



Inspection report

Archbishop Beck Catholic High School Sports College

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Unique Reference Number 104717
LEA Liverpool

Inspection number 274580
Inspection dates 22 and 23 June 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs J Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Cedar Road
School category	Voluntary Aided <i>Diocese of Liverpool</i>		Walton
			Liverpool
			Merseyside
Age range of pupils	11 to 18 years		L9 9AF
Gender of pupils	mixed	Telephone number	0151 525 6326
Number on roll	1,376	Fax number	0151 525 2465
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr J Hanson
Date of previous inspection	March 2001	Headteacher	Mr A W Hardman

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 18 years	7 September 2005	274580

Introduction

Archbishop Beck Catholic High School Sports College was inspected in March 2001. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school in September 2004 in connection with the Leadership Incentive Grant and, as a result of concerns about aspects of its work, reinspected the school in June 2005.

Description of the school

Archbishop Beck Catholic High School Sports College is a popular, voluntary-aided, Catholic comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years. It is larger than average; there are 1,376 pupils on roll, including 174 in the sixth form. Boys significantly outnumber girls, particularly in Years 8 to 10. The school draws its pupils from a wide area, some wards of which experience significant social and economic disadvantage; 31 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is about twice the national average. Few pupils are of minority ethnic heritage or have home languages other than English. Fifteen per cent of the pupils have special educational needs, including 25 pupils who have Statements of Special Educational Need; these figures are about average. The school has experienced increased turnover of teaching staff during the last two years, but has a full complement of appropriately qualified teachers. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school has risen steadily and is now close to average. The school has been a specialist sports college since 2000: it shares some of its sporting facilities with nearby primary schools and the local community. A recent bid for a second specialism, information and communication technology (ICT), was successful. The school holds a number of local and national awards, including the *Sport England Sportsmark Gold*, the *Arts Council Silver Artsmark*, and the *Liverpool Healthy Schools Award*. The sixth form is due to become a full partner in the Alt Valley post-16 collaborative from September 2005.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

Standards have declined over the last three years and are too low. The pupils do not make enough progress in relation to their starting points at each key stage of their education. While there is a core of good practice, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall. A principal weakness is the teachers' low expectations of what the pupils might achieve. Relationships are often good. The pupils generally behave well in lessons, and have at least satisfactory attitudes to learning. Around the school, their behaviour is good in the main. However, despite the school's efforts, the pupils' attendance is unsatisfactory, and too many are late for school. The long-serving headteacher has not provided clear direction for the work of the school in recent years. Senior staff have refocused on the priority of improving teaching and learning, but leadership and management are unsatisfactory overall. The role of middle managers is underdeveloped and their effectiveness varies. Governance has improved: it has developed some important structures for monitoring the work of the school.

Effectiveness of the school's sixth form

Senior staff have worked hard to establish the new sixth-form collaborative and, from September 2005, the type and range of courses available to the students will be broadened. However, the present sixth form has a number of weaknesses. The students' achievement is unsatisfactory overall. Some students are permitted to begin courses for which they do not have suitable GCSE qualifications, and pass rates are too low. Some of the teaching is unsatisfactory. The students' progress is not monitored carefully enough and some long-standing weaknesses in the students' achievement have not been addressed adequately.

Improvement since the monitoring inspection in September 2004

The school has introduced a programme to monitor the quality of teaching and has identified areas of strong and weaker practice. However, strategies to raise the quality of teaching have not brought about enough improvement. The development of the role of middle managers is in the early stages. The work of senior staff has focused on teaching and learning, but they have not developed lines of accountability and responsibility well enough to ensure secure and rapid improvement.

Capacity to improve

The school has not demonstrated sufficient capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities are to:

- raise achievement;
- continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- improve leadership and management;
- increase attendance and improve punctuality.

Achievement and standards

The standards attained in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2004 were well below average overall, although there was a significant improvement in mathematics where 71 per cent attained the expected standard, Level 5. Standards rose slightly in science, but fell in English. Crucially, too many pupils made insufficient progress during their time in the key stage, particularly the more able in English and science.

