

The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College

Parrs Wood Road, East Didsbury, Manchester M20 6BX

Inspection dates

30 November–1 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not maintained a good quality of education since the last inspection.
- The standards that pupils reach in mathematics is low given their starting points.
- The standards that pupils reach in science, especially the most able pupils, are not high enough given their ability.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they should across a number of subjects, especially mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities underperform and teaching is not consistent in meeting their needs.
- The pupil premium funding has not been specifically focused on strategies to improve the academic achievement of these pupils.
- The school development plan does not demonstrate how leaders and governors will know that their actions are having impact.
- Assessment systems are new and are not being used well enough to inform the next steps in learning. Consequently, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding in some subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- Attendance is above the national average and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is low.
- The personal development and welfare of pupils are strengths of the school.
- The careers education, information, advice and guidance for pupils are of high quality.
- Pupils achieve well in English, humanities, modern foreign languages, art, physical education and religious education. This is also where effective teaching is consistent.
- Pupils feel safe at this school and leaders work very hard to ensure that pupils are kept safe, especially the most vulnerable.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Ensure that pupil premium funding is used on strategies to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the standards in mathematics and science.
- Sharpen the school development plan so that it is clear what needs to be done and how leaders and governors will know that it has been successfully achieved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, leaders have not sustained a good quality of education. There have been a number of contributing factors to this – most notably, the significant instability in staffing.
- The performance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has declined since the last inspection. This is being addressed. However, the focus has been on the pastoral provision for these pupils and not on improving how well these pupils achieve academically. The funding that the school receives for disadvantaged pupils has not been targeted enough on strategies that will improve their outcomes and ensure that they achieve as well as other pupils nationally.
- Leaders correctly identify the areas that need improving. However, the school development plan is weak. It does not provide a clear, unambiguous road map as to how these improvements will be made and how it will be demonstrated that they have been successful.
- Leaders have struggled to recruit teachers to key subject areas such as mathematics and science, and this has significantly impacted on pupils' learning in these subjects. Recently, new teachers have been appointed to these departments and the new leaders appointed have brought a determination and proven capacity to make a positive difference. Already the impact of their leadership can be seen in the progress that pupils are making. Leaders correctly recognise that there is much to do, especially in mathematics.
- The performance of teachers and leaders is managed in a fair and equitable manner. The process is clear and consistent. It is underpinned by a programme of professional development. For example, there has been a significant amount of professional development around understanding the different special educational needs and/or disabilities that pupils may have and how their needs can be met in the classroom. Teachers are now incorporating these strategies into their teaching, albeit inconsistently.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is appropriate and meets the needs of pupils so as to equip them to move on to the next stage of their education. The pupils whom inspectors spoke to said that they feel that they have a good range of subjects to study and subsequently choose from. The effectiveness of the curriculum can be seen by the very high number of pupils who go on to further education, employment and/or training.
- Leadership of the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is strong. Pupils are given the opportunities to think and act positively on many of the topics that are discussed in their personal, social and health education lessons. For example, the pupils at the school have a strong social awareness and a respect for cultural diversity. The principles and values of being British are aligned to the Catholic ethos of the school, which is tangible and clearly permeates every aspect of school life.

- Leaders ensure that pupils are provided with the necessary careers education, information, advice and guidance. It is of a high quality and impartial. Recently, the school has received national accolades for the quality of the advice and guidance it gives to pupils. The pupils whom inspectors spoke to value the accurate advice that they have received to help them make informed choices about their next steps.

