

The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College

Parrs Wood Rd, East Didsbury, Manchester, M20 6BX

Inspection dates 16–17 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher the school has improved rapidly in all respects since its last inspection 18 months ago.
- Attainment is above average and progress has accelerated so that all pupils achieve well because teaching is consistently good across the school.
- Issues around behaviour have been tackled effectively so that behaviour is now consistently good and is outstanding in some lessons. Good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development promotes pupils' self-esteem and confidence.
- The school has exemplary methods of safeguarding pupils and 'goes the extra mile' in ensuring that they are safe and happy. Bullying is not tolerated.
- The school is innovative in developing the curriculum, which is constantly being enriched and improved in the bid to drive up standards still further.
- The staff, senior leaders and governors share the same vision to make the school even better and know how they are going to achieve this goal.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A higher proportion of outstanding teaching is required to ensure more pupils make better than expected progress.
- Some of the school's judgements in the past have been too generous about the quality of teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons of which two were joint observations with the deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, heads of subjects, the Chair of the Governing Body, groups of pupils and two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, an early telephone response from a parent, and reviewed the responses to the school’s own most recent questionnaires from parents.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work, scrutinised the school’s data about pupils’ progress and achievement, examined records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding and looked at the documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the work of the school.

Inspection team

Judith Straw Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Cooper	Additional Inspector
Ronald Cohen	Additional Inspector
Ariane Roberts	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average sized Roman Catholic secondary school.
- The very large majority of pupils are White British, with a small minority of pupils from a variety of different ethnic heritages. Few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority and for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is almost twice the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who with special educational needs is above that found nationally. The proportion of pupils supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A very small number of students in Year 11 attend vocational courses at a local college.
- The school's GCSE results exceed the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that more of it is outstanding by:
 - making sure that teachers plan lessons so that pupils of all abilities are able to make at least good progress
 - ensuring that all marking and assessment practices match the quality of the best, offering clear guidance to pupils on what is good, what needs to improve and how this is to be done
 - ensuring that teachers across a range of subjects use homework, particularly in Key Stage 3, to extend pupils' learning and research skills in order to accelerate their progress
 - making sure that lesson observations not only celebrate good teaching but also identify how it can become outstanding.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **is good**

- Pupils enter the school with attainment that is a little below average. In the last two years they have made such good progress that by the end of Year 11 attainment is significantly above average. Attainment rose further in 2012 so that 74% of pupils gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics.
- The attainment of all pupils, including those with pupil premium funding, disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs, girls and boys and the few who speak English as an additional language, is rising rapidly. The gap in the achievement between pupils receiving the pupil premium funding and other pupils has narrowed considerably. These pupils are doing better than the same pupils nationally.
- The small number of pupils following college placements and alternative provision also achieve well. As a result of the school's determination, all pupils have equal opportunities to be successful in their various courses.
- The vast majority of pupils make good progress. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in English and mathematics is above average and the proportion making better than expected progress has risen further. In each year since the previous inspection pupils have significantly exceeded predictions and beaten the targets set.
- Pupils are exceeding expectations so that more pupils in Years 7 to 9 are achieving the higher levels. Currently over half the pupils in Year 9 are on track to reach the higher levels in English and three-quarters in mathematics.
- Most pupils achieve well in lessons because they have positive attitudes to learning, are keen

to do well and know that the efforts they make now will contribute to their future success.

