

St Peter's Catholic School and Specialist Science College

Whitefields Road, Solihull, B91 3NZ

Inspection dates

19–20 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding		1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding		1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding		1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding		1
Sixth form provision	Outstanding		1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students make outstanding progress and consistently reach standards that are above national averages in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and the specialist science subjects.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding and leaders have ensured that there is a high degree of consistent practice across the school, although a very small minority of teachers do not fully stretch the most able students.
- The marking of students' work is consistently strong; teachers provide helpful tips to students on how to improve their work and students respond very well to this advice. This leads to rapid progress.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is exemplary. They are very keen to learn and to do well. They are polite, caring and courteous, showing respect for adults and for each other.
- Students say they feel very safe, and they have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They say that bullying is very rare and that the school takes quick and firm action should it occur.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students show strong commitment to their studies as a result of outstanding teaching. They make a significant contribution to school life by supporting younger students and acting as excellent role models.
- The outstanding curriculum that students follow is very well matched to their abilities and interests. It includes a strong focus on promoting literacy and numeracy skills across different subjects.
- The school ensures that promoting students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a key focus throughout its work.
- The headteacher, very well supported by a strong team of leaders and the governing body, has been quick to establish high expectations of all. Leaders show a strong capacity to sustain the improvements made since the previous inspection.
- Senior and subject leaders and teachers work as a close team to drive improvements in the quality of teaching across the school, supporting each other very well and sharing good practice.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in lessons across all year groups and subjects. Six of the lessons were seen with one of the school's senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body, the local authority school improvement partner and staff.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at policies, the school's own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and its plans for development, minutes of meetings of the governing body, records of lesson observations, information about students' progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students' work, including their English books.
- The views of the 142 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. Inspectors also took the school's own survey of parents' views into account, and considered the 67 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Kamal Hanif	Additional Inspector
Martyn Ashmead	Additional Inspector
Russell Hinton	Additional Inspector
Shahnaz Maqsood	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average at 10%.
- The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. About 21% are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Irish heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is low at 3%.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average at about 10%.
- A very few students in Year 9 attend off-site alternative provision at the Lighthouse when required.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The headteacher and the deputy headteacher took up their posts in September 2014, having previously been acting deputy headteachers at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently set tasks that fully stretch and challenge all groups of students, particularly the most able.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

are outstanding

- The new headteacher is very well supported by her senior team and the outstanding governing body. They have been quick to establish their vision for the school and to ensure that its previously good performance continues to improve, holding all fully to account for students' achievement and well-being.
- The school uses very effective procedures to ensure that the quality of teaching remains at a high standard in all key stages. Senior and subject leaders take part in checks on teaching, and all teachers have the opportunity to observe each other's lessons and share good practice. Subject leaders play a strong role in holding teachers to account for students' progress.
- All staff are able to contribute to the staff training programme and to share the aspects of their teaching that work particularly well. In this way leaders have established a high degree of consistency across the school, particularly in planning and marking. This has also led to close teamwork and an atmosphere where all support each other, either informally or formally, for example through coaching or mentoring.
- Leaders, including in the sixth form, have a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development, and high expectations of both staff and students. Any area of underperformance is quickly identified through rigorous tracking and monitoring, and is carefully addressed. Teachers know their students very well and keep careful records of how best to support each individual to enable them to reach their potential.
- Form tutors play a key role in providing both personal and academic support and guidance. Students told inspectors how much they value this support and the extra classes provided to enable them to revise, or to focus on an aspect of their work that needs improving.
- Leaders ensure that all are valued and diversity is recognised and celebrated. The very effective pastoral system helps to ensure that students can talk to adults, feel safe and be themselves. Leaders thoroughly track the progress of different groups of students, making sure that all have an equal chance to succeed and there is no discrimination. They also check carefully on the impact of the pupil premium on the progress and well-being of disadvantaged students.
- The curriculum is very well matched to students' interests and abilities. In particular the 'green pathway' enables students at risk of not gaining a GCSE grade C in English or mathematics to follow a course where they can be taught in smaller groups and have an extra lesson in one or both of these subjects each week. This has resulted in the dramatic progress of these students, with many now expected to reach grade A at GCSE. Independent careers advice is effectively provided from Year 7, ensuring that all are able to identify their goals and are supported through their option choices.
- The curriculum also promotes students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's constant focus on creating a climate where students are kind and considerate stems from the promotion of the key values of mutual respect and tolerance. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain. A rich array of additional activities such as volunteering, sport and music promote teamwork and the development of leadership skills.
- The local authority regularly reviews the school's work, providing a useful external check on the accuracy of leaders' judgements. It gave effective support to the headteacher following her appointment. In partnership with the local authority, leaders check on the progress, attendance and behaviour of students following off-site courses.
- The school constantly seeks to strengthen its partnership with parents, who are kept fully informed. Frequent workshops enable them to be involved in their child's education. For example, e-safety workshops for parents have enabled them to reinforce this safety message.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors give a very strong lead in the direction of the school and provide a very good balance of