Governance

- Governors are committed to the school and eager to see it improve. This can be seen in the interest and attention that they pay to the daily life of the school.
- Governors have ensured that they have the skills and expertise in different areas so as to be able to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. However, it is only recently that they have provided the real and necessary challenge, especially in regard to declining standards.
- Governors have not routinely monitored the impact that the pupil premium funding has on pupils' academic achievement. Consequently, this funding has done little to improve how well these pupils achieve.
- Inspectors noted that there has been a real shift in terms of the sharpness of governors' meetings and committees since the governing body was reconstituted. Governors understand the urgency with which they need to move and have made a number of tough decisions.
- Governors take their safeguarding duties seriously and partake in all safeguarding training opportunities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders are unrelenting and watchful in ensuring that pupils are kept safe, especially the most vulnerable. It is not uncommon for leaders to go above and beyond to ensure that vulnerable pupils are safe. One example of this is that the school's safeguarding officer is employed full time and not just term-time.
- The policies and practices are up to date and reflect the recent changes and developments. This has been accompanied by regular training for all staff and governors. Leaders also regularly check staff's understanding of safeguarding by following up training events with reviews and evaluations. Safeguarding records, checks on staff and recruitment practices are thorough.
- Leaders have been particularly attentive to ensuring that matters such as extremism, radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and forced marriages are understood by all staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The use of assessment information to inform teaching is not sufficiently developed. This is partly because the assessment system is new, but it is clear that in some subjects pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding and these are not being addressed.

- The needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not consistently being met in lessons. Teachers have only recently received support and development with teaching strategies to meet the needs of these pupils. The adults who work with teachers in the classroom to support the learning of these pupils are enhancing teachers' effectiveness.
- The additional funding for pupils who are disadvantaged has not been targeted enough on specific strategies used by teachers to improve pupils' learning in the classroom. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils have not made the progress that they should.
- As a result of more focused and specific teaching strategies, the needs of lower-attaining pupils are being met. However, outside English lessons, these pupils are not always being supported and developed to write in a sustained manner.
- The most able pupils are beginning to make better progress because they are being challenged in their lessons and are given work that reflects their ability.
- Leaders' records indicate that they have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching over time. They rightly correlate the effectiveness of teaching and learning with outcomes for pupils and know where teaching needs to improve. Where teaching is not effective, leaders have put in place programmes of support which have led to improvements or tough decisions being made.
- Inspectors observed teachers asking pupils questions that really made the pupils think. The quality of the responses by pupils was eloquent and perceptive and is indicative of their ability.
- The quality of feedback that teachers provide helps pupils move their learning forward. Pupils value this feedback and told inspectors that it shows them how much effort the teachers put in, and makes them want to put in even more effort. This also demonstrates the quality of relationships between pupils and teachers.
- The majority of parents value the communication they receive about their children's progress. They say it is clear and tells them what they need to know. The parents whom inspectors spoke to were particularly appreciative of the sessions that leaders provided regarding the new assessment system and curriculum changes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good and a strength of the school. The manner in which this aspect of the school is promoted is considered and strategic.
- The pupils are articulate and charming. They are proud of their school and they are happy to be there. This is also the view of the vast majority of parents.
- The student leadership team and the student council are dynamic groups and forces for good. They are given responsibility for the direction they take, and they are mature and considered in how they carry out their work.

