

Accrington St Christopher's Church of England High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	137421
Local authority	NA
Inspection number	386099
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,280
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Whitehead
Headteacher	Alasdair Coates
Date of previous school inspection	NA
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 50 lessons taught by 49 teachers. They held meetings with senior leaders, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including data regarding students' progress, school improvement plans, monitoring reports, departmental self-evaluations and procedures for safeguarding students. Inspectors analysed 561 questionnaires completed by parents and carers as well as 50 completed by staff and 164 responses from students.

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

- The impact of the newly developed sixth form on outcomes and aspirations for students and on the quality of provision in the main school.
- The impact of the school's drive to raise the quality of teaching and learning through the sharing of good practice.
- The consistency with which middle leaders evaluate performance and secure improvement.

Information about the school

St Christopher's Church of England High School converted to academy status on 1 September 2011. It is larger than the average-sized secondary school and is steadily growing. The sixth form opened in September 2010. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than found nationally, as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups. Below average numbers of students have identified special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is much higher than average. The school is acknowledged as a High Performing Specialist School, with specialism in technology, and holds numerous awards, including Investors in People, the Sportsmark and Healthy Schools status.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Accrington St Christopher's Church of England High School provides an outstanding education for its students and demonstrates palpable enthusiasm and ambition in all aspects of its work. Students' attainment is high and their achievement is outstanding, not only in academic terms but also in the way they develop spiritually and morally into self-confident, caring and responsible young people who work hard and fully enjoy the many opportunities presented to them by school. The school's compassionate and inclusive family ethos is apparent in positive relationships at all levels; students feel extremely safe and benefit from outstanding care, guidance and support that is notably successful in helping them to overcome obstacles and achieve the best that they can. Virtually all students say that they enjoy school. As one commented, 'even though the school is very big, the teachers know us and treat us as individuals.' Students' attendance is consistently high. Their behaviour is exemplary and their contribution to their community is extensive.

The quality of teaching is good overall with outstanding practice evident. There is a positive climate for learning across the school; teachers have high expectations, excellent subject knowledge and a commitment to sharing ideas with each other in order to develop their skills. They set ambitious targets for students and monitor their progress closely. Some marking is of an excellent quality, especially in English, but there is inconsistency in how well teachers' comments advise students on how to improve their work. In the best lessons, students make insightful, extended contributions to discussions and present their ideas in imaginative ways. However, in a few lessons there is a tendency for teachers to talk too much and this limits opportunities for active learning. The outstanding curriculum provides a suite of courses that meet all students' needs and interests. Students participate enthusiastically in the school's impressive variety of enrichment activities from judo to investigative science.

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by a highly effective team of senior leaders, has resulted in a shared vision of success which drives the school forward. This is fully supported by staff and there is a vibrant sense of teamwork across the school. Self-evaluation is rigorous, drawing on the views of all stakeholders, and shows an accurate understanding of where there is scope for improvement. Subject leaders are dedicated and knowledgeable. They have raised standards effectively in their departments but limited opportunities to observe the teaching of colleagues mean that their strategies for sharing best practice do not

always have full impact. The governing body provides astute insight, excellent support and rigorous challenge.

Considerable energy has been focused on the development of the sixth form, without detriment to outcomes in the main school. The sixth form has made a powerful contribution to the aspirations of the whole-school community. Academic outcomes for sixth formers are good and their personal development is excellent. The process of planning, building and opening the sixth form has been managed extremely well.

The school demonstrates an impressive trajectory of continuous improvement. The morale of the community is high and the capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding, in the main school and in the sixth form, by:
 - ensuring that marking is of a consistently high standard so that students are clear about their achievements and how to improve their work
 - enhancing the range of opportunities for students to present their ideas during lessons, including through the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

- Further develop the skills of middle leaders in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning within their departments.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enter the school with attainment which is variable but broadly just above average. They make outstanding progress to reach high standards of attainment in academic and vocational subjects. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make excellent progress and their achievement is outstanding. In English, rates of progress are exceptionally high. Carefully focused work in mathematics has accelerated students' progress significantly so that it is excellent too. The school sets demanding targets of all students. Regular, accurate checking of their progress enables difficulties to be quickly identified and support provided. Students have very positive attitudes to learning and a shared determination to succeed. Their attendance is very high, including to additional classes offered out-of-school hours. Their behaviour is outstanding and enables the school to function as a cohesive, happy and harmonious community.

