Relatively few students continue from AS to A2 level, although retention is increasing as entry requirements to courses are set at more realistic levels. However, guidance on the number of courses followed is not sufficiently well tailored to the prior attainment and skill levels of students. Opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills and habits are restricted, partly by the limited range of teaching methods employed in lessons. The small numbers in the majority of classes reduces opportunities for developing and challenging ideas through discussion with peers, and students are, for the most part, passive learners. In addition, the facilities for successful private study and personal development are limited. Students' relations with teachers are sound; they enjoy the ambience of their common room and willingly act as mentors and leaders in themed events for the whole school. Teachers and tutors know students well, and, as a consequence, those completing their Year 13 courses are guided securely towards careers and higher education.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are inadequate. The complexities of working across two schools have not been addressed and this has impeded the establishment of rigorous management systems. There are no clear lines of accountability, and responsibilities for the leadership of subjects across the two schools have not been agreed. As a consequence, systems for quality assuring and improving achievement and provision are ill-defined and ineffective. Procedures for checking punctuality and attendance lack rigour.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate the rate of students' progress in the school and the sixth form and eradicate the legacy of underachievement.
- Implement coherent systems for the management of the sixth form in order to improve provision and raise students' achievement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards at both Key Stages 3 and 4 are well below average. They are, however, rising gradually as a consequence of improving provision. The unvalidated 2008 GCSE results show a marked improvement in the proportion of students gaining at least five passes at grades A* to C. The percentage gaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics almost doubled, albeit from a low base. In addition, there was a modest rise in the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE passes including qualifications in functional English and mathematics. In the main, the school reached or exceeded its GCSE targets. Results in technology, the school's specialist subject, rose significantly to reach the national average, continuing a six-year trend of improvement. However, there were large variations in performance between subjects reflecting inconsistencies in the quality of provision. The picture was similarly uneven at Key Stage 3 where the 2008 provisional national test results show a significant rise in mathematics, no movement in English and a fall in scores in science.

From a base of slightly lower than average standards on entry, achievement was inadequate overall for outgoing Year 9 and Year 11 students. This reflects considerable underachievement resulting from inadequate provision over a significant period. However, the school's data indicate that students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are now making satisfactory progress. The school expects to meet its 2009 targets on most measures at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and raise its performance to the level of that found in similar schools. A number of factors have combined to bring about this improvement. These include the development of assessment processes, for instance, in English and science, which enable both students and staff to identify much more precisely where barriers to understanding exist. Importantly, the school's system for tracking students' progress towards their targets is now fully operational and readily accessible to all staff. This is enabling more rapid and accurate identification of underachievement so that the school is able to provide targeted help for students to accelerate their progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students report that there have been huge changes in the ethos of the school. Relationships between teachers and students are much improved and are usually friendly and supportive with a touch of humour. Consequently, students are now far more motivated and many want to do well. Attendance rates have improved to satisfactory. The best improvements are in Year 11 reflecting students' much greater commitment to school work. Although a small minority of parents still have some concerns about behaviour, the majority of parents, students and staff recognise that behaviour is much improved. Overall behaviour is satisfactory but behaviour in lessons is often good, allowing students to focus on learning. As the quality of teaching improves and lessons become more interesting, students report increased levels of enjoyment.

The school council has worked hard to try to eliminate bullying. Students report that they feel safe in school and bullying and racism are relatively unusual. When bullying does occur staff take immediate action but parents report that these measures have varying levels of success. The residential visits, in particular the retreat, are described by students as, 'really fun'. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They value the Catholic nature of the school describing the positive way it contributes to the family atmosphere and community spirit. Students appreciate the opportunities they have to learn about other faiths and cultures and develop tolerant attitudes. When students have the opportunity to contribute to the school and wider community they respond well but these opportunities are quite limited. Students are aware of how to keep fit, healthy and safe and are particularly keen on taking part in sport. Successful enterprise activities, involvement in a fair trade day and the work experience programme are helping students to develop their economic understanding. As a result of improving progress, more positive attitudes and improved attendance rates preparation for future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The overall quality of teaching and learning is now satisfactory. A much improved feature of lessons is the generally good relationship which exists between teachers and students. The school has introduced a common planning format that is helping to ensure lessons are well

structured and have clear learning objectives. Students now expect to know at the outset of sessions what they will be learning and this is contributing to a positive classroom climate. In better lessons expected outcomes are also spelt out so there are clear goals to aim for. However, the planning format does not prompt teachers to plan for students' different starting points and abilities and this is a weaker feature of many lessons. The imprecise match of activities to students' learning needs slows progress and limits the possibility of accelerating learning and eradicating previous underachievement. There is some good marking and assessment of students' progress but this is not consistent in all lessons and subject areas.

