

Holy Cross Catholic High School

Myles Standish Way, Chorley, Lancashire, PR4 3LS

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- This is an improving school.
- The progress of students has accelerated such that they now make good progress throughout the school, especially in English.
- Teaching is good and includes skilful questioning and students working together well to help them achieve the best they can.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students. Students know that their teachers want them to do well and will help them to succeed.
- Students behave well. They treat peers, teachers and visitors with respect and courtesy.
- Students, parents and teachers recognise this is a safe school where students are treated individually and well cared for.
- The school is led well by the interim headteacher and the two deputy headteachers following recent changes in its senior leadership.
- Teaching is led and managed effectively. Teachers are set clear and challenging targets that relate to the progress of the students they teach.
- Checks on students' progress are helping to raise achievement by accurately tracking how well students are doing.
- The curriculum is good and sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of students with good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Governors are knowledgeable and very committed to the school. They provide good support and challenge for senior leaders.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The achievement of students eligible for pupil premium funding lags behind that of other students. The performance gaps, although narrowing, are still quite wide.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding. Marking is variable and there are not enough opportunities for students to respond to teachers' comments.
- The role of middle leaders is not yet securely established.
- Recent changes in senior leadership have left some staff rather confused and unclear about the school's vision and direction.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons, including four joint observations with the headteacher or members of the leadership team, and a number of activities related to the school’s Mission Legacy Week.
- Discussions were held with senior staff, subject leaders, learning and pastoral managers, teaching staff, the chair, vice-chair and other members of the governing body, and the school adviser from the Lancashire local authority.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the student council and other groups of students from each key stage, listened to students read and spoke to students in lessons, at break-time and during lunchtimes.
- Inspectors checked work in students’ books and looked at a range of documents relating to students’ achievement over time, the school’s view of its own performance, improvement planning and safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors took account of the 119 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and 55 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Michael Blaylock, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jacqueline Rothery	Additional Inspector
Michele Costello	Additional Inspector
David Woodhouse	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Holy Cross Catholic High School is a smaller than average-sized secondary school that is the sole provider of Catholic secondary education in Chorley.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. (This is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and for whom English is not their first language are lower than those typically found.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action is below average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- There is alternative off-site provision for a total of 24 Year 10 and Year 11 students. These are mostly accessing vocational courses for one or two days a week as part of a mixed timetable arrangement with either Myerscough College or Blackburn College. A small number of these students follow individually tailored full-time programmes of study either through the Shaftesbury High School (a short-stay school offering alternative and complementary education) or a combination of work placements with courses provided by: Lever Park Learning Trust; Rathbone Training, Chorley; and Fixit, Wigan.
- The school has met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- At the time of the inspection, the headteacher was operating in an interim capacity, following the departure of the previous headteacher at the end of the summer term 2013 and awaiting the arrival of the newly appointed headteacher who starts in April 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress of all students in order to raise standards higher and further reduce the achievement gaps between students eligible for pupil premium funding and other students, by ensuring:
 - that all teachers' checks on students' achievements have a sharp focus and help students to make even faster progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding
 - that work is always sufficiently challenging to keep students' occupied productively; to intrigue students and help them develop as active enquirers and creative thinkers.
 - the consistent implementation of the school's marking policy to provide clearer next steps and greater opportunities for students to respond to teachers' comments.
- Establish a clear vision for continuing school improvement that secures the understanding and support of all staff following the changes in the leadership of the school through:
 - good communication and interaction to identify and articulate clear priorities for the school
