

Holy Cross Catholic High School, A Sports Aid Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119803
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	358630
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Vincent Ashworth HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	832
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Malcolm Holt
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy White
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 30 lessons and saw 28 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, senior school staff, middle leaders, teachers and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at samples of students' marked work across a range of subjects and different year groups. Inspectors looked in detail at documents relating to the school's monitoring of its performance and undertook a detailed analysis of current students' attainment and progress. They also scrutinised minutes of meetings, improvement plans and safeguarding procedures. The responses from parents and carers on 607 questionnaires were considered, together with replies from 61 staff and 121 students.

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

- The effectiveness of actions to improve students' achievement in mathematics and design and technology.
- How well teachers plan to meet students' individual needs in lessons.
- The effectiveness of the school's cross-curricular numeracy and literacy provision.
- The extent to which leaders and managers have sustained the high quality of provision and outcomes for students since the last inspection.

Information about the school

Holy Cross Catholic High is a smaller than average school; it has been a specialist sports and science college since 2004. Demand for places is high and the school is frequently oversubscribed. Most students are from White British backgrounds. A lower than average proportion of students is known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average; the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The school has achieved the Eco silver, Healthy School and Investors in People awards.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Holy Cross Catholic High School is a good school that provides its students with a strong foundation for adult life. Many features of the school are outstanding, notably the arrangements for pastoral care and support. An exceptionally high regard for students' personal development and well-being, coupled with a strong duty of care, are at the very core of the school's success. Students express a real pride in the school's Roman Catholic traditions, which are at the heart of their outstanding personal development. The strong and collaborative working relationships between teachers and students contribute enormously to students' excellent behaviour, positive attitudes to learning and their enjoyment of school life. One parent summed up the ethos of the school saying, 'The teachers unselfishly give up their own time to allow the children to live life to the full.'

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are consistently higher than average, which represents good progress from students' average starting points. In 2010, there was a dip in the proportion of students attaining five or more good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Students' progress in mathematics has been severely impaired by staff absences that have been beyond the school's control. Nevertheless, the governing body and senior leaders have taken steps to stabilise the situation; there is clear evidence of significant improvement in the progress currently being made by students in mathematics

Teaching and learning are good. There are pockets of excellent teaching, but the quality of teaching and marking remains uneven. Not all teachers are equally skilful in drawing on information about students' prior attainment and progress and using this to plan their lessons and design activities that are tailored to the full range of abilities. Improvements have been made to the curriculum to ensure that it provides a closer match to students' individual needs and aspirations. However, there is no systematic strategy to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills across non-core subjects.

The school's specialist status in science and sports is being used outstandingly well to underpin improvements in students' achievements, the curriculum and to establish strong links with the local community. Its impact is also evident on students' attitudes to learning and their drive and ambition to succeed.

Senior managers are relentless in their drive to raise achievement and rightly recognise that improvements currently being made in mathematics and design and technology need to be sustained. Through rigorous self-evaluation the school is aware of its strengths and areas for development and plans are firmly in place to address these issues. This, combined with an inspirational leadership, highly committed staff, supportive parents and carers and a clearly focused school improvement plan, indicate that the school has good capacity to improve.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning so that more lessons are outstanding by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of information about students' prior attainment and target grades to inform lesson planning, so that activities are tailored to students' individual needs
 - providing more opportunities in lessons for students to develop as independent learners
 - providing more opportunities in all subjects for students to develop and apply their literacy and numeracy skills
 - ensuring that marking is of a consistently high quality and clearly outlines the steps students need to take to improve their work to a higher level.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Learning is good. Students behave particularly well in lessons and show an excellent attitude to learning. In the best lessons there is real desire to explore and deepen their knowledge and understanding. The best learning occurs where students are equipped with the confidence and skills to work independently of the teacher. This is particularly the case in history, where teachers promote exploration and enquiry which sparks enthusiasm and inspires learners to shine. This approach underpins the exceptionally high standards in this subject. This quality of learning is not consistent and in some lessons the pace of learning is directed too much by the teacher. As a consequence, students are more passive learners; they complete tasks diligently but with little real enthusiasm to excel.