Students are exceptionally well-prepared for the next stage in their lives. They are independent, tolerant and resilient young people whose well-developed skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT provide an excellent platform for further study, training or employment. Furthermore, they make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community, for instance, as spiritual leaders; as junior sports leaders; through charitable fund-raising and through running eco-fairs. These responsibilities contribute very well to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural

development. Students respond very well to the school's work in promoting healthy lifestyles, for example, in their production of the prize-winning *Green Giant Step For Life* DVD. Their participation in extra-curricular sports and performing arts activities is high. The school's music ensembles have earned international acclaim.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
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	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The care, guidance and support that students receive are outstanding and contribute significantly to their high self-esteem and excellent achievement. Caring relationships, combined with access to high quality data, mean that staff are well equipped to identify and remove barriers to success for students. In addition, the school is conspicuously successful in enabling students to care for each other. Pastoral support staff work highly effectively with students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and ensure that they are able to engage fully with all that the school has to offer. The curriculum is kept under constant review and tailored to meet the needs of all students. Most students follow an academic pathway which includes a broad range of subjects, including popular options linked to the school's technology specialism. Vocationally-orientated courses are also of high quality and the students studying them are notably successful. Provision in modern foreign languages has been enhanced and uptake has increased strongly. Themed days, including those focused on spirituality, are very popular and have demonstrable impact on students' empathy understanding. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities enables all students to discover and develop their individual talents.

Good and outstanding teaching is evident in most lessons and is characterised by teachers' high expectations and excellent subject knowledge. Questioning is skilfully used to check students' understanding and a variety of activities make learning interesting. Some teaching is particularly effective in developing students' thinking skills. This was the case in an outstanding English lesson where the teacher had designed different activities, tailored according to the skills of groups of students, to support their understanding and analysis of war poetry. This elicited a strong

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

emotional response and students were enabled, through collaborative working, to clearly identify and discuss the impact of the poet's choice of imagery. Students relish opportunities to be active learners and readily take responsibility for improving their own work, as demonstrated in an excellent drama lesson where individuals provided remarkably insightful feedback to their peers on how they could best make use of space in improving the quality of scripted performances that they had selected themselves. In a few lessons, teachers tend to talk too much and this slows the learning of some students, although their engagement remains consistently high. Students' work is generally marked regularly and constructively. However, in some cases teachers' comments do not provide sufficient guidance on how work might be improved.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's tenacious, emotionally intelligent leadership is pivotal in ensuring that the school's consistent focus on improvement. He has fostered a strong sense of teamwork among staff who are fully committed to ensuring that every student achieves their personal best. Senior leaders complement this work enthusiastically and readily seize opportunities to make a difference. The development of the sixth form testifies to leaders' bravery and ambition, but has not weakened their focus on securing the best outcomes for students in the main school. Middle leaders are knowledgeable, energetic and passionate about their subjects. Their work has contributed directly to the raising of standards, although some sharing of good practice has been on a largely informal basis. The governing body is highly skilled, well-informed and committed to the school's development. Its members have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the school and provide support, challenge and affirmation to its leaders.

Self-evaluation is comprehensive, accurate and leads to focused action, including that involving external partners and colleagues from partner schools. As a lead extended school, St Christopher's plays a major part in local development work. Community cohesion is strong; the school has a clear understanding of its context and has forged links locally and internationally to promote mutual respect and understanding, including through impressive inter-faith work. The school's active engagement with parents and carers is reflected in the overwhelming support of the very large number who responded to the questionnaire.

