

St John's RCVA Technology School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114325
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	338340
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Mr Brian Dower

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 students	11–18
Gender of students	Mixed
Gender of students in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	1,397
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	326
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Leo Robinson
Headteacher	Mr G Moran
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 34 lessons, observed 34 teachers and spent approximately 70% of inspection time looking at learning. They held meetings with the chairman and vice chairman of governors, staff and groups of students and a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including monitoring and assessment records, students' books and files, minutes of governors' meetings, school improvement planning and curriculum and lesson plans. They also analysed 131 questionnaire returns from parents and carers, together with 83 from staff and 201 from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- students' current progress and how well they are prepared for the next stage in their education or for employment
- the use of assessments to set ambitious performance targets and challenging learning activities
- students' understanding of how well they are doing and how to improve
- partnership arrangements with outside agencies and other schools to promote students' learning and their welfare
- the extent to which sixth form students are working independently and creatively.

Information about the school

The school is much larger than the average secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average; that of students with special education needs and/or disabilities is slightly below average. Students are predominantly of White British heritage. A few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Admission to the sixth form is open to students from other schools. The school has specialist technology status and holds the Investors in People award.

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: how good is the school

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 is high and the level at which they achieve in relation to their average starting points is excellent. Learning and progress are good for all groups, including those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the few from minority ethnic backgrounds. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is average and students' achievement in relation to their prior GCSE results is good.

Students say they feel very safe in school. They know what constitutes risk, including that encountered on the internet, and how to protect themselves and others. They have a good understanding of how to keep fit and well, they eat healthily and take full advantage of a wide range of extra-curricular physical activities. A large majority of students undertake responsibilities in school and the local community, making an exceptional contribution. Their fundraising for disadvantaged people in this country and abroad is extensive. They contribute ideas for school improvement, suggestions which are often taken up. Christian values permeate the school's work, resulting in the students' sensitivity to the needs of others. Their behaviour is excellent and they are keen to learn and succeed. Attendance rates are high and punctuality to school and lessons is excellent. Students receive exceptional preparation for the next stage in their lives because of the qualifications they get, their excellent basic skills and their impressive personal qualities.

Teaching is good. Working relationships between students and with staff are excellent, as are the facilities for learning. Inconsistencies in teachers' use of assessments, their questioning skills and the way they promote independent learning define the difference between the predominantly good teaching and the outstanding. The curriculum is outstanding because it is structured to meet the needs of all. The school's status for technology has contributed to the improvement in students' learning skills and the rising trend in attainment. Care, guidance and support are outstanding, allowing all, including potentially vulnerable students, to make good progress and develop in confidence and maturity.

Leaders, managers and governors have been successful in creating the climate for students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development to flourish. Students' commitment to work and each other, and their loyalty to St John's, drive the high standards and the exceptional sense of community cohesion in school and beyond. Self-evaluation is accurate but development priorities are defined loosely and lack

precise milestones to measure the rate of improvement. The rising standards are testimony to the school's good capacity to improve further. The school gives excellent value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching and learning to that of the best by:
 - ensuring that assessments are used to pitch learning activities at a challenging level in all lessons
 - extending opportunities for students to evaluate for themselves how well they are doing and how to improve
 - challenging students to explain and justify their thinking when questioned.
- Strengthen strategic planning by defining the milestones to be used to monitor the pace of change so interventions are timely if improvement falters.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of students

1

The school's records and inspection evidence show that the rapidly improving trend in GCSE examination results over recent years is being maintained. Current learning and progress remain good and expectations are that attainment will rise further this year for all groups of students. This is because students enjoy their work and are ambitious. In the main, they understand where they are in their learning and what to do to raise the bar. The transition rates into post-16 education or into training and employment are consequently very high. Students have excellent literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and use these well across the curriculum. Their social and speaking and listening skills are highly developed and they are self-reliant and confident young people. They have an excellent understanding of cultural and religious diversity within different societies. They know right from wrong and are aware of the consequences of their actions. Spiritual development is excellent, with students reflecting on issues surrounding faith and the world around them. They are courteous and welcoming when they meet people for the first time, a natural ease which bodes well for their dealings with clients and colleagues when they enter employment.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Students' attainment ¹	1
The quality of students' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which students feel safe	1
Students' behaviour	1
The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which students contribute to the school and wider community	1

