

St Anselm's College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105114
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308771
Inspection date	5 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Thompson

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	Boys
Number on roll	
School	844
6th form	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Cummings
Headteacher	Mr R Duggan
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2004
School address	Manor Hill Birkenhead Merseyside CH43 1UQ
Telephone number	0151 6521408
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, personal development, leadership and management, the impact of specialist status and the effectiveness of care and guidance. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment data, school documents and parents' questionnaires. In addition, there were discussions with the headteacher, staff, governors and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This average-sized selective school is a specialist college for languages and technology. The school draws its students from a wide area that includes the full range of social and economic circumstances. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. There are many fewer students than usual from minority ethnic backgrounds and none at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including statements of special educational need, is well below average. The school has the Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark, the Biffa Environmental Award and the Mersey Partnership Language and Enterprise Award. About one in five of the staff joined the school in the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school in which students achieve exceptionally well and reach very high standards. Parents, students and staff refer to the school as 'a family' and this is reflected in all aspects of school life.

Boys enter the school with above average standards. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above average. GCSE results show a steadily rising trend. In 2007 they were well above the national average and very high in relation to the national average for boys. Close to 90% of students gained grade C or better in English and mathematics, the pass rate at five or more grades A* to G was 100% and the proportion of boys gaining A* or A grades was well above average. Students' excellent progress as they move through the school puts St Anselm's in the top 15% of schools nationally for its performance. Nevertheless, there is no complacency. For example, analysis of data shows that in recent years boys' progress in English was better than in mathematics, although standards in the subject were consistently well above average. Steps have been taken to redress the balance with positive effect. Where performance in any subject is not as good as the school's leadership believes it should be, reasons are sought and strategies for improvement are put in place. The effectiveness of all innovations is carefully evaluated.

A number of linked factors underpin the school's excellent performance. Foremost is the students' outstanding personal development that contributes greatly to the exceptionally positive learning atmosphere in the school. During their time in the school, boys develop a mature, articulate confidence and are very well prepared for their future lives. Higher than average attendance illustrates students' positive response to what the school offers them. Attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Consequently time in lessons is used well and, above all, it is acceptable among the boys to work hard and to do well. They celebrate each other's successes. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional in many ways, enhanced by the extensive enrichment opportunities of the curriculum. The school provides excellent opportunities for reflection and expression of ideas, thoughts and feelings through assemblies, form time and in subjects. Students work together well and support each other, reflecting the caring ethos of the school as a whole. Boys show a tremendous generosity of spirit and awareness of the needs of others through their support of local and global charities. They contribute in many ways to school and the wider community. For example, the St Vincent de Paul group help in a soup kitchen for the homeless; boys coach sporting activities for young children; and peer mentoring provides individuals with support for their school work. Students have a voice in school affairs that they are confident is heard. They feel safe because of the atmosphere of mutual respect and they greatly appreciate the high level of support and guidance that they receive from the staff. They believe that any difficulties that they may face will be dealt with promptly and effectively.

Academic and pastoral support are inseparable in this school. The well developed systems for tracking all aspects of students' development enable difficulties to be identified at an early stage so that prompt and effective interventions are made. Assessment, guidance and pastoral support are significant factors in maintaining boys' rapid progress as they move through the school. The process involves contributions from all staff so that boys have a strong network to support their development and academic progress. All students are valued equally and enabled to participate in all that the school has to offer. Excellent, sensitive support is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has some striking examples of achievements made by the most vulnerable students as a result of the care that they receive.

Teaching of the excellent curriculum is good and much of it is outstanding. The impact of specialist status is to be seen in the development of teaching and learning methods that promote excellent progress. In particular, the use of information and communication technology to support learning has improved greatly since the last inspection. Teachers' use of assessment and the process of setting targets to support planning and to check the quality of students' learning has also developed well. Well planned lessons move at a good pace with frequent changes of activity to maintain interest and concentration. Teachers use questions well to check students' understanding and to encourage participation in learning. Nevertheless, sometimes opportunities are missed to build upon answers to stretch students' thinking further. Although clear policies to guide teachers' marking of students' work are in place, its quality is too inconsistent. Books show that commentary is positive but often does not give students clear advice on how to improve. Where this is done, it is not always clear that advice has been followed up by teachers or students.

Leadership and management are of high quality at all levels. The key to the school's success is the headteacher's unremitting vision for continuing improvement in all areas of the school's work. With the support of an exceptional leadership team, he has created a shared sense of purpose in the school. Responsibilities are devolved to promote staff development and accountability is clear. Where performance does not match expectations, robust action is taken to secure improvement. The governing body is fully involved in the school's self-evaluation and planning process. Governors are very well informed and consequently able to hold the school rigorously to account for its performance. The school meets its specialist targets and discharges its wider responsibilities well. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection, much of it due to the school's dual specialisms. These have enabled enhancement of the curriculum, improvements in facilities, developments in teaching and learning styles and an increase in the school's partnerships that benefit both the school and its community.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an excellent sixth form. High quality management, outstanding teaching and a curriculum that meets students' needs and aspirations exceptionally well combine to produce excellent achievement, outstanding personal development and high standards. The great majority of students stay on into the sixth form. A much higher than usual proportion complete their A-level courses and some 90% go on to university. This illustrates the effectiveness of the guidance they receive on their choice of courses and the appropriateness of the courses offered. Sixth formers make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school, many providing support for younger boys and to the community at large.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that marking tells students clearly how to improve their work and that advice is acted upon.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of St Anselm's College, Birkenhead, CH43 1UQ

Thank you for your welcome, courtesy and openness in talking to us during the inspection of your school. You are a credit to it. We enjoyed the lively conversations we had with you and seeing you at work. Many of you told us how good you think your school is. We agree with you. It is outstanding. Many of you spoke of the school as a family. You play a big part in making it so by your excellent behaviour and attitudes, particularly those of you who make such an impressive contribution to the whole community.

There are many excellent aspects to your school that help you make exceptional progress and to reach very high standards. Foremost among these are:

- leadership and management are outstanding
- high quality care, guidance and support ensure that you do as well as you should and help you deal with any difficulties
- the excellent curriculum meets your needs and provides you with a wide range of opportunities to discover and develop interests, skills and talents
- you get on well and support each other admirably
- you show a mature awareness of other people's needs through your community and charity work.

Part of our job is to recommend ways in which schools can improve what they do. We have asked your school to make sure that the commentary made on your work when it is marked tells you clearly how to improve. You can help by making sure that you take notice of the advice you are given.

We wish you well for the future and hope that you will continue to help making St Anselm's an excellent place to learn - and make the most of the opportunities it offers.