

St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114326
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	378843
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2012
Lead inspector	Lee Northern HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,391
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	277
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dennis Bradley
Headteacher	Simon Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	13 February 2007
School address	North End Durham DH1 4NG
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with one day's notice. The lead inspector looked at the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 42 lessons, each taught by a different member of staff. Of these, four were observed jointly with managers from the school. In addition, a number of short visits to lessons and registration sessions were conducted, including a series of visits to lessons to sample students' behaviour and safe practices. In total, nearly 19 hours of teaching was observed. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students and evaluated samples of students' work. Inspectors also met with members of the governing body and with school staff. They observed the school's work, scrutinised a range of documentation and examined evaluations undertaken by the school to ensure that it meets statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding. In addition, 509 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised and inspectors also examined questionnaires returned by school staff and those from a representative sample of students.

Information about the school

St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School is situated on the outskirts of the city of Durham. The number of students attending the school is higher than that typical for secondary schools. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much smaller than that seen nationally. Almost all students are of White British heritage and few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs or supported at school action plus is smaller than the national average. The proportion of students entering or leaving the school other than at the usual times is much lower than the national average for secondary schools. The school has specialist status for technology.

The school meets the current floor standards, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. It has gained a number of awards, including the International Schools Award and holds Healthy School status.

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

Key Findings

- St Leonard's is a good school that provides well for its students. The school is not yet outstanding because not enough teaching is consistently good or better to reduce more rapidly variations in achievement, most notably in mathematics. The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good.
- While achievement is good overall, including in the sixth form, there are variations in the rates of progress of different groups of students. In addition, although achievement in English is outstanding, students make only satisfactory progress in mathematics. The great majority of students achieve well in most of their subjects but a small number of students known to be eligible for free school meals, and some who have special educational needs, make slower progress than their peers, although these differences are being reduced.
- The quality of teaching is good, including in the sixth form. However, not all teaching is consistently effective in ensuring the needs of all groups of students are met, including those most vulnerable to underachievement. Not enough teaching, particularly in mathematics, challenges students sufficiently, involves them more actively in their learning or deepens their understanding. The impact of support for literacy across the curriculum is much more evident than it is for numeracy.
- Behaviour and safety are good. The mature attitudes, resilience and application of most students contribute significantly to their good learning. However, in a small number of lessons, inspection evidence confirms that some low-level disruption occurs where teaching lacks challenge and active engagement, or where strategies to promote positive behaviour are applied inconsistently.
- Leadership and management are good and provide a clear direction for improvement. Actions to improve teaching and manage performance are well established and are leading to improvements in provision and outcomes. However, steps to ensure existing good and outstanding teaching are shared more effectively are not embedded fully.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in mathematics by:
 - ensuring all mathematics lessons provide sufficient levels of challenge to more rapidly accelerate students' rates of progress
 - providing more opportunities for students to discuss their learning, develop their reasoning skills and deepen their understanding
 - strengthening the support for numeracy across all aspects of the curriculum.
- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and outstanding by:
 - ensuring all teachers use assessment information to meet the needs of students, placing particular emphasis on those groups most vulnerable to underachievement
 - increasing the opportunities for students to be more actively involved in their learning by balancing more effectively the contributions of students and teachers to lessons
 - sharing more effectively those aspects of good and outstanding teaching that exist within the school.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students join the school with levels of attainment that are consistently above average. They make good progress overall and, by the end of Key Stages 4 and 5, reach levels of attainment that are often well above those typical for secondary schools. For example, many students excel in English and most also make good progress in humanities subjects, in modern foreign languages and in science. Students also achieve well in those subjects linked to the specialism of technology. A significant factor in this is the impact of support to develop students' literacy skills, including for a very small number of students in Year 7 who are in the early stages of reading. These students make good progress because of the support they receive that helps them to understand the links between letters and the sounds that letters make. By contrast, work to provide support for numeracy across the curriculum is much less well developed. For example, in some lessons, students are confused by mathematical approaches that they do not recognise or understand fully, even though they are often equivalent to those they have been shown elsewhere. A small number of parents and carers who made written comments to inspectors indicated concerns with inconsistencies in achievement across the curriculum. However, many also praised the work of the school. For example, the comment, 'Excellent school, excellent ethos' was typical of the views of many. Inspection evidence confirms that, although achievement is lower in some aspects, such as in mathematics, the great majority of students achieve well. For example, almost all sixth form students complete their studies successfully and a very large majority continue to higher education.

The progress made by students known to be eligible for free school meals, and those with special educational needs, is similar to that of their peers, although a small number make slower progress overall. Although the use of assessment information to identify underachievement and to target support is much stronger than at the time of the previous inspection, not all teachers use this information effectively to ensure that these differences in achievement are reduced more rapidly. For example, additional and targeted support to

meet the needs of those students vulnerable to underachievement, including through mentoring programmes, is more effective than support provided in mainstream lessons, where tasks and activities are not always sufficiently well adapted to meet the needs of all the students in the class. Nevertheless, the impact of recent initiatives to improve the progress made by girls can be seen in a reduction in the differences between boys' and girls' achievement across a range of subjects. However, in some lessons, the approaches used mean that girls do not have enough opportunities to be more actively involved in their learning.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good overall, with some examples of outstanding teaching seen, most notably in English. In a very small number of lessons, students made inadequate progress. A small number of parents and carers indicated in their written comments that there is some variation in the quality of teaching. Inspection evidence confirms this view.