- The school enters pupils early for GCSE English and mathematics only as a means of giving them the opportunity to re-sit later and gain the highest possible grade. This practice will cease in English but continues in mathematics. In the summer of 2012, there were 13 higher attaining pupils in Year 11 who achieved particularly well in mathematics in the AS level examination as a result of gaining good grades at the end of Year 10.
- Pupils are achieving better in a range of subjects and particularly in science, where results have improved over the last two years. More pupils are now reaching the highest grades.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The great majority of lessons are well planned so that pupils make consistently good progress. Good and outstanding lessons are characterised by a brisk pace and a good balance of activities where pupils develop skills, confidence and initiative in tackling and solving problems.
- In the vast majority of lessons relationships are positive which makes a good contribution to pupils' attitudes to learning. As a result, the climate for learning is supportive and progress quickens. Pupils' best work is celebrated in attractive displays.
- Paired and group work is used effectively. Pupils are given challenging and engaging tasks and time is allowed for them to solve problems together without interference from the teacher. Pupils respond well and maturely to these opportunities and engage in high-level discussions about their work with good opportunities to work by themselves. For example, in an outstanding Spanish lesson, students worked together to change verbs in a text from the past to future tense. All pupils were engrossed, no time was lost, pupils responded well to the trust placed in them and, as a result, outstanding progress was made.
- There is a strong focus on literacy. Teachers insist that pupils use correct subject-specific terms when giving explanations. Literacy is promoted across all subjects, for example, in a good science lesson pupils were reminded of the literacy focus for the week about writing in clear, simple sentences.
- Lesson planning always indicates the different levels that pupils might achieve, but, in some lessons, all the pupils are doing the same activities so that, on occasions, average or higher attaining pupils are not stretched so that they can make outstanding progress.
- There is some good marking which celebrates what pupils can do and gives helpful, subject-specific advice on how to improve. However, a small minority of books are not marked regularly and comments are too general and could apply to any subject or pupil because they focus on the quality of presentation rather than on how the individual pupil could develop their understanding of the subject.
- The use of homework is variable across subjects and year groups. Some opportunities are missed, particularly in Key Stage 3, to develop pupils' research skills and to extend their learning beyond the classroom.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of pupils is typically good and has improved enormously in the last two years. This is because systems are clear and consistent. Pupils enjoy the rewards of good behaviour, say that lessons are more interesting and appreciate the new buildings and improved environment.
- The number of exclusions has fallen dramatically as a result of the school's strong behaviour management policy.
- Pupils feel safe and free from harassment. They say that bullying is minimal and that the school rapidly takes action if and when bullying is reported. There are 'worry boxes' and an internet system to allow pupils to report concerns anonymously if they prefer.
- The school is largely free from racism and name-calling or other unpleasantness so that pupils

enjoy school and feel proud to attend here.

- Attendance has risen sharply and, having been below average for some years, is now above average.
- Pupils very much enjoy the challenge of being given leadership roles in school and rise to the high expectations set.
- Pupils often lead prayers during morning and afternoon prayer time and make a good contribution to the local and wider community through their fund-raising for many different charities in Manchester and abroad.

The leadership and management are good

- Under the passionate, visionary leadership of the headteacher the school is going from strength to strength. She leads a team of committed and dedicated professionals determined to improve this good school further. Senior and other leaders are totally committed to the success of their subjects and to the school as a whole.
- Staff are fully accountable and leaders at all levels report to the governors on what has been achieved and what remains to be done.
- Leadership of teaching has led to strong improvements in its quality since the last inspection. There is a mostly rigorous checking system in place and findings from lesson observations, looking at pupils' books, listening to the views of pupils and parents as well as measuring the rates of progress, are all used to judge the quality of teaching.
- Lesson observations are done by both subject leaders and senior leaders. Occasionally, records show that some judgements have been overly generous, especially when judging teaching to be outstanding. A minority of judgements are not based sufficiently on how well pupils are learning in lessons.
- Teachers are very well supported by regular training opportunities, including specific coaching where necessary. Outstanding performance management has been effective in promoting the improvement in teaching and teachers have targets based on improving their work in the classroom.
- Pupil premium funding is invested in boosting literacy through strategies such as an accelerated reading group and providing a safe learning environment for more vulnerable pupils in a Year 7 nurture group. It has also been used to employ more teachers to reduce class sizes and to fund some stimulating enrichment activities. Governors play a leading role in checking on the impact of how this money is spent and so pupils gain the maximum benefit.
- The curriculum is flexible, innovative and constantly in transition as the school develops new ideas and practices. For example, pupils arrive early and begin the first lesson at 8.20am. The move to six lessons of 50 minutes per day has put extra pace into the school day. The Barlow Life programme on Wednesday afternoons offers pupils the chance to learn different subjects and skills as well as some exciting enrichment activities, such as circus skills and film making.
- The school uses little alternative provision. The school carefully monitors the attendance and progress of the few pupils in Year 11 who are following vocational or work-related courses at local colleges to ensure their well-being and achievement.
- The school has strong links with a range of local sixth form providers and, as a result, nearly all pupils progress to higher-level courses after Year 11.
- The local authority has provided light touch support when requested. It is recognised that the school is well able to manage its own improvement strategies.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body have a deep knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and keep themselves well informed about progress in all areas.
 - Individual governors are attached to different faculties and gain personal knowledge about the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making in different departments.
 - Members of the governing body are fully involved in performance management which is closely linked to teachers' salary progression and promotion.
 - Firm and effective financial management has eliminated a large budget deficit.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	105581
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	405002

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	852
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Chidgey
Headteacher	Claire McCarron
Date of previous school inspection	2 March 2011
Telephone number	0161 4458053
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