

St Damian's RC Science College

Lees Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire OL6 8BH

Inspection dates

15–16 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher is dedicated in his pursuit of excellence and has inspired others, resulting in outstanding leadership across the school. Standards are exemplary and the school is a beacon of success.
- The highly experienced governors are unwavering in their support and have an exceptional oversight of the school. They hold leaders firmly to account in securing outstanding outcomes for pupils.
- Middle and senior leaders pursue excellence. They are highly skilled and knowledgeable. They are uncompromising in their quest to provide an excellent education for all. As a result, pupils are thirsty learners and make exemplary progress.
- The close-knit staff believe that all pupils can achieve, and echo a culture of high expectation. They foster excellent relationships with pupils to ensure that pupils become the very best they can be.
- Disadvantaged pupils make exemplary progress across the school because leaders use additional pupil premium funding effectively.
- Extensive extra-curricular opportunities, external trips and school events richly develop pupils' understanding and preparation for life beyond school.
- The school is rigorous in keeping all pupils safe. Leaders are meticulous in ensuring that pupils receive superb pastoral care.
- A comprehensive careers programme ensures that pupils are exceptionally well informed about opportunities for their next steps in life.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well planned and richly embedded across a broad and balanced curriculum. Consequently, pupils are very knowledgeable about life in modern Britain.
- Pupils display first-rate attitudes and behaviour in classrooms and around the school. The school is a harmonious place to learn and consequently pupils' punctuality and attendance are high.
- Many parents speak admiringly of the school and recognise the efforts of staff to ensure that their children thrive and achieve.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. However, there is still room for growth in staff expertise.
- A few pupils stubbornly struggle to engage with the culture of high expectations. Consequently, repeated exclusions remain too high.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce even further the number of pupils with repeated fixed-term exclusions.
- Sustain the rapid improvements in teaching and learning across the school, so that academic success continues to flourish in every subject area.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher is ambitious and passionately leads the school's development very effectively. He and his senior leaders exude a determination to enable every pupil to achieve his or her potential. Together, since the last inspection in 2014, they have transformed the quality of education and care for pupils.
- Pupils' achievements are highly regarded and celebrated across the school. Staff and governors are proud to work at the school. Staff morale is very high. Staff and pupils have a great deal of confidence in the headteacher, who has inspired their loyalty and respect and driven a culture of high ambition and excellence for all.
- All leaders are forensic and shrewd in the identification of areas in need of support. When monitoring and evaluating the impact of their work, they act decisively and are quick to react to any shortcomings and areas that require further attention.
- Middle leaders are empowered to lead their own areas of responsibility effectively. They check the quality of teachers' work robustly. They are diligent in their tracking of pupils' progress. They use insightful interventions with skill and sensitivity to ensure that no pupil falls behind. All leaders make checks on teaching and learning, to ensure that teachers adapt teaching to meet pupils' needs and abilities. Consequently, most pupils thrive across the school.
- Leaders are innovative and quick to recognise need within the school. For example, in response to a reduction in the provision of mental health support from outside agencies, staff undertook training so that they could identify the signs of specific mental health problems. This has ensured that support can still be provided to those in need.
- Year 7 'catch-up' funding is being used effectively to provide additional support, such as one-to-one tuition and group work, to ensure that eligible pupils acquire the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to be successful at key stage 3. For example, the school uses literacy and numeracy form groups to ensure that every second of school time is used well. As a result, these pupils are making excellent progress. The gap between them and other pupils has narrowed by the time they reach key stage 4.
- Staff understand fully the link between improving their own classroom practice and boosting pupils' progress. They eagerly participate in frequent professional development activities and work hard to ensure that pupils reach very challenging targets. Staff who completed the Ofsted survey were extremely positive about the quality of the support they receive to thrive in the classroom.
- The curriculum is constantly evaluated and tailored to match the aspirations, abilities and interests of all pupils. The school actively encourages all pupils to try and learn a language and all pupils undertake religious education to GCSE level. Some pupils receive 'enhanced learning' through additional lessons in curriculum time; these are highly valued because of their positive impact on progress. During these lessons, key aspects of English and mathematics are reinforced, as well as reading and phonics support.
- In the Ofsted survey, parents were overwhelming in their support for the headteacher

and his staff. One parent wrote: 'I can't praise St Damian's enough. It is everything as a parent I could ask for in a school'.

- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of pupils is impressive. Pupils are regularly immersed in rich, well-organised opportunities. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders organise theme days, 'Aspire Days', to enable pupils to understand the concept of British values. Pupils have the opportunity to learn about and discuss cultural diversity and faiths such as Hinduism and Islam. Some pupils also take part in a global citizens club and campaign to raise awareness of global refugee issues, as well as raising money for a number of refugee charities.
- The special educational needs co-ordinator is passionate about her role and has rapidly raised expectations. Consequently, the school is moving forward and is well on its way to being a beacon of excellence for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that learning support assistants are effective in supporting identified pupils in the classroom. Potentially vulnerable pupils are supported very effectively and achieve well in the school.
- Leaders establish good links with local primary schools and ensure that pupils entering the school in Year 7 are well prepared. The transition is seamless and supports pupils' achievement.

Governance of the school

- Governors are dedicated and driven by a determination that all pupils in the school should make outstanding progress. The governors visit the school regularly to assess the impact of leaders' work, including termly evaluations of the action taken, linked to the school improvement plan. They are scrupulous in ensuring that additional funding, such as the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding, is spent effectively.
- Governors are passionate about the school and have extensive relevant expertise that they bring to bear on their roles. Governors use their rich skills to challenge and support the school effectively. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governing body meetings are well attended. Governors complete an annual skills audit to map adeptly the skills of the members of each committee and to ensure that there is extensive expertise to challenge leaders effectively. Records show that governors ask searching questions.
- Governors are rigorous in their approach to the performance management of all staff and the headteacher. They make rigorous checks on all evidence for teachers' progression requests.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There are strong systems to ensure that staff and visitors are vetted before working with pupils. Leaders and governors fulfil their statutory duties very effectively.
- The care and protection of pupils is a very high priority in the school. Leaders make sure that all staff are trained in child protection and have also ensured that staff know

how to identify and respond to pupils who are at risk of being radicalised.

- The age-appropriateness of the safeguarding curriculum ensures that pupils are educated in staying safe online, inside and outside school. Leaders are aware of local risks, such as child sexual exploitation, and use a number of effective measures to manage this risk for pupils. The chaplain contributes to this open culture by providing pupils with an opportunity to talk in 'Grill the priest' sessions, when pupils can raise any concerns or issues around society.
- Pupils report overwhelmingly that they feel safe and that there is an adult that they can talk to at the school. This was echoed by parents and staff in their responses to the online questionnaires completed during the inspection. Almost all parents stated that their children are safe at school and are well cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching and learning is a significant strength of the school. Teachers know their pupils well and plan their learning activities highly effectively. As a result, teachers routinely support and challenge pupils to make rapid gains in their learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is outstanding and teachers set high expectations for pupils. They ensure that activities are planned skilfully, with a focus on increasing the depth of pupils' knowledge and understanding, including for the most able. This is the main reason why pupils make strong progress.
- Teachers are well supported and benefit from excellent professional development. They flourish under the school's close care and attention and develop into highly effective professionals.
- Leaders use information about pupils' attainment to set challenging and highly aspirational targets. Assessment is used very well by teachers to pinpoint and target gaps in pupils' understanding. Pupils have strong knowledge about their own progress in subjects across the school. They have a very clear understanding of what they need to do to improve to reach their required destination.
- Pupils' engagement and interest are striking across the school. Pupils are hugely committed and resilient learners. They are eager to find out more and determined to improve.
- Teachers ask perceptive questions which probe pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, in mathematics, pupils were questioned deeply on their understanding of trigonometry. As a result, pupils' confidence in explaining their mathematical reasoning increased.
- Teachers are well organised and consistent in their application of classroom routines, so that pupils benefit from the maximum amount of learning time. Teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently and pupils' books demonstrate teachers' high expectations of all pupils.
- Not all teaching seen by inspectors was of the very highest quality. Aspects of teaching seen in a very small number of non-core subjects did not match the very high standards across the school.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders' work to safeguard and care for pupils is exceptional. Staff know pupils well and are very quick to put into place any early help that is needed. The pastoral leaders are dogged in following up referrals made and securing support for individuals.
- Bullying is rare. Tolerance is part of the culture of the school and individual differences are highly valued. The school uses allocated curriculum days to focus on values such as equality and respect. The school also uses a number of approaches to support pupils' understanding of homophobia and anti-bullying. Social responsibility is taken seriously and pupils are encouraged to 'pay it forward' with an act of selflessness that influences others.
- There is a strong commitment to developing pupils' leadership across the school. Pupils' opinions are valued and they are encouraged to be active citizens. Leadership groups make a significant contribution to school life and the local community. A range of pupil leaders from liturgy group, pupil learning forum, peer mentoring, language ambassadors and prefects were able to demonstrate their impact within the school and expressed how they had a real stake in school development.
- School leaders ensure that all pupils have access to impartial careers advice. A clear programme is provided from Year 8 onwards, informing pupils of the varied choices beyond 16 and the skills needed for work. For example, pupils experience enterprise days, college taster days and have a personal interview to support their career aspirations. This care and attention to pupils' personal development are mirrored in the school's good track record of all pupils engaging in appropriate education, employment or training. Many pupils continue their studies in sixth-form colleges. A small number of pupils complete successful apprenticeships.
- Pupils who are educated at off-site provision have their attendance and welfare checked on a regular basis. They make the progress expected of them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding, both within classes and around the school site. Pupils are polite, friendly and highly respectful of each other, adults and visitors.
- Pupils want to learn and value greatly the strong relationships between them and their teachers. As a result, pupils thrive both academically and emotionally. Many pupils said that their teachers were the best thing about the school; one pupil described the teachers as 'inspirational'. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and are very proud of their school.
- Pupils' attendance rate is well above the national average and is a testament to pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils relish the opportunities that the school provides for them. The importance of attendance is promoted strongly within the school community.