In the best lessons, including in the sixth form, teachers ensure that all students are challenged to produce their best work. The astute use of assessment information, linked to students' target grades, ensures that expectations are high. Students with special educational needs are helped to make good progress because the best teaching provides support and challenge in equal measure. Good learning is frequently characterised by students' active involvement in the lesson, with an appropriate balance between the teacher's input and students' contributions. For example, in an English lesson for Year 8 students, the students made outstanding progress because the teacher expected them to work collaboratively, share their ideas and develop their thinking. There was a strong focus on support for reading and on the skills needed to work effectively as a team. The targets for the lesson were carefully matched to each student's needs, including for those students speaking English as an additional language. In less effective teaching, too little account is taken of students' prior learning and capabilities. As a result, some students spend too long working on topics they have encountered before, or new work is presented in ways which lack challenge or engagement. For example, although the use of intervention and modular approaches to assessment is helping to raise achievement in mathematics, not enough mathematics teaching focuses sufficiently on developing students' understanding and reasoning. Progress in some lessons slows because too little emphasis is placed on students discussing their mathematics, exploring misconceptions and making sense of mathematics for themselves.

The quality of written feedback to students varies. In the best examples, students are provided with detailed guidance from the teacher that helps them to improve their work. In English, students make rapid progress because of the quality of the feedback they receive. In turn, students take great pride and pleasure in the portfolios of work they produce. However, not all marking provides feedback of this quality, particularly in mathematics. In a few instances, books are rarely marked or the comments provided are not useful in supporting students to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and safety are good and an analysis of the school's behaviour records confirms this pattern over time. Students say they feel very safe in school and parents and carers express few concerns. Although students are confident in the school's ability to deal effectively with bullying, the school does not analyse separately the impact of its work to

tackle different forms of bullying. Students have a good understanding of the potential dangers associated with the internet and new technologies. However, on rare occasions, a small number of students need to be reminded about the importance of routines to ensure safety in design and technology workshops.

Through a combination of assemblies, tutorial time, enrichment activities and the wider curriculum, students develop a deeper understanding of religious, moral and ethical issues in modern society. As a result, their thoughtful and considerate approach makes a highly positive contribution to school life. Many sixth form students take on roles of responsibility across the school, including as 'buddies' or mentors for younger students. Almost all lessons proceed with very little interruption and many are characterised by the warmth of relationships that support learning. However, in a few instances, lessons are disturbed by the off-task behaviour of a small number of students. Inspection evidence, including the views of students, confirms that this is linked to instances where the school's systems for managing behaviour are inconsistently applied, or where lessons do not challenge or engage sufficiently. Attendance is above average and little learning time is lost as students move from lesson to lesson around the school. There are very few serious incidents of poor behaviour and the number of fixed-term exclusions from school is very low.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders and managers are providing a strong drive for improvement across many aspects of the school's work. For example, the use of assessment information has been greatly strengthened since the time of the previous inspection. The detailed monitoring of students' progress across all areas of the curriculum is enabling prompt and effective action to be taken to address any underachievement. As a result, levels of attainment are rising and differences in achievement between groups of students are narrowing. Lines of accountability have been clarified and the support and challenge for middle leaders is enabling many to contribute strongly to further improvement. The governing body is effective in holding the school to account and provides sufficient challenge and support to the school.

Actions to improve teaching and manage performance are well established, including through the provision of an appropriate range of professional development opportunities for staff. However, although a clear structure for assuring the quality of the work of subject teams is in place, existing approaches lack sufficient rigour and coherence to drive improvements to teaching more rapidly. For example, although a programme of peer support is developing to enable good practice to be more widely shared this is not embedded sufficiently or is rigorous enough to raise more rapidly the level of the least effective practice to that of the best. Nevertheless, improvements in the overall quality of provision, an increasing trend of attainment and the positive impact of actions to improve outcomes for different groups of students all demonstrate clearly the school's good capacity for further improvement.

The curriculum is good overall and meets all statutory requirements. The post-16 curriculum enables most students to choose courses that suit their needs, interests and abilities and students following the growing range of vocational and applied GCE options achieve highly. Students receive clear advice and guidance at appropriate stages. At the time of the inspection, arrangements for safeguarding were robust and regularly reviewed. The school community is one where inequality and discrimination will not be tolerated. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very effectively through the

curriculum. Links with partner organisations, together with the many trips, visits and retreat opportunities ensure that students develop a broader understanding of other cultures and faiths.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
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.



14 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St Leonard's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School, Durham, DH1 4NG

You will remember that a team of inspectors visited your school recently. We took careful note of the views that you expressed in our meetings with you and in the questionnaires that you completed for us.

We judged that your school is providing you with a good standard of education, although we also found that there remains some variation in achievement between different groups of students and across different subject areas, most notably in mathematics. We were particularly impressed by the quality of your work in English.

We found that your school works effectively to ensure you have a safe learning environment where bullying is not tolerated. However, you told us that in a few of your lessons your learning is sometimes disturbed by other students. Some of your parents and carers commented on the same issue. While we confirmed that some low-level disruption to learning does take place, it is uncommon.

We have asked that the school helps you to achieve as well in mathematics as in many other of your other subjects. We have asked that teachers ensure all of you are challenged to produce your best work, and to provide more opportunities for your active involvement in lessons. We have also asked that teachers use assessment information to ensure all lessons meet the needs of every student in the class. Lastly, we have asked the school to ensure that it supports your mathematical development more effectively across all aspects of its work and to further develop ways in which all teaching can be as good as the best teaching in your school.

You can also play your part in improving St Leonard's School by continuing to attend regularly, behaving well and working hard. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

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