At GCSE, the results in 2004 were slightly better than those in 2003: they did not make up all the ground lost in 2003 and did not match the good improvements in 2002 when the school received an achievement award. Only 29 per cent of the pupils gained five or more A* to C grades, which was well short of the performance the school had expected. There was, however, a positive picture at the five A* to G measure, and almost all the pupils were awarded at least one GCSE pass. In common with the results at Key Stage 3 and post-16, there was significant variation between subjects. Overall, the pupils made below average progress over the key stage.

The results in the sixth form were very low when compared with all maintained sixth forms. The pass rate was 71 per cent overall, but varied widely between different courses. A principal factor leading to poor achievement was the unsatisfactory guidance students received before and during their time in the sixth form; their GCSE qualifications did not equip them to study their chosen sixth form courses. Concerns about the standards attained in the sixth form raised in the HMI inspection

in September 2004 remain. The issue has not been tackled adequately, and represents a weakness in senior leadership.

The school has introduced more extensive systems for gathering information about the performance of pupils, particularly in Years 9 and 11. Recent data shows that at Key Stage 3, the school is likely to fall short of its targets. The gap is widest in science, about 20 per cent. At Key Stage 4, the school expects to exceed its target for the proportion of pupils likely to gain five or more A* to G grades but fall short at the five A* to C measure. In relation to the sixth form, the school's lack of monitoring of students' attainment and progress meant that it was not in the position to estimate accurately their likely performance in the examinations in 2005. At all key stages, improvement is uneven and, at present, it is too dependent on the strengths of individual managers and teachers.

Personal development

The pupils behaved well in most lessons and showed good attitudes to learning in just over half. They often met their teachers' expectations, by listening attentively and following classroom routines. Most were willing to contribute to the lesson, offering opinions, answering questions, and asking for help or clarification where relevant in a mature way. Many took care over the presentation of their work. They responded enthusiastically to the best teaching, but remained cooperative even where the teaching was uninspiring, and sometimes when it was weak. When given the opportunity, they worked sensibly in pairs or small groups. In one sixth of the lessons, however, the pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning were unsatisfactory. Usually, this was a consequence of teaching that did not hold their attention or involve them sufficiently, or where the teachers had difficulty in managing behaviour, for example, in quelling low-level chatter. In one well-planned lesson, the pupils were deliberately disruptive and all the class made inadequate progress as a result. Sometimes, where the teachers had low expectations of what might be achieved, the pupils adopted more casual attitudes, and completed less of the work, often untidily.

The pupils' behaviour around the school was generally good. Most were considerate and friendly, although there were some pockets of silly or boisterous behaviour. The changeover between lessons was orderly, if sometimes leisurely; while not all the teachers managed the areas near to their classrooms, others, including senior staff, were effective in hastening pupils on their way. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen slightly over the last few years; there were 52 in 2003-2004 and four boys were permanently excluded. The figures for this school year to May are broadly similar.

Despite the school's robust efforts to promote good attendance, it has remained stubbornly below 90 per cent for several years. Only the Year 7 pupils' attendance exceeds 90 per cent. Of particular concern is the low attendance of the Year 11 pupils and its likely impact upon their achievement. Overall, attendance is well below average, at 88.8 per cent for 2003-2004 and the same rate to May this school year. Nearly a quarter of the pupils have taken at least one day's holiday during term-time this year. During the inspection, attendance was lower, at 81 per cent. Only 22 Year 12 students attended the sixth-form assembly. There was a lack of clarity in some lessons about which Year 12 students should be present to continue their A-level courses.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although it was not possible during this inspection to evaluate the contribution made by religious education. The pupils make a positive contribution to the local community through activities in the parish, voluntary organisations, hospitals and special schools. Those elected to the sports council have the opportunity to represent the views of others and exercise leadership skills. Cultural and multicultural awareness is promoted through various subjects and activities, including music, drama and modern foreign languages. The pupils enjoy various extracurricular activities, such as music, ICT, and sports clubs, in addition to study and revision sessions. Sixth-form students are able to study for the award of sports leader.