Students come to the school with standards that are broadly average; they make good progress as they move through the school and leave having reached standards that are above the national average. Students make better progress in English and science than they do in mathematics and, consequently, standards have been lower in mathematics than they should be. This has been compounded by staffing difficulties in the mathematics department which resulted in low GCSE pass rates in 2010. The school has made every effort to tackle the consequences: new appointments have been made; additional resources and support have been put into the department; and the curriculum reviewed. As a consequence, students currently in Year 11 are making at least satisfactory progress and many are set to exceed their target. Students' performance in science, modern languages, history and music is consistently strong. Standards in history are exceptionally high. Standards in design and technology were exceptionally low in 2009; inspection evidence shows students' progress is starting to improve in these subjects.

There is no significant difference between the progress made by different groups of students. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the outstanding support and care they receive. The school has recognised that for a small number of lower-ability students progress has been uneven. Steps have been taken to address this. School data and inspection evidence show that this group of students are generally meeting or exceeding their targets.

Students grow as mature, self-confident and compassionate young people with a strong community conscience. Their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is a

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substantial strength of the school and contributes strongly to its distinctive ethos. Attendance is higher than average and reflects students' appreciation and enjoyment of life in school. Behaviour is outstanding; students demonstrate mature and cooperative behaviour in class and around the building. As a consequence, students feel particularly safe at school. Instances of bullying are rare; for many students, consideration and respect for others is of paramount importance. Students welcome the many chances they are offered to express their views about school through their own school council. Students' willingness to take on extra responsibility is impressive. Many students make valuable contributions to the school and wider community. They take an active part in the development and day-to-day running of the school and act as mentors to those needing their help. The school council represents the student voice very well and has made significant improvements to the school environment. Through their regular involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and school clubs they develop as well-rounded and healthy individuals.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good. Some teaching is outstanding, the majority is good, but a proportion remains satisfactory. Good teaching is characterised by real enthusiasm for the subject, high expectations and a good range of structured activities that engage students' interest, ensuring that they make good progress. Questioning is used well to encourage

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students to think for themselves and extend their answers. Where teaching is less effective, the planning does not always fully meet the needs of all students and the range of teaching and learning strategies is narrower. Students are set individual targets, which they are well aware of, but some teachers do not pay sufficient attention to these targets when planning their lessons. Inspectors saw instances of outstanding practice in the use of assessment. However, this is variable across subjects. In some lessons, the progress of students' learning is not assessed sufficiently to allow the teacher to adjust the learning activity to meet needs fully. The quality of day-to-day marking is variable within and between departments.

The school's good curriculum contributes well to students' personal and academic development. There is a good range of academic and vocational GCSE courses and partnerships with other providers have extended the number of vocational programmes on offer. The take-up of options in science and modern languages is particularly high. Personalised programmes, including work placements, are also organised for individual students who benefit enormously from a curriculum tailored to their individual needs. Almost all students leave school and progress onto further education, training or employment. Through a very well planned and taught programme for personal, social and health education, students are prepared well for life after leaving school. Opportunities to develop student's literacy and numeracy skills more widely across other subjects are underdeveloped. Opportunities for sports and cultural activities are outstanding. The school is rightly proud of students' strong track record in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme.