The school is a cohesive, harmonious community that actively promotes equality of opportunity and values individual differences. There are no gaps in performance between key groups of students. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated. The school's safeguarding procedures are exemplary and their monitoring is undertaken assiduously. Staff have received training that is beyond mandatory requirements.

These are the grades for the 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	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The new sixth form, which offers wide ranging A-level courses and some foundation learning, has enhanced the school's provision significantly. The school's monitoring indicates that progress is good and accelerating. Attendance of students in the sixth form is outstanding, as is their personal development. All aspects of provision are good and improving within an inspiring and supportive learning environment. New teachers have been recruited with sixth-form teaching experience and others have undertaken significant additional training to equip them for the challenge of sixth-form teaching. Students receive high quality guidance to make informed choices regarding university entrance or the world of work. Those who have joined St Christopher's from other high schools testify movingly to the way in which they have been welcomed and included in its learning community. School leaders have orchestrated the development of the sixth form with meticulous attention to detail and have clear plans for its future.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was very much higher than average and showed a high degree of consensus in affirming the school's leadership, safety, and quality of teaching. Many parents and carers commented on the strength of the school's ethos and relationships, including one who wrote, 'I cannot praise the school enough. My child is happy, confident and successful thanks to the care and dedication of the staff'. Virtually all respondents agreed that their children were happy at school and made enough progress. A few parents or carers felt that the school did not always help them to support their children's learning.

Inspectors took particular note of this view, by considering reports sent home and guidance to parents and carers regarding subjects. They found that advice to individual parents and carers, particularly of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, was of a very high quality. The school's virtual learning environment is at a relatively early stage of development and the school has plans to make this more useful to parents, carers and students.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Accrington St Christopher's Church of England 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 561 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,280 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	304	54	243	43	4	1	2	0
The school keeps my child safe	354	63	200	36	1	0	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	237	42	281	50	27	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	250	45	273	49	12	2	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	298	53	239	43	4	1	2	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	204	36	284	51	40	7	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	195	35	320	57	28	5	1	0
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)	281	50	234	42	7	1	2	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	278	50	253	45	11	2	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	288	51	230	41	12	2	5	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	175	31	301	54	26	5	5	1
The school is led and managed effectively	357	64	188	34	1	0	4	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	371	66	177	32	4	1	3	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



7 November 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Accrington St Christopher's Church of England High School,
Accrington BB5 4AY**

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making us feel very welcome when we visited your school recently. We sensed the same enthusiasm and feeling of community at St Christopher's that numerous other visitors have commented upon. We are particularly grateful to those students who gave up their time to talk to us and those who completed the questionnaire. Your views helped us reach our judgement that you attend an outstanding school.

You make outstanding progress in your learning and achieve high standards, as well as enjoying yourselves and showing a great deal of care for each other and your community, for instance, through your spiritual activities and through those focused on ecological sustainability. Your attendance is high and you acquire a range of skills that will equip you well for the next stage in your education and for the world of work. We agree with you that the level for care, guidance and support you receive is exemplary. The school is extremely effective in ensuring that those of you who are experiencing difficulty receive the help you need.

Your teachers work extremely hard and you clearly appreciate the lengths they go to, including through extra tuition sessions, to ensure that you do as well as you can. They have excellent subject knowledge and ensure that you are enthusiastic and motivated. We have asked the school to focus on a few areas to improve teaching still further. Much of teachers' marking is detailed and constructive but we recognise that some could be more helpful in advising you on how to improve your work. We are confident that you will play your part by responding to their feedback. Also, we felt that in a few lessons, teachers tended to do too much talking and your learning can be strengthened by opportunities to be more active, including by making use of ICT to demonstrate your thinking. We would like subject leaders to observe teaching of colleagues in their departments on a more regular basis in order to share the strategies that work best in helping you to learn.

The new sixth form is an ambitious development that is one indicator of the outstanding quality of leadership shown by your headteacher and the staff team. We agree with you that the sixth form has enhanced your opportunities to study a wide range of subjects within an exciting and supportive environment.

We see no reason why St Christopher's should not continue to grow from strength to strength, with your ongoing commitment and support.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

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