The school has a positive attitude to promoting inclusion. Most pupils enjoy coming to school but too many do not achieve as well as they could. Most teachers know the pupils well and pastoral care is good. The pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they are worried or feel upset. In practical lessons, the pupils show understanding of the importance of working safely and the emphasis placed by the school on sport helps them to lead healthy lives. Work experience and opportunities for vocational education help to prepare them for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Although the teaching has improved since the inspection in September, it remained unsatisfactory in about a quarter of the lessons, which was too many and included some of the sixth-form teaching. It was at least satisfactory in the rest, and was good or very good in just over a third. In the better lessons, the teaching was lively and enthusiastic, and the pupils enjoyed learning. Relationships between the staff and pupils were good, and were characterised by warmth and humour. The teachers set clear learning objectives, and chose activities that helped the pupils to undertake increasingly challenging tasks with confidence and independence. The

teachers used questioning effectively to check that the pupils had understood thoroughly and to extend their learning further.

In most lessons, the teachers managed the pupils well and carefully planned activities enabled the pupils to make satisfactory progress. Classroom displays were attractive and provided support for learning, although few illustrated specific grades or levels to which the pupils might aspire. There were, however, weaknesses in the teaching, including some that was satisfactory overall. An important shortcoming was that the teachers expected too little of the pupils; they set work that was insufficiently challenging, and did not make sure that all of the pupils played an active part in the lesson. A few teachers had gaps in their subject knowledge. Some teachers talked for too long so that the pupils' attention wandered. Others chose tasks that were dull or repetitive. Consequently, in some lessons, the teachers had to spend too much time managing the behaviour of the pupils who had lost interest, and little was achieved as a result.

The pupils made at least satisfactory gains in knowledge, skills and understanding in three quarters of the lessons. In the other quarter, which was too many, they did not learn enough. Their progress was good in just over a quarter of the lessons. They responded positively to quickly paced lessons with challenging activities that required them to think and to use technical vocabulary accurately. The pupils made insufficient progress where the tasks simply kept them occupied rather than actively acquiring and applying relevant subject skills or understanding, or where they had lost interest and had negative attitudes to learning.

Some of the teachers assess the pupils' work well but practice is too variable. Useful systems to collect and analyse assessment information throughout the year have recently been established with departments clearly accountable for tackling underperformance. However, despite some examples of good practice, information about the pupils' earlier results, current performance, and future targets is not being used to plan individual lessons. Some teachers made reference to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades during lessons, but did not always explain the assessment criteria. By monitoring the pupils' work, the school has accurately identified that marking rarely explains why the work was of a particular standard or how it might be improved. A concise, and helpful, revised policy is due for implementation at the start of the new school year. Currently, marking is inconsistent and too often cursory or superficial. A few teachers have not marked the pupils' books for a long time, which is unacceptable.

Much of the provision for the pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory and some is good. The pupils with the lowest levels of literacy, including many of those who have a Statement of Special Educational Need, are given intensive support in developing reading skills and these pupils make at least adequate, and often good, progress. The lowest-attaining pupils were often taught well but, in too

many classes, the teachers did not identify learning objectives for different groups of pupils; nor did they modify the work set for the pupils with special educational needs. Most individual education plans have some sound features but many of the pupils' targets are too general and not easily measurable. Some teaching assistants gave useful support in lessons, but a few stood by while the teacher talked to the class. Their role in helping pupils to learn featured insufficiently in lesson planning. Overall, they do not play a prominent role in monitoring the progress of the pupils in lessons and over longer periods. More generally, there is no whole-school system for checking on the progress of the pupils with special educational needs, which makes evaluating the quality of provision unnecessarily difficult.

An increasing number of pupils in Key Stage 4 are benefiting from appropriate and relevant work-based learning. Next year's curriculum has been redesigned to better meet the needs of the pupils and includes more flexible grouping arrangements at Key Stage 3, a significant extension to the range of vocational courses, and courses in ICT for all pupils which lead to nationally recognised qualifications. The post-16 collaborative provides opportunities for sixth-form students to study a wider range of courses across the participating schools. The school anticipates that, for the first time, a number of its students will study academic and vocational courses, including modern apprenticeships, at other schools or providers.

