

The McAuley Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106810
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	324467
Inspection dates	23 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Mr Jon Lövgreen

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
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,729
Sixth form	329
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Fr John McNamee
Headteacher	Mrs Mary Lawrence
Date of previous school inspection	March 2006
School address	Cantley Lane Doncaster DN3 3QF
Telephone number	01302 537396
Fax number	01302 537891

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and the sixth form and investigated the following issues:

- the effectiveness of steps taken to ensure consistently high achievement on GCSE courses
- the consistency and usefulness of assessment systems and the quality of teachers' marking
- pupils' behaviour and attitudes and how these contribute to the progress they make
- the provision and care for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Other aspects of the school's work were not considered in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

The school occupies two sites, separated by a busy road. Pupils have to travel between sites on a regular basis. Both the school and the sixth form are much larger than average. Pupils come from a wide and varied catchment area. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Whilst few have statements of special educational need, the proportion of pupils having learning difficulties and/or disabilities has risen sharply and is now above average. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is broadly average, as are the growing numbers who speak English as an additional language. The school has specialisms in performing arts and applied learning, and is a Leading Edge school for mathematics. Additionally, it is deemed a Consultant School for the Specialist Schools' and Academies' Trust. Awards gained include the International Schools' Award, Sportsmark, Artsmark Silver, the Inclusion Chartermark, Investors in People, the Healthy Schools' Award, an Outstanding School Award, and the status of a National Support School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Judged outstanding three years ago, the school has made considerable improvement. It is a highly effective school, endlessly seeking to do better and very clear about how it will move on because self-evaluation is both searching and accurate. The school is held in high regard by parents and pupils thrive in a situation where they are both challenged and cherished. This sees them exceptionally well prepared for future education and employment.

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is marginally above average. Achievement is outstanding so that by the end of Year 11 standards are well above average. GCSE results show a rising trend. They are now well above national averages and show outstanding achievement in many subjects. Within this strong picture performance in mathematics and English literature, vocational GCSEs and the specialist subjects of drama and music stand out. In 2008, over half of all GCSE entries resulted in A* to B grades. For the second year running over 80% of pupils gained five or more A* to C passes and a high 73% included functional English and mathematics in these. The school was alert to some relative inconsistencies in the 2008 results, for instance in graphics, history and physical education, and by a small group of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staffing, curriculum and syllabus changes have been used to tackle these issues effectively. Challenging targets were met or exceeded and those for 2009 have been revised upwards in the light of assessment information. Assessment was the only significant weakness at the time of the last inspection. It is now a strength. Regular and rigorous checks on how pupils are doing enable staff at various levels to have a clear and early indication of any underachievement and nip it in the bud. Pupils are kept fully informed. They fully understand their targets, how they are arrived at and what they need to do to reach them. All groups of pupils are making excellent progress as a result. Regular, detailed and informative marking of pupils' work supports this. Exemplary care helps all pupils, including the most vulnerable, to overcome difficulties. 'The Zone', carefully tailored courses, and help for the increasing minority of pupils who speak English as an additional language are significantly positive features here.

The school has worked hard to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. Lessons are checked regularly. The best practice, of which there is much, is used to support improvement. Any teaching judged satisfactory is targeted for coaching. Excellent use is made of training by using the expertise of staff, or ideas gleaned from the many other schools worked with. Both pupils

and parents stress the high levels of enjoyment in many subjects because of enthusiastic and sometimes inspirational teaching. Pupils are keen to come to school, as their above average attendance shows. Behaviour in lessons is excellent and exclusion rates are very low. The school has an aura of studious calm. Discussion of wider issues enables pupils to come to mature opinions about faith, beliefs and other cultures. Mutual respect sees pupils accepting that they have much responsibility for their own learning and they work diligently as a result. Inspectors agree with parents that whilst most pupils cope outstandingly well with the demands of frequent moves between sites across a busy road, the situation is far from ideal. However, the school takes all possible steps to ensure the safety of pupils and to reduce any risk. Astute management minimises the inevitable time loss, and the extra expense of having to duplicate some resources, which this causes. Safeguarding arrangements meet current government requirements.

