



St Gabriel's RC High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105367
LEA Bury
Inspection number 277345
Inspection dates 20 September 2005 to 21 September 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Michael Blaylock HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Bridge Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Bury
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Lancashire BL9 0TZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 764 3186
Number on roll	1036	Fax number	0161 761 3469
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Kevin Coen
Date of previous inspection	22 November 1999	Headteacher	Mr E Robinson

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 20 September 2005 - 21 September 2005	Inspection number 277345
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Gabriel's Roman Catholic High School is an average sized 11-16 mixed comprehensive. It works in partnership with another high school in providing education and care for children from Catholic families in Bury. Pupils are predominantly white British with a below average number from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are only a few pupils for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below the national average.

The school achieved specialist school status as a Science College from September 2004. There are many long-serving staff who contribute to the strong sense of tradition and belonging in the school. St Gabriel's recently celebrated its fiftieth year. In that time there have been only three head-teachers, with the current head appointed in 2002.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Gabriel's is a good school. It is currently involved in the process of considerable and necessary change. This is beginning to have an impact on the culture of the school and on raising standards of attainment. The school has a strong tradition of being a caring faith community. This is encapsulated in the school's mission statement. The school's self-evaluation shows that senior managers have a clear understanding of both the school's strengths and the areas where improvement is needed.

The school's over-riding priority of raising standards of attainment has come in response to declining examination results in 2004. Inspectors judged that achievement and standards are good, recognising the impact of various strategies in the improved Year 9 national test results in 2005. The quality of the care and support pupils receive is outstanding and contributes to their excellent personal development throughout the school. Good and often inspirational teaching enables pupils to succeed in reaching the standards expected of them. The curriculum, which is mainly traditional, is satisfactory but could include more appropriate courses to better meet the needs of all pupils. Additional funding from achieving specialist school status has enabled the school to improve resources and provide additional support staff. As yet, specialist status has had limited impact, on raising standards across the school.

The leadership and management of the school are good. There has been good progress in addressing all the key issues for action arising from the last inspection. Recent appointments to the senior management team have increased the capacity of the team to drive further improvement. One of the challenges for the school's leaders is to establish greater consistency of practice throughout the school. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement consistent whole-school assessment, tracking and targeting systems.
- Develop the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners.
- Establish greater consistency of practice, particularly in teaching, and subject leadership.
- Identify and address the professional development needs of all staff in implementing change.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. From above average levels of attainment on entry to the school pupils achieve the standards expected of them. Results for Year 9 pupils in national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science have been consistently above average, although in 2004 they compared less favourably with similar schools. Subsequently the school adopted a more positive approach to the Key Stage 3 national strategy including better use of assessment and value added

measures in tracking pupils' performance. This has resulted in a marked improvement in performance in the 2005 test results.

The 2004 GCSE results were above the national average. This represents satisfactory progress when compared with similar schools although in the core subjects of mathematics and English pupils' performance was significantly higher than average. In previous years GCSE results have been well above the national average. The school is concerned to improve further its GCSE results, anxious to restore them to previous higher levels. To this end, a thorough analysis of all available data has been carried out to identify underperformance and a strategy for raising attainment across all subjects has been implemented successfully. There are clear signs of improvement in particular subjects and with individuals.

Pupils with particular needs are supported very well and make good progress. The school has agreed policies and practices to ensure pupils are set challenging targets. Performance data is analysed to show learners are achieving appropriately. This analysis highlighted boys' underachievement as an issue in the past. The school has effectively addressed this, resulting in a considerably reduction in the gap between boys and girls over the last three years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development of pupils is excellent. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their exemplary attendance, attitudes and behaviour. A minority are late to lessons and the school deals with this appropriately. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. They have some understanding of other faiths and cultures. The school teaches self-reliance and self-discipline, qualities that enable pupils to contribute to the school and its community. Pupils feel safe. Anti-bullying measures are in place and used consistently to swiftly resolve any incidents.

Teaching programmes include guidance on substance abuse, smoking, nutrition and sexual health. Most pupils adopt healthy lifestyles: they enjoy playing sport and are encouraged to join school teams. Some pupils follow 'Enterprise' and similar activities that help them to develop good team-working skills. The school choir is highly regarded, while participation in drama adds to pupils' confidence. Pupils develop appropriate skills to prepare them for the next stages in their life as early as in Year 8 with 'Work Shadowing'. The School Council contributes to developments, and its views are acted upon. Pupils willingly undertake a range of fundraising activities for charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn well because teaching is good and often outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning has improved as a result of the recent focus on pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9. Relationships are strong, teachers know their pupils well, and pupils

are keen to learn. In most classes, lessons are well planned and the work is matched to the different abilities of the pupils. A small number of teachers have not adopted recent initiatives and consequently there are some inconsistencies in pupils' experiences.