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

The extent to which students develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Students' attendance ¹	1
The extent of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and communicate an enthusiasm for learning. They have high expectations for their students. A range of teaching strategies and high quality resources are used in their work. Although good practice was seen, assessments are not always used well to ensure that classroom learning activities are sufficiently challenging. Opportunities are sometimes missed to encourage students to assess for themselves how well they are learning and so promote greater independence. There are occasions when questioning fails to challenge students to explain how and why they have formed a view or come to a conclusion. The curriculum is extremely relevant to students' needs. It provides high quality activities and rich experiences for all students beyond normal lessons. Excellent partnership arrangements broaden provision and choice through a range of academic and vocational pathways. Highly sensitive care for those students who are potentially vulnerable, and effective support for all, underpin students' confidence in their own abilities. Students make confident and well-informed choices about their future because of the excellent guidance they receive.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets students' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers are rightly proud of their track record in removing barriers to students' learning and ensuring that every boy and girl has an equal chance. Their success is evident in the good progress and excellent achievement of individuals and groups. Their leadership of teaching and learning is good. They have identified the inconsistencies in teaching and have in place appropriate priorities to tackle this. They accept that strategic planning lacks appropriate monitoring milestones to ensure that there is no slippage in the drive for improvement.

Governors and staff have a clear understanding of the religious, ethnic and social characteristics of the diverse community that the school serves and take account of parents' and carers' views. As a result, the school is a popular choice. There are excellent links with outside organisations and agencies to ensure students' well-being and to promote their academic progress. Governors are closely involved in the life of the school, providing support and encouragement. They have in place challenging

performance targets to ensure students' attainment exceeds what might be expected from their entry levels. It often does. Safeguarding procedures, including those for child protection, are excellent. Safe working is evident in daily routines.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students' outstanding personal development underpins their good academic progress. They are confident and articulate, keen to advance their education beyond school. They undertake a range of responsibilities in school, in the feeder primaries and in the local community. Their charitable work extends nationally and internationally. Progression rates from Year 11 into the sixth form (Year 12) and from Year 12 to 13 are good. Students who join the school at the start of Year 12 settle quickly and make the same good progress as others because of effective induction procedures. The good pace of learning has improved on the satisfactory progress of recent years. This is because of a better balance between academic and vocational provision and more rigorous teaching which challenges students to be independent and creative in their learning. The school's technology status has brought significant improvements in the use of ICT for learning. Students speak highly of the care they receive, feeling that they are 'respected as individuals and not seen as a grade in a box'. Subject leaders monitor progress effectively and give timely support when difficulties are encountered. The capacity to improve further is good.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A very small minority of parents and carers returned completed questionnaires. Of these, almost all were supportive of the school and expressed appreciation of the work of teachers and teaching assistants in providing for students' well-being and their academic development. A few of that small number of returns expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspectors found it to be excellent in lessons and around the school. Those few students who find difficulty in adjusting to school routines are managed well and do not disrupt the learning of others.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St John's RCVA Technology School and Sixth Form Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 131 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,397 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	55	42	72	55	3	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	69	53	59	45	3	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	51	39	70	53	7	5	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	55	42	66	50	9	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	52	40	67	51	7	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	34	66	50	14	11	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	25	84	64	9	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	53	40	66	50	6	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	37	70	53	10	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	38	59	45	12	9	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	28	74	56	9	7	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	57	44	63	48	8	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	65	50	53	40	9	7	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



26 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St John's RCVA Technology School and Sixth Form Centre, Bishop Auckland, DL14 6JT

Thank you for the warm welcome we received when we visited your school. We had an interesting two days with you and were impressed by your courtesy and good humour and your willingness to talk openly about your work and your involvement in activities outside of lessons.

We found your school to be providing you with an excellent standard of education. Examination results in the main school are high and students' levels of achievement are outstanding. Sixth form results are broadly in line with national expectations and students achieve well. The care and support you have for each other is admirable. You have the personal qualities to be successful and achieve your ambitions. All who work in the school put your welfare and progress first and go to great lengths to make school an interesting and vibrant place to be.

Teaching is consistently good and at times outstanding. There are always areas that could be better. We have asked that assessments are used to set you challenging learning activities in all lessons, that questioning is as rigorous as possible and that more opportunities are provided for you to evaluate your work and progress for yourselves. We also asked that the implementation of the school's development plans be monitored more closely. The outstanding curriculum allows you to pursue your own interests and gives you the qualifications you need to realise your ambitions. You told us how very helpful staff are and that you get the care and support you need to overcome any difficulties.

A minority of parents returned the questionnaire. Most returns were positive but there were concerns recorded on some about behaviour. We found it to be excellent in lessons and around the school and you told us that when poor behaviour occurs it is managed well and does not interrupt your learning.

Thank you for contributing so well to the inspection. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Brian Dower
Lead Inspector

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