challenge and support. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and draw on their different areas of expertise. For example, they have made better use of technology to improve communications with parents and to support sixth form students in their studies.

- Governors have a strong strategic role in monitoring and supporting teaching and learning. They make regular visits to lessons to gain first-hand knowledge of teaching and learning. They ensure that teachers' pay rises are linked to the achievement of their students and the whole-school targets set for them. They fully support leaders in their constant drive for improvement, and have had a marked effect on improving the quality of teaching over time.
- Governors have a thorough understanding of performance data and how the school compares to others nationally. They ensure that they have regular training to enable them to carry out their role effectively. They ensure that the school's ethos is promoted very well, and that all beliefs are respected. They focus strongly on ensuring that tolerance and an understanding of individual responsibility remain the school's priorities. They promote links with parents well and ensure that both students and staff are kept safe, through safeguarding procedures that are highly effective and fully meet government requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. They show not only great enthusiasm for their learning, but also a strong determination to do well. This was particularly well illustrated in an English lesson, where the Year 11 students were really pushing their teacher to ensure they had all the information they needed on how they would be examined and what a high-grade answer would include. A strong partnership and warm relationships between teachers and students were evident in all lessons observed during the inspection.
- Behaviour around the school is calm and sensible even where space is limited. Outside areas are well supervised and sixth form students provide additional support in areas that are particularly crowded. Students are excellent ambassadors for the school. They are polite and friendly to visitors, holding doors open and going out of their way to show the way or to talk about their pride in their school.
- Attendance overall is above average. The school rigorously checks on absent students and relentlessly follows up any extended absence to check on students' safety. Sixth form attendance is above national levels.
- The school's drive to improve punctuality has included moving tutor time to the start of the day. This has had a strong impact, particularly in the sixth form.
- Exclusion rates have fallen over recent years. This is largely the result of leaders providing an inclusion area within the school where students can be supported more effectively.
- The large majority of parents and all teachers who responded to the questionnaire agree that students are safe and behave well. Students say that their learning is very rarely disrupted.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students told inspectors that they are very well informed about such issues as e-safety and cyber-bullying, and that the school takes rapid and effective action should incidents of bullying occur. They told inspectors how much they value the opportunity to report bullying or other issues that worry them confidentially online, and that the school cares for them very well.
- The school takes a 'zero tolerance' approach to derogatory language, including homophobic or racist name-calling. Students say that they feel free to be themselves and do not worry about discrimination of any sort. One commented that mutual respect and tolerance were 'ingrained'.
- The school provides excellent support for those facing challenging circumstances, including in the sixth form, and works very well in partnership with external agencies where appropriate. It goes the extra mile to ensure that its students are safe, including the risks from on-line social media and issues related to

sexual exploitation.

The quality of teaching**is outstanding**

- Leaders rigorously monitor all aspects of teaching and the progress that students make throughout the year. The results show that teaching is now outstanding, and that there is a high level of consistency in the methods that teachers apply across the school and in different subjects.
- Where students make the fastest progress, teachers show high expectations and set tasks that build on previous learning and are closely matched to the different abilities within the class. Teachers reinforce clear strategies that students can apply to different situations, so that they are well understood and students can confidently apply them in examinations. In an English lesson observed, students worked by themselves to develop a 'mind-map' that would help them remember key facts from their set text. They showed enthusiasm both for the text and for the help that this method of learning provided.
- Teachers promote literacy and numeracy extremely well across different subjects. Special focus weeks, such as the one on numeracy that took place during the inspection, ensure that teachers across the school include a numeracy task in their lessons. For example, Year 9 students learned about the 'Wall Street Crash' and stocks and shares, linked with their set English text *Of Mice and Men*. This not only enabled them to discuss and reflect on moral issues, promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but also to develop their understanding of the world of finance.
- The feedback provided to students during lessons and through marking gives them a very clear understanding of how to develop their learning further. Students are informed about the things they have done well and given 'tips' for improvement. They then have the opportunity to redraft passages of their work or make corrections before their work is marked again. This constant dialogue helps students to make rapid progress in improving their own work.
- Teachers know their students well and will often challenge the most able students individually with an extension task. A very small minority of teachers, however, do not consistently set tasks or ask questions that fully challenge and stretch the most able students. Teaching assistants are used well to support disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

