

# St Joseph's College

London Road, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 5NT

## Inspection dates

4–5 February 2014

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- All members of the community of St Joseph's College share the commitment of the headteacher and governing body to provide the best possible education for all students. The drive to maintain high standards and make the school even better is impressive.
- Students join the school with strong literary and numeracy skills. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, attainment is high. Achievement is outstanding because students make rapid progress in all subject areas.
- Teaching is inspiring, exciting and creative. A challenging learning environment is created where students relish the opportunities to explore, investigate and develop their skills.
- Students are eager to learn, proud of their school and ambitious to achieve well. They are courteous, polite, respectful and highly effective communicators. They embrace the numerous opportunities to contribute to their school, local and wider communities. Students feel safe and nurtured in this school.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students follow mainly academic courses and most go on to university. They leave the sixth form ready to make a contribution to the world around them.
- Outstanding leadership and management pervade the school. Leaders are never complacent, continually driving improvement. The school knows itself exceptionally well and its current improvement priorities, to develop better marking and further increase the proportion of students achieving the very highest grades at GCSE and at AS-level, are the right ones.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons taught by 45 teachers. One lesson was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with members of staff, students from every year group and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documentation including samples of students' work, the school's information about progress and attainment, records of attendance and behaviour, school policies and matters relating to safeguarding. They examined the development plans for many departments and the whole school development plan.
- There were insufficient responses to register on Parent View, the Ofsted on-line questionnaire. Instead, inspectors reviewed the 564 parental responses from the school's recent survey conducted in November.

## Inspection team

Judith Straw, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Bimla Kumari

Additional Inspector

John Leigh

Additional Inspector

Peter McKay

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Joseph's College converted to become an academy school on 1 February 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- St Joseph's is a slightly larger than average secondary school. There is an entrance examination to gain admission and about three quarters of the students are practising Catholics. The rest are from other Christian denominations or other faiths.
- Most students come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. Few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportions of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action and school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are much lower than those found nationally.
- A very small proportion of students is known to be eligible for the pupil premium. Pupil premium is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals; those looked after by the local authority and those from service families.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The sixth form is housed in its own building but many lessons take place in the main school. About half of all sixth formers join from other secondary schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher is a national leader of education (NLE) and the school has several specialist leaders of education. St Joseph's provides support for a number of other secondary schools in the area as well as one primary school. It is a teaching school and a Leading Edge school.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Implement action plans to:
  - increase the proportion of students achieving the very highest grades at GCSE and AS-level
  - ensure that marking is consistently effective in telling students what they need to do to improve their work and that students act promptly on these suggestions.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is outstanding

- Students make rapid progress across all year groups and in most subjects. The proportions of students making more than expected progress in English and mathematics are high. The proportions of students achieving GCSE A\* and A grades across most subjects are already high but the school would like to ensure even more students reach this level. Attainment has been well above average for several years and even higher in the last two years since the school became an academy.
- The school's tracking records for the current Year 11, as well as the evidence seen by inspectors in lessons, show that nearly all students will gain five or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics by the end of this academic year. More GCSE A\* and A grades are expected because of the sharp focus on providing even greater challenge for the most able students.
- The most able students make rapid progress. They show industry and initiative in their studies and are ambitious to succeed. The school is also rightly proud of the fact that many middle ability students achieve exceptionally well making much faster progress than similar students nationally.
- The school occasionally uses early entry for mathematics for a small number of students who need a boost to their confidence in sitting examinations. The most-able students do not take mathematics early because the school prefers to enrich the mathematics curriculum during Year 11 to maximise the number of high grades and provide a secure foundation for later study.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make excellent progress. Their work is discussed every two weeks and those who might be falling behind or need some extra support receive it promptly.
- The very small number of students who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding are well-supported by extra sessions in reading and numeracy so that they rapidly improve their work and reach the standards of other students.
- There have been so few students in recent years that are known to be eligible for free school meals that any meaningful statistical conclusions are impossible to draw. What can be said is that students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding receive whatever support the school believes will be most helpful to them. Sometimes this is in the form of extra small-group sessions, sometimes it is support for school visits, uniform or technology equipment. In English and mathematics the attainment of individual students is usually higher than the national average and only slightly below that of other students in the school. Data show that most of these students make good, and sometimes better, progress in English and mathematics.
- Students in all year groups spoke confidently in lessons and in discussions with inspectors. Students achieve exceptionally well in science and have excellent numeracy skills. The focus on reading goes across the entire school, as can be seen from the high number of books borrowed from the library and the enthusiastic support for several book clubs and the school-wide reading review forum.
- Achievement in the sixth form is strong but is better in Year 13 than in Year 12. Improvement in AS results in Year 12 is currently a priority. Overall a higher proportion of students achieves A\* to E grades than is found nationally and a higher proportion attain A\*, A and B grades both at A2 and AS level. Students achieve exceptionally well in applied A-level subjects. Retention rates are very high because nearly all students complete their courses. As a result of high quality guidance and education, students progress to a wide range of university courses, vocational pathways or employment.

### The quality of teaching

### is outstanding

- Teachers are experts in their subject areas and impart their knowledge with enthusiasm, skill

and often humour. Outstanding learning was seen in virtually all subject areas. The work set is interesting, challenging and enjoyable.

