

The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105581
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	355802
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	James Kilner 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	871
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Frank Thompson
Headteacher	Mrs Claire McCarron
Date of previous school inspection	31 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 31 lessons, taught by 29 teachers and spent the majority of their time observing learning. They held discussions with school staff, the deputy chair of the governing body, the school council and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of other evidence including safeguarding, action plans, case studies and self-evaluation documents. Inspectors also analysed the 177 responses to parental questionnaires, and 167 students' questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The accuracy of school self-evaluation, together with the effectiveness with which leaders and managers tackle identified weaknesses and improve outcomes and quality of provision throughout the school.
- The impact of partnerships and specialist curriculum on outcomes for students.
- Whether teaching is sufficiently engaging and challenging at both key stages to improve attainment further, particularly in English, for boys and in specialist subjects.
- The capacity for sustained improvement under the guidance of middle and senior leaders along with the governing body's understanding of underlying issues in both key stages.
- The safety of students with particular reference during the building programme.

Information about the school

At this average-sized Catholic secondary school the very large majority of students are White British and from families from four associated Catholic parishes. The remaining tiny numbers of students originate from a variety of minority ethnic heritages, of which White Irish and White and Black African heritage students are the largest groups. Few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is almost twice the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly higher than the national average.

The school has Specialist Science College status. Since the previous inspection, the school is managing a significant financial deficit to their budget and has been subject to a complete change of staff and governance at senior levels.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Barlow Catholic High School provides a satisfactory education for its students. Following the previous inspection, the school experienced significant staffing and financial difficulties. The severity of these circumstances was such that planned improvements halted abruptly. The recently appointed headteacher was resolute from the outset in accepting the challenge to bring about much needed improvements to the school. By necessity, tough decisions had to be made on staffing levels and resources to address a significant deficit budget. This, coupled with major staffing issues at senior leader level, was in danger of affecting the performance of the school. Undeterred, the headteacher, in close collaboration with the revised governing body, set about an effective re-structure of the senior team. Leadership and management is now epitomised by a strong sense of teamwork, high morale and the governing body is well on target to deliver budget requirements in the allocated time scale. With this unrelenting passion and commitment in the pursuit of high standards together with secure self-evaluation, the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

Currently, the school is undergoing an extensive rebuilding programme which is due for completion in February 2012. Consequently, teaching resources and accommodation have to be altered on a regular basis in order that work progresses. Students appreciate the guidance they are given to keep safe whilst building work is underway. For their part, they respond and adapt quickly as the building programme advances necessitate alterations to their routes around the school.

While whole-school attainment is in line with the national average, there is a gap between attainment in English and that seen nationally. The gap is now being narrowed. Students' attainment in the school's specialist subjects has improved over time, particularly in mathematics which is above the national average. Indications are that science, faltering over recent years, is now on an upward trend to improve further. Students make expected progress, although middle ability boys sometimes make less progress than others. Lesson monitoring is increasingly robust, linking observations of teaching to students' progress meetings. Regular 'snapshots,' allow for the scrutiny of students' work, lesson planning and assessment data by heads of faculties along with fellow teachers. The result is that senior leaders not only understand fully where weakness within departments lie but also hold heads of faculties and individuals to increasingly good account. However, this is yet to impact fully on outcomes. Within the profile of teaching there are some clear examples of good practice and pockets of outstanding practice, although the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Weaknesses lie in the lack of clear focus on learning outcomes for students in lessons together with an inconsistent approach to providing students with feedback in their marked work. As a result, students are not systematically clear about how they need to improve to reach the higher levels in their studies. For their part, students' behaviour is satisfactory and they are closely supervised at all times during the

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building work. However, a significant number of students are over-reliant on teachers imposing sanctions to manage their behaviour. This has an impact on students' ability to take responsibility for their actions as well as their learning. Consequently, for a significant number of students their preparedness to take responsibility for improving their own learning and being responsible for their own actions is underdeveloped.

Up to 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all students make at least good progress, particularly in English and for middle ability boys, by:
 - increasing the proportion of lessons where students make good and outstanding progress, utilising fully the role models of good and outstanding teaching already evident in the school
 - making sure students are consistently and effectively challenged to reach the higher levels in their studies by more effective use of information about their individual progress
 - ensuring that feedback in marking students' work builds on this information to allow them the opportunity to improve with a greater level of independence.
- Embedding the culture for students to take responsibility to achieve their full potential and in managing their own behaviour.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The large majority of students enjoy the educational experience the school provides, demonstrating this through their positive personal development. Most students enter Year 7 with standards of attainment which are in line with the national average. By the time they tackle GCSEs, those attaining five A* to C and five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, remains similar to the national picture. Predictions based on current assessment indicate that these results will improve to be slightly higher than national in 2011. The school performs well in gaining success for students leaving school with five GCSE passes at A* to G, which is significantly better than the picture found nationally. However, progress at the end of Year 11 overall shows a slight decline across all subjects and specifically in English. While girls and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress in line with their ability, middle ability boys do not consistently make expected advances in their knowledge and skills. Consequently, progress is satisfactory overall.

Students are acutely aware of the need to keep safe while using modern technologies and use the school's confidential online system to report any form of intimidation or cyber bullying. While the school is endeavouring to improve behaviour it remains satisfactory, a view shared by a number of students who responded to the questionnaire. Overall, students demonstrate a satisfactory attitude to work in lessons. On these occasions, they respond positively to guidance and remain focused when prompted. Their ability to take responsibility for their own learning and work independently for lengthy periods without direction is not developed well. Where students are enthused with the curriculum and

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teaching fully engages them in learning activities, they have a real purpose in solving problems rather than just practising the skills needed to answer examination questions. This was evident during the Year 7 skills day when all students remained focused on their exciting learning opportunities and behaviour was exemplary.