A particular strength of the school is the range of sporting, cultural, artistic and other extracurricular opportunities offered to the pupils, including those identified as gifted and talented. Specialist school status as a sports college has been re-awarded recently and many talented pupils have achieved national recognition across a variety of sports. Significant numbers of pupils also take part in productions, music recitals, and out-of-school music and drama competitions. Extracurricular trips and visits for gifted pupils enrich their experience but not all are challenged or extended routinely in lessons. Useful analysis of the achievement of the gifted and talented pupils has been undertaken, but not enough has been done to share the practice that exists in departments where achievement is good, and weaknesses in provision have not been tackled sufficiently systematically or successfully.

Leadership and management

The governing body provides effective and committed support for the school. It was quick to recognise that it had not held the school to account for its declining performance. A core group of experienced governors has met regularly to monitor the effectiveness of the school's actions planned in response to the serious concerns identified by HMI in September. The chair of governors has a good understanding of the areas where there has been improvement, and the weaknesses that remain,

including the lack of suitable structures and procedures to underpin effective leadership and management.

The headteacher has served the school and its community with dedication for many years. There has been much to celebrate over that time, including the achievement of specialist sports college status and the new sixth-form collaborative. Over the last few years, however, there has been a decline in the quality of education provided by the school. The lack of clear direction in establishing robust management systems and structures meant that this decline was not identified or tackled effectively. Since September, some useful progress has been made in addressing the issues, but it has not been rapid or extensive enough. Nevertheless, the school is beginning to show an increased capacity to bring about further improvement.

The appointment of a new deputy headteacher in January 2005 strengthened the senior leadership team. His energy and determination helped to revitalise and refocus the efforts of senior staff. However, the leadership and management of the senior staff remain unsatisfactory overall. The focus on teaching and learning has not led to enough improvement. The headteacher's line management of the senior staff is unsatisfactory as it does not provide a mechanism for gauging their effectiveness or for promoting rapid improvement.

Senior staff have worked hard to establish the new post-16 collaborative. From September 2005, the type and range of courses available to the students will be broadened. However, the present sixth form has a number of weaknesses that have not been identified or addressed robustly enough.

Middle leadership and management are of variable quality and underdeveloped in many cases. Some subjects are well led, for example design and technology, and there are emerging strengths in others, including mathematics. The introduction of a system of curricular reviews is a useful start in developing the role of heads of department. They show a greater awareness of the use of data in evaluating the performance of subjects and individual teachers and pupils, but this work is at an early stage. Pastoral leaders are insufficiently involved in monitoring pupils' academic performance. The progress of sixth-form students is not tracked carefully or frequently enough, and not all the students receive appropriate guidance in selecting courses. The line management of middle managers by senior managers is unsatisfactory: arrangements are too informal to ensure that best practice is replicated across the school, weaker practitioners are challenged, and all are held properly to account.

The school is in a period of transition. The headteacher and a long-serving deputy headteacher are retiring at the end of this school year. An experienced headteacher from a successful local school is due to take up post in September and another deputy headteacher has been recruited. The present headteacher and senior staff

have liaised with the headteacher designate and this has laid an important foundation for future improvement.

The local education authority (LEA) has provided support for the school on a number of fronts, particularly through the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. The work of the LEA's consultants has been well received by the subject departments, but its impact in raising the quality of teaching has been uneven. Training and support has been provided for staff in the management of challenging behaviour. A good start has been made in developing the use of assessment data. The LEA and archdiocese have worked to develop and support middle managers, and both bodies have expressed their commitment to supporting the school in the future to bring about the necessary improvements. The collaboration between local schools through the leadership incentive grant has had a positive impact in some areas of the school's work.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Archbishop Beck Catholic High School Sports College was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in March 2001.

The school was visited in September 2004 by three HMI in connection with the Leadership Incentive Grant. The visit raised serious concerns about aspects of the school's work, in particular, the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of leadership and management at senior and middle levels.

In June 2005, three HMI and an Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Forty six parts of lessons, one registration session and a sixth-form assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, nominated senior and middle managers and other staff, the co-ordinator for special education needs, a teaching assistant, a group of pupils from the sports council, the chair of governors and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the areas of serious concern identified in note of the visit in September 2004.

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