The curriculum is constantly reviewed and evolving because it is seen as the key vehicle for better serving pupils' needs. Excellent use and integration of the specialisms makes a significant contribution to pupils' academic and personal progress. Widening vocational options allow new approaches to be tried. There are now courses leading to certification in information and communication technology and a foreign language in Year 9. Pupils are rising to these opportunities, alongside those for earlier starts to science and other GCSE courses. Increased motivation, confidence and a sense of achievement all come from these.

Leadership and management are excellent. There is no complacency. The headteacher's philosophy that every child deserves, and must get, the best, underpins the work of the school. Her belief that challenge and care, both of pupils and staff, must always be balanced, has created a school where people work for and support each other. A strong and dedicated senior leadership group sees that expectation goes hand in hand with encouragement. Middle managers are fully involved and relish their role in school improvement. Governors are highly influential in steering the direction of the school. There is a very successful commitment to community cohesion. All in the school value and support each other and there is extensive work with other schools and community groups. Environmental programmes, commemorative events for Holocaust and World Peace Days, and the imaginative and nationally recognised Fairtrade initiative show a wider commitment. The school provides outstanding value for money. The balance of ambition, detailed analysis and understanding of how well it is doing, together with its continual striving to do even better, leads to outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form. Standards are significantly above national averages and achievement is outstanding. The last three years have seen results improving year-on-year and tracking indicates that this trend is continuing. Strong leadership and management have led a clear focus on catering for individual needs. Thorough evaluation and analysis have been central to driving standards up. Past relative underperformance in sociology and psychology has been successfully overcome. High retention rates and excellent success rates in examinations, including at the higher grades, reflect the outstanding quality of sixth-form teaching. Teachers have expert subject knowledge. Learning has a brisk pace because activities are varied and intellectually stimulating. The balance between meeting examination requirements and encouraging students to think independently is never lost. Sixth formers become mature, diligent and confident learners because they find teachers extremely supportive and easily approachable. Excellent relationships result. Highly effective monitoring and regular progress reviews ensure that students are clear about their targets and how to improve. The quality of care and guidance they are given, both in academic and personal terms, is exemplary. Much thought has been given to how best to induct students into sixth-form life and studies. Events such as the annual summer conference provide students with the opportunity to prepare themselves thoroughly for their final year in the sixth form and to plan for education and life beyond it. The curriculum meets the needs of students exceptionally well. Where blips have occurred, for instance in physical education, they are spotted and the syllabus altered to secure improvement. The school continually seeks to broaden and diversify its provision, including vocational courses. Opportunities are provided for involvement in the school, local and wider communities. For example, some students help to mentor pupils in Years 10 and 11, others help younger pupils with basic skills. The successful organisation of parties for senior citizens and for adults and children with special needs contribute valuably to students' excellent personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

This is a high performing school which rigorously questions its performance and takes prompt and highly effective action to tackle any issues. As it has no significant weaknesses there are no specific areas for improvement.

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/or disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2	
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	

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.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	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

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 eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

24 April 2009

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of The McAuley Catholic High School, Doncaster, DN3 3QF

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our brief visit and the opportunity to see you at work and to talk to some of you. We also read your parents' views in the questionnaires they returned.

You will be delighted to know that we think The McAuley is an outstanding school with an outstanding sixth form. Standards are rising because staff work so hard to do what is best for each and every one of you. Quality lessons from enthusiastic teachers help you make outstanding progress in most subjects. Careful checks by teachers and the progress reviews you are involved in flag up where you could be learning better and teachers are quick to act on this. As a result, you feel encouraged and guided to achieve well. You make excellent progress and reach high standards. You appreciate the excellent care and support you get and respond to this by being mature, courteous and keen to do your best. You feel a strong loyalty to your school and take a very active part in it and in the local community. School buildings are crowded and having to travel between buildings across a busy road is not ideal, but most of you are exceptionally sensible about the difficulties this presents and work to the schools safety guidance. You appreciate the increased opportunities for study which are provided, such as more vocational courses and the chance to start GCSE courses early and complete one in Year 9. Your headteacher, helped by a strong senior team and fully involved governors, has created a highly successful school. All staff expect a lot of you: they know you, and how you work best, and give you every chance to succeed.

As your school is doing so well, and is constantly looking to do even better, we feel there are no key areas for improvement. Staff know where any minor weaknesses are and have clear plans in place to tackle them.

Our best wishes to you for future success and happiness.

Jon Lövgreen
Lead inspector