The achievement of pupils**is outstanding**

- Students start at the school with skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics that are above average, and make outstanding progress. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of students gaining five A* to C GCSE passes, including English and mathematics is consistently high. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades (A* and A) is consistently above average in mathematics and religious education, and increasing in other subjects. Standards in science are also consistently high across the school as a result of the school's specialism.
- The proportions of students making and exceeding nationally expected progress in English increased strongly in 2014. Although progress rates in mathematics dipped slightly in 2014, they still remained high. There is no significant difference between the rates of progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make equally rapid progress as a result of the outstanding teaching and support they receive. Teachers are provided with the training and support they need to enable them to support individuals very effectively.
- Year 7 'catch-up' funding is used very effectively to support any students who enter the school with limited skills in literacy and numeracy, for as long as it is required. There is a strong focus on the promotion of literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects, with students encouraged and expected to use the technical language required of each subject. Students show a love of reading and often volunteer to read out loud in lessons.

- All students are now entered for GCSE mathematics in Year 11, with the highest attaining students having the opportunity to take an additional course to prepare them for A-level study. Students throughout the school say how much they love mathematics and great enjoyment was seen in all the mathematics lessons observed.
- The most able students are strongly supported by the school's leaders to ensure that they make outstanding progress. Most of their teachers set challenging targets and give them opportunities to explore their interests and talents. 'Fast-track' sets in English and mathematics, where all are aiming for A or A* grades, ensure that these students are fully challenged and learn rapidly.
- Over the past three years, the gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged students and other students in the school and students nationally have narrowed. In 2013, disadvantaged students were just over half a grade behind their classmates but at the same level as students nationally in English and mathematics. The gap in English narrowed further in 2014. As a result of a strong focus by leaders on the achievement of this group, their progress in these subjects is also increasing.

The sixth form provision**is outstanding**

- All groups of students make outstanding progress in the sixth form. The department is popular and students are keen to stay on at school after their GCSE courses. In 2014, this retention rate was well above the national average, as was the proportion staying on to complete their courses in Year 13. The school provides very well for an increasing number of disabled students, who are well supported to enable them to complete their sixth form courses.
- Over the past three years, standards have risen and have remained above national averages. There is no significant difference between the performance of different groups of students, including disabled students, those who have special educational needs or the disadvantaged. All students are expected to resit their GCSE English and mathematics examinations until they achieve at least a grade C.
- Leaders' monitoring and records of students' achievement over time show that the quality of teaching is of a consistently high quality. Students say that teachers provide excellent support, both in the feedback they provide on their work and their willingness to spend time providing one-to-one advice.
- Strong leadership of the sixth form ensures that students are well supported and guided, and that any underachievement is quickly addressed. Students greatly value the support and guidance they receive from their form tutors and the head of sixth form. They say that the school keeps them very safe and enables them to support the safety of younger students.
- The sixth form fully meets the current standards for 16 to 19 study programmes. There is a strong focus on improving employability skills, and all students are offered the opportunity for work experience. A wide range of extra activities enhance students' experience and enable them to develop personal and leadership skills. These include presenting assemblies, volunteering, charity fundraising and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. These opportunities are greatly appreciated by students, who act as excellent role models for students in the main school through their outstanding behaviour and the commitment they show to their studies.
- In 2014, all students went on to further or higher education or employment, or entered apprenticeship schemes. An increasing number, year on year, are offered places at Russell group universities.
- Students have outstanding opportunities to explore contemporary issues; for example, British values and moral issues, including sexism and cyber-bullying. This supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship, extremely well.

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	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.
		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.

School details

Unique reference number	104119
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	448263

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	1256
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Loughran
Headteacher	Marie Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2009
Telephone number	0121 705 3988
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