Parents are held to account when attendance falls below the school's high expectations.

- Pupils are well supported in developing their knowledge of online safety. Many pupils were able to tell inspectors how to report inappropriate content.
- The school's high expectations of behaviour have initially magnified the number of fixed-term exclusions but this is now reducing. However, there is still a small number of pupils who re-offend and do not fully engage with the school's culture.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils' attainment is high at the end of key stage 4. Attainment in nearly all subject areas is significantly above the national average for pupils gaining a standard pass (grade C or grade 4) at GCSE. The number of pupils who gain the highest grades (grade A/A* or grade 8/9) is impressive and well above national figures, reflecting the high quality of teaching and learning across the school.
- In 2017, pupils' outcomes across the school were the best in the school's history. Pupils' rates of progress, from their different starting points, were above national averages in many subjects across the school.
- Pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science is strong across the school. Outcomes in sciences and mathematics are particularly impressive over time.
- Observation in lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and other inspection evidence confirm the school's own judgement that pupils currently in the school make outstanding progress.
- Pupils' progress is sharply monitored by teachers and subject leaders. Pupils who fall behind are quickly and effectively supported to get back on track. Teachers' judgements are moderated with rigour, to ensure accurate predictions for pupils' outcomes. As a result, leaders are confident in their future predictions of continued exemplary outcomes.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress across the school. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils achieved highly across the curriculum. Their attainment and progress, including for the most able disadvantaged, were well above those of other pupils nationally and locally. For example, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attained a grade 5 and above in English and mathematics was well above the national average. The improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are evidence that the pupil premium funding is being used highly effectively.
- The most able pupils' achievement is above average at the highest GCSE grades. The progress made by the most able pupils is typically above average across most of the subjects that they study.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress overall, which is typically similar to that of others nationally.
- Pupils of all abilities read widely and make good use of the well-stocked school library. Live webinars are used to engage pupils with authors, as well as streamed performances from the Royal Shakespeare Company. Pupils read with confidence, accuracy and enthusiasm. There is well coordinated, effective support for those pupils

who need extra help to develop their reading skills when they join the school. As a result, these pupils make accelerated progress from their starting points.

School details

Unique reference number	106270
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10036734

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.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	804
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Jones
Headteacher	Sheldon Logue
Telephone number	0161 330 5974
Website	www.stdamians.co.uk
Email address	admin@stdamians.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 March 2014

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion of these pupils with an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- On very rare occasions, the school educates pupils through off-site provision of vocational courses. Providers include Tameside College.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was initially conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 as a short inspection of a school whose predecessor was judged good. The inspection was then deemed a full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.
- Inspectors observed teaching in lessons, including jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors analysed the school's own parent survey results, as well as 99 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the 86 free-text responses. Responses to the online questionnaire completed by 67 staff were also taken into account.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, and groups of pupils, middle leaders and members of the governing body. Telephone calls were also made to a representative of the diocese and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaks, lunchtimes, in registration periods, assemblies, in lessons and at the start and end of the school day.
- Inspectors visited the school's internal exclusion room to check its effectiveness and climate for learning.
- Inspectors held a telephone conversation with staff in the alternative provision used by the school regarding pupils' safety and progress.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents provided by the school, including the self-evaluation document, improvement plans, minutes of the governing body and documents relating to safeguarding. Inspectors also evaluated key documents, including reports of attendance, behaviour and records related to pupils' academic progress.

Inspection team

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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