There are many opportunities for students to contribute to the life of the school and community. A very active and influential student council is involved in appointments of staff and is actively involved in the design of toilets for the new building. Students relish the opportunity to contribute to the wider Catholic community such as the St Vincent De Paul Society, the Chaplaincy or work to support an orphanage in Bolivia. While the school council and school have done much to promote healthy eating and life styles, not all students choose these options. The school is proactive in reducing the number of students who are persistently absent and the levels of attendance are now satisfactory. Equally, the numbers of students not in employment, education or training have reduced significantly over time. This, combined with their average levels of attainment, prepares students adequately for their future economic well-being.

The diversity of the ethnic and religious mix of the school is increasing and students are respectful of one another's beliefs. They show a genuine commitment when exploring moral issues, for example, in their active promotion of Fair Trade and considering the moral integrity of adverts. More-able, older students were given the opportunity to question a local Member of Parliament, demonstrating an acute awareness and moral stance on current and proposed legislation affecting young people.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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?

In the majority of lessons, teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and secure satisfactory or better rates of progress for their students. In the more successful lessons, students keep their enthusiasm for learning even when presented with a high level of challenge with teachers monitoring accurately the pace of learning. In such lessons, accurate marking informs students of the next steps they should take to improve their work. Nevertheless, in too many instances, the level of challenge is insufficient to steer students to the higher levels. Planned opportunities for students' individual abilities within the same group are frequently underdeveloped leading to the more-able being insufficiently challenged. These lessons feature students relying heavily on teacher direction for their behaviour as well as their learning. This is why levels of progress vary to such an extent across groups, years and subjects and are only satisfactory overall.

The curriculum adequately matches most students' needs, interests and aspirations. The opportunities to link subjects across the curriculum are at an early stage, although there are fine examples of where this is proving effective. For example, a student in a history lesson was able to link a war poem studied during a science lesson on gasses to his explanation as to why chemical warfare during World War 1 was so disastrous. Opportunities to use information and communication technology are currently hampered by the building programme. The school's specialism in science is now back on track after a period of relative inactivity. The enthusiastic leadership of this area has secured a strong

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partnership with a leading global engineering company providing exciting curricular and career opportunities for students.

The good levels of care, guidance and support are based firmly on the school's basic principle that 'Everyone is a unique creation of God'. Systems to collate and act upon pastoral information ensure swift and effective intervention and support whenever identified. Effective partnerships, both within the faith community and with local authority and health services, ensure expert guidance and help can be brokered in individual cases. Academic progress for those students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities leads to personalised support and involves input from parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management at all levels has been galvanised under the direction of the recently appointed headteacher. Consequently the school is improving. Leaders are fully committed to the school's goal to 'create a culture of achieving through respect and high expectation'. In this they are proving successful with the majority of staff firmly behind much needed changes to systems and methods. The strength of the governing body lies in its ability to fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school, particularly in relation to interpretation of data and finance. The majority of parents and carers are pleased with the quality of education their children receive. Whilst some are concerned with the way in which behaviour is managed, inspectors found that this was satisfactory. The school have plans to improve lines of communication so that there is a fuller understanding by parents and carers of the school's priorities. The school nurtures partnerships at both academic and pastoral levels, ensuring that students' needs are met. The strong academic links with a nearby partnership school allows for teachers to share planned learning opportunities, particularly in the school's specialist subjects.

Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily and the school is harmonious with students from differing faiths being welcomed and their cultures celebrated. However, the school has yet to act fully on the outcomes of their recent audit in this area. The school promotes equality of opportunity at all levels but they recognise that they have work to do in ensuring that the group of boys currently underachieving continue to close the gap in their attainment. Effective systems ensure that all statutory responsibilities to keep students safe are fully met. Given the effective management of the budget and satisfactory outcomes for students, the school achieves satisfactory value for money.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents and carers who gave their views were positive about the school and the work it does on behalf of their children. Some concerns were raised about the way in which the school deals with unacceptable behaviour as well as the level at which the school takes account of suggestions and concerns. Inspectors raised these concerns with the school and it is clear that the school is taking decisive action to improve systems to seek and act on the views of parents and carers as well as sharing with them more detailed information on policies and practices, including those on behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College 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 177 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 871 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	55	31	106	60	11	6	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	59	33	111	63	6	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	71	40	96	54	10	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	60	34	98	55	15	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	49	28	117	66	3	2	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	44	25	106	60	20	11	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	38	21	108	61	19	11	2	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)	45	25	112	63	6	3	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	21	118	67	16	9	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	28	89	50	24	14	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	18	108	61	16	9	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	46	26	114	64	8	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	62	35	99	56	10	6	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



4 March 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College,
Manchester, M20 6BX**

Thank you for the friendly welcome extended to us when we inspected your school recently. You assisted us in making our judgements when we met with groups of you, observed you in lessons and watched as you negotiated your way safely and sensibly around the building works.

We judged that your school provides you with a satisfactory education and that your headteacher, the governing body and leaders demonstrate a good capacity to improve your school even further.

You get on well together and are given some meaningful opportunities to take responsibility and consider some of the bigger moral questions in life.

The care, guidance and support you are given, and your spiritual, moral and cultural development are all good.

In order to improve your school we have asked your leaders to:

- improve the rates of progress you make, especially in English and for boys
- match lessons to your individual abilities and that teachers give you clearer written feedback on your work
- ensure more of your lessons are of the same calibre as the good and outstanding ones we saw
- encourage you take more responsibility to manage your own behaviour and learning to help you to reach your full potential.

You can play your part by endeavouring to work hard.

Yours sincerely,

James Kilner

Her Majesty's Inspector

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