In the best lessons, pupils respond enthusiastically to the often inspirational teaching. Here teachers provide a secure, supportive and stimulating learning environment where pupils are treated with courtesy and consideration. Relationships are based on mutual trust and genuine belief in the care and welfare of individuals. Pupils appreciate being actively involved in learning, they enjoy the imaginative topics they are presented with and respond by working really hard and achieving exceptional standards. For example, one Year 11 pupil summed up his experience in drama lessons as: 'drama is really cool you can be yourself and express your feelings without being embarrassed'. Although recognised by senior managers, there has been insufficient sharing of this best practice with other teachers.

The school is introducing a new system for assessment and target setting, using national curriculum levels, to better monitor pupils' progress and raise attainment. This is already standard practice in some departments, notably science. All departments are expected to implement the new model of assessment during this academic year. Inspectors found inconsistencies in marking and written feedback in pupils' work. These ranged from a cursory tick to detailed information on how well they were doing and what they needed to do to improve. These differences were seen both within and between subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory, but has some weaknesses. It is traditional in structure, mainly GCSE courses with few relevant or meaningful options for pupils for whom this is not appropriate. Little attempt has been made to incorporate more imaginative, practical or vocational courses; consequently the curriculum has not kept pace with the times. Resources have improved, but information and communication technology (ICT) is not offered as an accredited course in Years 10 and 11 nor is it firmly embedded in lessons across the curriculum. Citizenship education is taught both as a discrete subject and in other curriculum areas. The school needs to monitor this to ensure that all aspects of the citizenship curriculum are being taught to all pupils. Links with the local sixth form college are strong and ensure a good continuity of education across the 14 to 19 age range.

The school offers a traditional programme of extra-curricular activities, including public speaking classes, much appreciated by the pupils involved. The after-school sports are particularly popular and add significantly to opportunities for pupils to enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This is an area in which the school excels. One Year 11 pupil commented that the school 'is like a big family' because it is 'relaxed and friendly'. Another in Year 10 said that 'teachers are kind' and 'know us well'. Their views are widely shared by pupils, and their parents, and by inspectors who found the care, support and guidance for pupils to be outstanding. Staff are committed to achieving the school's mission statement and have established a secure, supportive Christian environment.

The needs of pupils with additional learning needs are well met. Pupils are able to benefit from the drop-in facility, which gives them access to a health professional. The school's Curriculum Support Centre provides a valued sanctuary for some pupils. The safeguarding of pupils is robust. The school environment is safe and supportive. Pupils' needs are identified early on and are well met. Recently appointed learning mentors provide extra support for pupils.

The school works well with parents and other agencies, with a new centre to house visiting professionals. Pupils receive good advice and guidance for their future careers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has given clear direction in identifying raising standards of attainment as the key priority for the school. The need for change in a number of areas is recognised in order to achieve this. Increased delegation of responsibilities to Heads of Year and subject leaders is encouraging initiative and autonomy. These developments are changing the culture of the school. However, there is a need for more detailed strategic planning with agreed targets and accountability in order to ensure greater consistency. The senior management team is aware of staff development needs in implementing these changes. They are concerned that the rate of change allows the whole staff to move forward together.

Staff have a strong allegiance to the school. Their shared commitment to the school's mission statement, 'to know, love and value each person', is clearly evident throughout the school. Staffing is adequate with recent improvement in the pupils to staff ratio. The school recognises the need to appoint a specialist subject leader for ICT.

The governors are effective in their work. They are well informed, supportive and involved as 'critical friends' of the school. The governing body is strongly committed to the school and includes members with a long association with St Gabriel's.

The school is aware of the financial constraints under which it operates, but does provide good value for money. It is important that the school prioritises the allocation of resources to facilitate school improvement. Achieving specialist school status has brought benefits in both refurbishment and resources, particularly in the recently installed computer network.

There has been considerable progress on all the issues identified in the previous inspection report. The restructured senior management team has the capacity to move the school forward.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school.

We found that your school is a good school that cares for its pupils exceptionally well. It is a strong, caring community, whose staff are committed to practising the Roman Catholic faith and helping each of you fulfil your potential. Your teachers know you well and work hard to make sure that you are happy, safe and healthy. Because of this, you enjoy coming to school and your behaviour and attendance is very impressive. St Gabriel's is also a school that is changing in many ways. Science College status has resulted in improved accommodation and resources, particularly for ICT.

We also found that teaching is good, indeed quite a few of the lessons we saw were outstanding. This good teaching helps you to learn and make reasonable progress. Those of you with particular needs are very well supported and make good progress. Examination results for GCSE in 2005 show an improving picture. Some of the changes that the school has made also improved the Year 9 test results.

We think your school can improve further by measuring your performance in each subject in a similar way. This will help you know more clearly how well you are doing and how you could do better. The school could also offer a wider choice of courses in Years 10 and 11, including vocational subjects. These would be better courses for some of you to study. Your teachers also have to learn some new things to keep up with these changes in your school.

Thank you for your help in the inspection, for welcoming us into your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work, your life in school and other interests and concerns.