- It is impressive that the pupils are not only interested in looking for ways to improve the school but they are just as keen to help those less fortunate in the local area and community in which they live. The pupils are currently collecting hampers to distribute at Christmas but they were insistent that the hampers have to be 'luxury hampers' because the recipients have to feel and know that they are important.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school and that, when bullying occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. The records that leaders keep are thorough and show that the incidents of bullying are continuing to reduce. This is because there has been significant input over the last few years in assemblies, and external visitors coming in to speak to pupils about all different issues such as crime, drugs, mental health and bullying. The school has recently received a national anti-bullying award.
- A recurring message evident around the school in displays and in conversations with inspectors was 'Barlow: no labels'. Pupils are respected for who they are and there is no acceptance of anything that hints of discrimination or labelling because of gender, sexual orientation, race or belief, for example.
- Pupils generally show very positive attitudes to learning. Where this is less strong is where teaching does not meet their needs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The attendance for all pupils is good and above the national average. Although the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been lower than the national average, leaders have implemented a raft of strategies that have led to higher rates of attendance.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is below the national average, and the systems and provisions in place to insist on pupils attending school regularly are working.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions are reducing and are only issued as a last resort. Leaders will only exclude pupils after every other sanction has been exhausted.
- The uniform is smart and presentable. The standard of expectation has been raised and this is evident in school and as pupils travel to and from school. The high standards expected in uniform and appearance reflect the school building which is clean, litter and graffiti free, and an environment which is conducive to learning.
- There is a new behaviour management policy which is clear and uses a step-by-step approach to issuing sanctions. This is not fully embedded and so learning in a few lessons can be disrupted by poor behaviour. However, the pupils spoken to all told inspectors that behaviour has greatly improved.
- The behaviour and attendance of pupils educated at alternative providers is good. Leaders are in regular communication and any issues or absences are dealt with quickly. Leaders often visit the alternative providers to assure themselves of the quality of provision, including safeguarding practices.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- For too long pupils have not achieved as well as they should in mathematics. This is especially so for disadvantaged pupils.
- Progress that pupils make in science is not as good as other pupils nationally with the same starting points.
- While the proportion of pupils who attained five or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics at grade C or above, in previous years has been above the national average, it has declined since the last inspection. In 2016, the proportion of pupils who achieved a grade C or above in English and mathematics was below the national average.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged do not make the progress that they should at this school. The progress made by the least able and most able disadvantaged pupils has been too slow.
- The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should across the curriculum. They do make good progress in English, humanities, religious education and art, for example. The proportion of pupils who achieve the highest grades in biology, chemistry and physics is lower than the national average in these subjects.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have not made good progress across the curriculum. This is contrary to pupils who have a statement or education, health and care plan who consistently make better progress than their peers nationally. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are now making modest improvements in their learning. Their specific needs are being better met than they were previously and their learning is benefiting.
- Pupils are now making quicker progress. This is evident in pupils' work, lessons and the school's own assessment information. The stability in teaching that is now being seen is contributing to this.
- Progress made by the most able pupils is improving in subjects where they are challenged to think hard, and in lessons where they are deepening their knowledge and understanding. Leaders recognise that this is not always consistently happening.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged and the most able disadvantaged still have a lot of catching-up to do with other pupils nationally. The differences in all year groups are closing but not quickly enough. This is because the pupil premium funding has not been targeted specifically on strategies to improve academic standards.
- Progress made by pupils in English, humanities, modern languages, art and religious education is consistently good.
- Pupils are encouraged to read and reading lists of appropriate books are provided. There is a well-resourced library which pupils use. The reports that parents receive also include their children's reading age which parents told inspectors they particularly liked.
- Pupils who are educated at alternative providers achieve well given their starting points and circumstances. Leaders monitor the progress of the pupils at these providers and it is evident that they are appropriately based and their needs are being met.

- Almost all pupils go on to further education, employment or training when they leave this school. This is because of the effective information, advice and guidance that they are provided with.

School details

Unique reference number	105581
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	10024203

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 comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	880
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marian Meakin
Headteacher	Claire McCarron
Telephone number	0161 445 8053
Website	www.thebarlowrchigh.co.uk
Email address	admin@thebarlowrchigh.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 October 2012

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The majority of pupils are White British, with a significant minority of pupils from a variety of different ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is similar to the national average.

- In 2015, the school's GCSE results exceeded the government's current floor standards.
- Pupils join the school with starting points that are similar to the national average.
- Ten pupils are educated off-site at the Manchester pupil referral unit, the hospital school and the Manchester Vocational and Learning Academy.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons across subjects and across all year groups. A learning walk took place with senior leaders. Inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils from both key stages, the student council and the student leadership team about their experience of school and their learning.
- Inspectors considered 41 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, and 25 written submissions on ‘free text’. There were 32 staff responses and 35 pupil responses to Ofsted’s inspection questionnaire. Inspectors also met with a group of six parents who requested to meet with inspectors.
- Inspectors met with the members of the governing body. Meetings were also held with the principal, senior and middle leaders, and members of staff. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority and the Diocese of Salford.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documentation including the school’s own self-evaluation and development plan, anonymised performance management documents, school policies and procedures, and the school’s own assessment information. A range of documentation regarding safeguarding was scrutinised, including behaviour and attendance records and bullying logs.
- Inspectors listened to a group of pupils read.

Inspection team

Jonathan Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Vicky Atherton	Ofsted Inspector
Tim Long	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Caldecott	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Crossley	Ofsted Inspector
David Woodhouse	Ofsted Inspector

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