 - developing the work of middle leaders in contributing to the strategic leadership of the school and in supporting and developing the colleagues for whom they have responsibility.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Although the school has consistently been reaching standards that are above national averages, students have not always made good progress. This is because they start the school with standards that are significantly higher than is found in most schools and until recently the school's focus has been on securing the important GCSE grade C standard, rather than every student achieving the best they can.
- Teachers now have a sharp focus on ensuring that students throughout the school make at least the progress they are expected to and there are increasing numbers of students who exceed expectations. Overall achievement is now good and improving.
- The impact of this has been that, although overall progress in English and mathematics was low in 2013, the proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics is now rising. The projections for 2014 suggest this will continue with Year 11 students making outstanding progress in English and at least good progress in mathematics. Attainment is above average.
- The school's tracking system shows that students in Key Stage 3 make good progress, with many on target to make more than expected progress.
- The quality of work seen in students' books and folders was good. Their work is well presented and students take pride in their work.
- History and religious studies are subjects in which students excel.
- Students read fluently and with understanding. They use these skills effectively across the curriculum.
- The school has entered most students early for their GCSE mathematics, but this policy has been critically reviewed in light of recent changes in accreditation. Following parental and student consultation, the school now enters approximately one quarter of its Year 11 students for the Foundation Tier paper in the autumn term, with the prospect of progressing to the Higher Tier paper in the summer. This provides good progression and works well for these students.
- Students eligible for pupil premium funding, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, have done less well than their peers, with mostly widening achievement gaps up to 2013. In English, the attainment of students eligible for this funding was on average one GCSE grade lower, whereas in mathematics it was one and a half grades lower. A concerted effort has resulted in those students currently in the school making progress similar to that of their peers; in-school achievement gaps are now much reduced and it is fully anticipated that this will be evident in the 2014 examination results.
- Students with disabilities or a statement of special educational need and those identified as school action plus make good progress to achieve above average standards.
- The small number of students whose curriculum includes alternative off-site provision follow a range of mostly vocational courses that meet their needs and interests well. This provision is proving highly successful in preparing students for the next stage in their education, employment or training.
- The school has identified an 'able, gifted and talented' group to ensure that the needs of the most able students are met. Those students who start their secondary education having reached the higher Level 5 in their primary schools make good progress that is in line with that of similar students in other schools. Similarly, the achievement of the few students who speak English as an additional language is indistinguishable from that of their peers.
- Over 85 per cent of parents responding to the Parent View questionnaire agreed that 'my child makes good progress in this school'.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers plan their lessons well and make use of varied activities to engage and sustain the interest of their students. They have good subject knowledge and make skilful use of questioning to probe and develop students' understanding.
- There are many opportunities for students to work together in pairs to help each other to achieve as well as they can and to check each other's work. Group work is also used effectively to help students develop skills for working in a team while also learning in the subject.
- Some teachers are less confident in checking students' progress and occasionally this can be rather superficial and not effective in accelerating progress.
- Occasionally in lessons, students do not complete activities, but in other instances they finish tasks quickly and waste time waiting for the next part of the lesson.
- Teachers know their students well and relationships between teachers and students are good. All teachers are aware of the need to help each student make the best possible progress that they can, and particularly so for disadvantaged students, and the most able.
- Some teachers are making very effective use of the school's marking policy to recognise students' achievements and identify next steps for them. However, this is not the case throughout the school.
- There is excellent support from teachers and teaching assistants for students with statements of special educational needs. This enables these students to do things that otherwise they could not, and to achieve well; clear evidence that the school promotes equal opportunities well.
- Students recognise that their teachers want them to do well and will help them to succeed. This is the view of the majority of parents as well, summed up in a letter from a parent saying, 'I am very proud that my children are part of this school. They come home every day excited about what they have done and are eager to talk about their lessons and what they have learnt.'