In the best lessons seen during the inspection the pace was brisk and students enjoyed being actively involved in their learning. There was a good variety of demanding tasks. Effective questioning challenged students to think hard and teachers sought reasoned answers that helped extend knowledge and understanding. Effective support from technicians and learning assistants helped students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to make satisfactory progress. Learning was slower in lessons where there was too much input from teachers and students were given insufficient time to respond appropriately to tasks. Superficial questioning did not help students consolidate their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and increasingly matched to students' needs and aspirations. It is still developing through evaluation, revision and planning. It offers intensive support for students in Years 7 and 8 with limited literacy skills as well as the small minority who are new to English. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive continuous planned support, which includes them in all aspects of provision. Extension work is less well developed for the most able and talented students. At Key Stage 4, students have a satisfactory choice of academic and vocational options, enhanced by links with employers, schools and colleges. Current Year 9 students are preparing for a carefully considered pathways system offering a closer match with preferences and post-16 ambitions. A few students at risk of disaffection benefit from provision, such as work-related courses, tailored to their needs. A suitably planned personal, social and health education programme includes citizenship and is complemented by religious education. Students benefit from a programme of industrial visits and extra-curricular activities and say they would appreciate more of the same.

As a consequence of the school's technology specialism, there have been substantial improvements to the quantity and quality of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment across the school. In better lessons effective use of, for instance, interactive whiteboards motivates students. Increasingly, support for learning is available through the virtual learning environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Systems to support students' academic progress and personal development have improved significantly. The appointment of progress and learning managers, along with ready access to more reliable data, has brought about a more rigorous focus on achievement. As a result, those students at risk of underachieving for various reasons such as erratic attendance or a poor work ethic are more effectively identified and supported. However, there is still some way to go before the full impact of the new systems is felt. A more proactive approach to transition from Key Stage 2 means that students with barriers to learning are now being recognised before

they join Year 7. Although it is too early to judge its full impact, the recently established learning development unit has already helped some of the most vulnerable students to improve their attendance and accelerate their progress. Students report that the new system that looks at the balance of their attitudes, behaviour, attendance and achievement ensures that hard-working, well-behaved students are properly recognised. This is boosting students' motivation. Form tutors play a central role in supporting students and form time is being put to increasingly effective use.

Effective careers guidance is helping the majority of students to make sensible decisions about their future options. Transition is particularly well managed between Key Stages 3 and 4 and this is encouraging students to raise their aspirations. Child protection procedures are in place and the school works hard to ensure that students are safe and secure and receive effective personal support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Through her resolute leadership and determination to put the needs of students first, the headteacher has gained the commitment of staff to the drive for sustainable improvement. She has provided stability and direction following a period of considerable turbulence and uncertainty. The headteacher has successfully established a senior leadership team with clear roles and responsibilities and developed substantial capacity in the associate leadership team. While the quality of middle leadership varies, it is satisfactory with many middle leaders getting to grips with the well-considered systems for whole-school improvement.

New remits for middle leaders are facilitating an integrated approach to guiding and supporting students both academically and pastorally. At all levels suitable lines of accountability are in place and performance management aligned much more closely with the school's priorities. Coherent and comprehensive systems for the effective self-evaluation of all areas of provision have been established with monitoring and evaluation conducted by both senior and middle leaders. Although variable in quality at this relatively early stage of implementation, the school knows its strengths and weaknesses and has appropriate plans in place to address its priorities.

Through the school's specialism, work with primary partners across a range of subjects and projects is well established, contributing effectively to smooth transition from Key Stage 2. Broader community links are growing but the school recognises that its approach to community cohesion, whilst satisfactory, requires further development. The school provides regular opportunities for parents to comment on its provision including through a parents' forum.

The interim executive board's contribution to the leadership of the school is highly effective and has been instrumental in the school's improvement. The board provides astute strategic direction. Members are sharply focused and rigorous in challenging the school's performance: they have recognised the inadequacy of provision in the sixth form and begun to plan accordingly. Their wide range of relevant expertise enables them to provide the school with high quality support. The school continues to benefit from considerable, well-targeted support from the local authority.

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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 |
|---|----------------|-------|

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 | 4 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | No |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 3 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 | 4 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 | 4 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 | 4 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress | 3 | |

¹Grade 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.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 3 | |
| The attendance of learners | 3 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 3 | |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 | |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|--|---|-----------------|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 3 | IE ² |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 | IE ² |

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 | 4 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 | |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 3 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 | 4 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 3 | |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 3 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 | |
| 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 | |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St Catherine's Catholic High School, Halifax, HX2 9TH

Thank you very much for making us welcome when we inspected your school recently. I am pleased to be able to tell you that your school is providing a satisfactory standard of education and no longer requires special measures. The discussions we had with a number of you helped us reach this conclusion.

Your headteacher is leading the school well. She has made lots of improvements in a short time. GCSE results went up in 2008 and we can see that overall you are making satisfactory progress in lessons. This is partly because teachers are making learning more interesting for you, for instance, through the use of interactive whiteboards. As a consequence, your behaviour in lessons has improved and is often good, helping you to learn more rapidly. The vast majority of you know your targets. The school now has a much better system for checking how well you are working towards them and is able to intervene quickly to help those of you who fall behind.

The courses you follow are now better matched to your needs and interests. In addition, many of you told us how much you enjoyed the fair trade day and the enterprise week. Those of you who find learning difficult are getting better help to succeed. The learning development unit is providing valuable support to a small number of you who need specific help at school. Your attendance has improved and is now satisfactory.

You will not be surprised to know that we have asked the school to carry on making improvements. Standards are not high enough so teachers need to ensure you make more progress in lessons. Many of you did not achieve as well as you should have in the past and have some catching up to do. You can play your part by working as hard as possible in every lesson. We have also asked the school to improve the sixth form. It is not well organised and too many students are not doing as well as they should.

We wish you all every success in the future.