- Many different strategies are used to enthuse students. For example, Year 7 students were dictating long passages of French to each other and so practising their speaking, listening and writing skills. Questioning is used exceptionally well to make students think deeply, work problems out and build confidence in their own ideas. In an outstanding Year 12 English session, students were able to identify the key themes of the play they were about to study simply by focusing on one image and one very short scene.
- Because of the highly positive attitudes to learning of students and their excellent behaviour, students often review each other's learning so that a strong partnership builds up in most classrooms. Students are happy to discuss and share ideas. In many lessons there is an atmosphere of friendly competition.
- The school's emphasis on the importance of literacy and reading ensures that students who start school with lower reading ages soon catch up. Numeracy skills are developed well across the curriculum and a high proportion of students go on to study mathematics and science-related courses.
- The small proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs receive highly effective support from teaching assistants, class teachers and the special needs co-ordinator. Support is tailored precisely to their needs.
- Most of the teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. This was confirmed in discussion with students and from direct observations. Very few students fail to complete their courses and nearly all go on to the university or a vocational course of their choice.
- Marking of students' work is good, but sometimes opportunities are missed to state precisely what students should do to improve and not all students respond instantly to requests to complete, correct or enhance their work.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Students recognise the high expectations set for them and they have equally high expectations for themselves. This is why their attitudes to learning are excellent. They fully embrace the school's aim, 'aspire to be more'.
- Students are proud of their school. They have a keen awareness of right and wrong. The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are happy, well cared for and well looked after.
- Students say that bullying is very rare and the school's records confirm this. They confirm that name-calling is rare and is not racist or homophobic. Students know how to keep themselves safe, including rules for Internet safety, the hazards of wearing headphones in the street and awareness of drug abuse of different kinds.
- Discipline is excellent across the school. Students say that they like strict rules because it ensures that everyone is safe. They understand the sanctions for various misdemeanours and say that they are fair. Students themselves are highly critical of poor behaviour. Corridors are quite narrow but there is never any disturbance. Students wear their uniform with pride and there is virtually no litter on the site.
- Attendance is consistently high and punctuality to lessons is excellent. Senior students monitor anyone arriving late.
- Sixth-form students take on many roles and responsibilities such as bullying ambassadors and leadership of the School and ECO councils. Recently two Year 13 students spent half a term at the United Nations in Geneva as Edmund Rice human rights ambassadors. Sixth formers say that for them the school is 'full of opportunities'. The opportunities for students' personal development at St Joseph's are exceptional.
- The school's welcoming and inspiring atmosphere supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students enjoy a very wide range of extra-curricular sports, music, drama and creative arts. Assemblies and tutor periods set a purposeful tone for the day and provide the

opportunity to reflect.

## **The leadership and management** are outstanding

- The headteacher and governing body set high expectations for staff and students alike. The headteacher's aspirations for all students permeate the school and are shared by her talented senior leadership team, middle leaders and, indeed, all teachers and support staff. This is a community where everyone matters, is valued and is supported. These factors contribute to the school's excellent capacity and impetus to keep improving.
- Middle leaders are highly effective. All departments have a very accurate view of the strengths of what they are providing and what can still be improved. Development-planning is shared with governors, students and parents, so that everyone knows what the school is working to achieve.
- Leadership in the sixth form is strong. Students can choose from 29 Advanced-level subjects. The checking of progress is thorough and systematic. All Year 12 students are expected to attend several supervised study periods each week in order to cultivate good study habits.
- The school is rigorous in tackling underperformance, whether from students or departments which miss their targets. The school is highly effective in promoting equality and tackling discrimination, as can be seen in the narrowing gap between the achievements of different types of student.
- Procedures for teachers' performance management are rigorous. Teachers are rewarded only when objectives and the teachers' national standards are fully met. Teachers know that only good or better progress is acceptable and so are continually seeking to improve their teaching practice.
- The curriculum is mainly an academic one, which suits the vast majority of students who want to progress to study in the sixth form and, later, to higher education. All students, including the most-able, are given every encouragement to develop their interests and broaden their horizons by, for example, joining the 'Internet gateway for gifted youth', an on-line forum run by Warwick University and MENSA. However, the key aims of the school are not just academic ones. St Joseph's aims for its students to become responsible, compassionate, tolerant, courageous, non-judgemental citizens concerned about social justice, living their lives with integrity.
- Teachers speak warmly of the support they receive in developing their own careers and professional skills. The local authority regularly uses the expertise at St Joseph's to support other local schools. As a national leader of education the headteacher works in conjunction with other local schools to offer courses to teachers on topics such as improving teaching and behaviour, moving good teaching to outstanding and developing leadership in school. Staff from St Joseph's are setting up a teacher training programme for teachers in Sierra Leone.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body is ambitious for the school and proud of its track record. It is working with the national college to provide training courses for governors across the locality. Governors hold the school leaders robustly to account. They probe all information provided by the school, ask searching questions and make sure they are satisfied with the answers. Governors have a good understanding of the school's progress and attainment data and how to compare it with similar schools nationally. They scrutinise decisions relating to teachers' salary progression and know exactly how pupil premium funding is spent. Their abiding concern is always to ask: 'what difference has it made'? Governors see the work of the school for themselves in learning walks and lesson observations. Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met, including those relating to safeguarding, health and safety.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136460
<b>Local authority</b>	Stoke-on-Trent
<b>Inspection number</b>	440905

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy Converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1078
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	401
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Simon Whitehouse
<b>Headteacher</b>	Roisin Maguire
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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