The outstanding care, guidance and support provided to students reflect the school's strongly inclusive ethos. Procedures for setting challenging targets and tracking students' progress are very well developed and contribute significantly to students' academic progress. Transition arrangements into school and between key stages are well managed. Staff identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable students, giving strong support to them and their families. Students receive good advice about courses and careers which enable them to make informed choices. The small minority of students at risk of disaffection receive well-tailored support and guidance, which keep them engaged. The expertise of external agencies is utilised to beneficial effect.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher ensures that there is a clear vision for improvement which underpins the work of the school. The school's systems for monitoring

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students' individual progress and development are exemplary and underpin the school's accurate and incisive self-evaluation. A restructured team of senior leaders has been instrumental in communicating high expectations and ensuring that the school runs smoothly on a daily basis. The quality of middle leadership is good and improving. Subject leaders are increasingly more accountable for raising the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. Analysis of questionnaires returned by staff during the inspection shows that all staff feel proud to be part of the school, and the overwhelming majority are clear about the school's priorities and feel valued.

The governing body is highly committed to the school and has a clear vision for its future direction. It has consistently and effectively held managers to account for variation in the school's performance. Equality of opportunity is strong, evidenced by the school's inclusive ethos. Excellent arrangements for safeguarding are well established and highly effective. Particularly good attention is given to developing students' understanding of potential risks to their well-being and safety. The school has established channels for communication with parents, listening to and acting upon their comments, for example, in the appointment of a learning mentor. Partnerships are very well established with a range of schools, colleges, businesses and community groups; they have a highly positive impact on the well-being of students. The specialist science and sports status has been used to good effect in developing innovative practice at the school itself and in partner schools. The school has an incisive understanding of the communities it serves. It works hard to promote community cohesion and offers many opportunities for students to work alongside people from different backgrounds. Sound financial management ensures staff and resources are well deployed and the school gives good value for money.

These are the grades for 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	1
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	2

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Views of parents and carers

Inspectors received questionnaires from the parents and carers of almost three quarters of the students registered at the school, representing a significantly higher proportion than is usually seen in secondary schools. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school; they are particularly positive about the school's safe environment, the good teaching and their children's overall experience. A small minority of parents feel that school could take more account of their suggestions and concerns and advise them on ways in which they can support their children's learning. A few parents commented on poor behaviour in lessons. Inspectors looked closely at this and found that on the whole students' conduct and behaviour are exemplary, both in lessons and around the school. Nevertheless, parents' comments have been shared with the school to inform future plans.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Holy Cross Catholic High School 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 607 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 832 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	223	36	348	57	32	5	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	264	43	334	55	10	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	213	35	351	57	38	6	2	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	194	32	372	61	34	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	195	32	390	64	14	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	139	23	381	62	74	12	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	148	24	407	67	35	6	4	1
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)	175	29	373	61	22	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	193	32	367	60	36	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	189	31	335	55	56	9	6	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	114	19	396	65	42	7	6	1
The school is led and managed effectively	200	33	368	60	19	3	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	248	41	326	53	23	4	4	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



Dear Students

Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic High School, A Sports and Science College, Chorley PR7 3LS

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for your very warm welcome. I was pleased that so many of your parents took the time to complete the questionnaire we sent. The overwhelming majority of parents are highly supportive of the school and the headteacher's strong leadership. You attend a good school and we found many aspects that were outstanding. Your GCSE results show good progress from what you had already achieved when you came to the school. We were particularly impressed by the high quality of your work and achievements in science, sports, history and art. Teaching is of good quality overall, although there is some that is satisfactory. The school's curriculum is well organised to meet your needs. There are excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activities, particularly in sports; these help you to develop as mature, considerate and well-rounded young people. Your behaviour is outstanding; you are a credit to your parents, carers and teachers. We were particularly impressed by the ways in which you contribute to the development of the school and to the wider community. This really is outstanding – keep up the good work! What makes your school such a special place is the high quality of care and support you receive from your teachers. The staff know you very well and there are excellent systems to look after you and to keep you safe.

There are clear plans to make the school even better and senior managers are tracking very closely improvements in the mathematics and design and technology departments. In order to make sure that all of your lessons are as good as the very best we have asked the school to look at ways in which teachers can make better use of assessment information when planning lessons and designing activities that will challenge you to meet and exceed your individual targets.

With all good wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Ashworth

Her Majesty's Inspector

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