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students behave well, treating each other, their teachers and visitors with respect and courtesy. They have a good understanding of how they should behave and conduct themselves sensibly in lessons, in moving around the school and in the dining hall at lunch and break times.
- While some older students were less enthusiastic about their school, the majority of students are very positive. Doubtless some disenchantment is linked with the disruption caused through changes in the leadership of the school.
- Students' attitudes in class are positive. They interact well with teachers and are engaged in their work, responding readily to teacher instructions. However, it was only when teaching captured their interest and imagination that students came alive, responding with interest and imagination.
- There is good use of progress certificates to recognise and celebrate students' academic achievements, as well as promoting the message to students, staff and parents that progress is the key element within achievement.
- Students are aware of various forms of bullying, including cyber and homophobic, and know that if bullying occurs it is dealt with. Incidents are rare.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Attendance is excellent, consistently above the national averages in recent years and continuing to improve.
- Exclusions are also declining, for boys and students with special educational needs, as the school is becoming increasingly effective in identifying and addressing underlying causes of any disaffection.
- Students, parents and teachers recognise that this is a safe school where students are treated individually and cared for well. Good nurture and support are provided, particularly for

vulnerable students, in the school's Routledge Centre.

The leadership and management are good

- The interim headteacher has brought stability to the school after the previous headteacher moved on after less than a year in post. Leadership is currently in the hands of the interim headteacher and two deputy headteachers who are driving the focus on accelerating students' progress. Actions to improve the performance of disadvantaged students had been introduced and are now being pursued more rigorously, enabling the school to continue to improve.
- The senior leadership team, along with middle leaders and the governors want their school to do well for its students. Together they have both the ability and ambition to improve the school further. The school's self-evaluation is mostly accurate, although judgements on the quality of teaching, behaviour and some aspects of achievement were generous. However, the way ahead is identified clearly. This vision for the school now needs to be embraced by the whole school community.
- Middle leaders have a growing understanding of their responsibilities and are increasingly effective in providing good support and development for the teachers they have responsibility for. They recognise that they are accountable to senior leaders and appreciate the increasing communication and support they receive. These are recent developments that are still developing and are not yet consistent and secure in practice.
- Issues identified for improvement at the time of the previous inspection have been successfully addressed, leading to well-embedded good practice in literacy across the curriculum and improved use of assessment.
- Responses to the staff questionnaire were mostly positive although varied, indicating a lack of cohesion and some uncertainty about the direction and leadership of the school. Recent changes in the senior leadership have caused concern and uncertainty, although staff remain loyal to the school.
- Teaching is led and managed well. Effective checks are made on the quality of teaching, leading to teachers being set clear and challenging targets that relate to their performance and the progress of the students they teach. Pay progression is dependent on achieving the agreed targets.
- There is a strong commitment to the continuing professional development of teachers through in-house training and external opportunities. This includes teachers sharing their expertise with other schools.
- Checks on students' progress are increasingly effective in tracking accurately how well they are doing and providing support for those who need it.
- The curriculum is good. School leaders are responsive to the needs of students and tailor provision accordingly. The alternative provision enhances the curriculum and is carefully monitored by the school. The Mission Legacy Week provided rich opportunities for promoting students' spiritual, moral and social development, with excellent opportunities to explore sensitive issues in a safe, secure environment. A summer school has been very effective in helping identified students make the transition from their primary schools.
- Good support from the local authority has helped the governors handle leadership issues well, both in securing the services of the interim headteacher and in the recruitment of the new headteacher.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very committed to the school and provide effective support and challenge for senior leaders. This is often informed by their insightful understanding of the school's performance data. Governors have a broad range of skills and experience, including financial expertise and are knowledgeable about educational issues. They have a good understanding of the school and its current priorities relating to progress and disadvantaged students. There is good awareness of how the pupil premium funding is being spent and the impact of this. Such is their commitment to the students eligible for the pupil premium funding that they

have authorised additional expenditure for their support, which is proving effective in closing the gap in their achievement and that of other students. They execute their safeguarding responsibilities responsibly and efficiently. Governors are aware of their new performance management responsibilities and are concerned to see targets for the headteacher and other staff that are informed by the school's self-evaluation and align with the school improvement plan. Governors are very positive about the next stage of the school's life as the newly appointed headteacher takes up his post after Easter.

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	119803
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	440849

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	791
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Edwards MBE
Headteacher	Anthony Perry
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2010
Telephone number	01257 262093
Fax number	01257 232878
Email address	admin@holycross.lancs.sch.uk

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