



Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103541
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 286693
Inspection dates 11–12 October 2006
Reporting inspector Davinder Dosanjh HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Victoria Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Acocks Green
Age range of pupils	11–18		Birmingham B27 7XY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 7064200
Number on roll (school)	1285	Fax number	0121 7076597
Number on roll (6th form)	158		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mary Mills
		Headteacher	Seamus O'Donnell
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	11–12 October 2006	286693

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Archbishop Ilsley is a large school which became a specialist technology college in September 2002. It receives a significant number of students from inner city Birmingham. The student population is predominately from an Irish cultural heritage. Other minority ethnic groups are represented. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is high and well above the national average. Over 50% of students in the sixth form qualify for the education maintenance allowance.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Archbishop Ilsey is a good and improving school. Outstanding care, guidance and support promote an environment where the progress and well-being of each individual are valued and nurtured.

Standards are generally above average and students' progress is good. In 2006 the school made significant improvements at Key Stages 3 and 4. The percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades increased notably from 2005. The school's considerable efforts to improve achievement have been very successful. For example, a number of intervention strategies have been highly effective. These include extra lessons, subject days, revision materials and targeting specific students. Alongside these strategies the tutorial system has been key in improving students' achievements. Form tutors and heads of year provide excellent individual care to all students and carefully monitor academic progress. Students are also well supported by a number of non-teaching pastoral support staff.

Students enjoy school and feel safe. They are very positive about their school and explain that they are well cared for. Attendance has improved and behaviour is good. Careers education is well organised and comprehensive. The contribution made to developing the workplace skills of students in preparation for their future working lives is outstanding.

Teaching is good overall. Improvement in the quality of teaching and learning has been achieved by developing skills and sharing good practice, and this has led to considerable improvement in the progress students have made. Lessons are well planned and organised. Teachers create a positive environment in the classroom, with a clear structure and support for students. The curriculum is good and provision for extra-curricular activities is strong. However, the school does not meet its statutory requirements for citizenship.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school; they comment on the committed and dedicated staff and report that 'the school is always willing to listen and is responsive.' There is good liaison between the school and parents.

Leadership and management of the school are good. Clear direction is set by governors, senior and middle managers. They have achieved success in improving subject areas such as mathematics, science and design and technology. The school's self-evaluation has proved effective but is not sufficiently diagnostic. Whole school reviews do not yet have sufficient focus on students' progress to enable early and effective interventions. The school has a good capacity to improve as indicated by the significant improvements in achievement and standards made in 2006.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards are below average but students make satisfactory progress from low starting points. Teaching

is satisfactory and varies in quality. Some lessons do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to learn independently. The school provides an adequate range of GCSE, AS/A-level and vocational options but collaborative arrangements within the local area are limited. Students appreciate the advice and guidance they receive in relation to their progression from school. Students take on a wide range of responsibilities. The head boy and girl act as good ambassadors for the sixth form and liaise well with parents and younger students. Students are active in organising many charity and fund raising events. Each year a small number of students participate in the Arizona exchange to the United States of America. They speak with great enthusiasm of the opportunity to stay with a host family. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Teaching and learning are not analysed sufficiently to ensure that students make better than satisfactory progress. The work of the sixth form is not monitored rigorously enough to bring about sustained improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the leadership and management of the sixth form to improve provision and raise standards.
- Sharpen evaluation to include a greater focus on students' progress in order to support early and more effective interventions.
- Ensure citizenship is assessed and reported on.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards have shown a steady increase in the last few years following concerted action to improve them by subject and key stage leaders. The school has responded well to a gradually improving intake in Year 7 and, although standards in national tests in 2005 in Year 9 were below average, 2006 saw substantial gains, especially in mathematics and science. This represents good achievement overall, given the just below average attainment of these students when they joined the school. Standards have risen similarly at the end of Year 11, where the percentage of students gaining five or more higher A* to C grades increased markedly in 2006 from their average levels in 2005. As in previous years, all students gained at least one GCSE grade, and nearly all gained at least five. The introduction of courses that better match the needs of students, for example health and social care, has helped to raise standards. Improvements have been significant in design and technology subjects. Again, this represents good achievement. The combination of individual support and a drive to improve standards has been successful in ensuring students of all abilities are making good progress. This improvement has accelerated recently and is particularly reflected in the school's significantly better national test and examination results in 2006.

The school's post 16 results represent satisfactory progress for many students from low starting points. There is further room for improvement in the standards reached

at AS level and the proportion of students obtaining high grades. There are significant variations in attainment between different subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. Attendance has improved and is now good. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. The number of permanent exclusions has reduced significantly due to the school's efforts to work with individual students with behavioural problems and keep them in school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good overall. The school has correctly recognised the need to review its cultural provision to take account of changes in the ethnicity profile of both staff and students.

The school is effective in encouraging students to adopt healthy lifestyles. For example there is a good range of extra-curricular sporting activities which are well attended. Healthy eating choices are also popular in the school canteen. Students say they feel safe in school and that their teachers deal effectively with the small number of racist and bullying incidents that take place.

Students make a positive contribution to the community, for example, through charity events and the annual Christmas dinner for local senior citizens organised by students in the sixth form.

The development of skills that will contribute to future economic well-being through careers education is an outstanding feature. The full impact of this is seen through the very small number of students who do not take up an education, training or employment opportunity at the end of Year 11.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The training and development opportunities the school has put in place to improve teaching and learning over the last few years are having an impact with an improvement in the progress students make. The Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Programme (TEEP) is very effective in lessons where this is implemented. Lesson planning is often good and includes clear objectives alongside the successful use of starter activities and plenaries. Teaching promotes positive attitudes to learning. Teachers use a wide range of activities which engage and stimulate students well. Questioning techniques are used effectively in testing and probing students' learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) is frequently incorporated into lessons to add interest and clarity to teachers' explanations. Interactive whiteboards are not used to their full

potential in lessons. The focus on assessment for learning is developing with some examples of good practice such as quality boards in geography and learning ladders in technology. Most students understand the level at which they are working. Some detailed marking helps students to know how to improve, but this is not consistent practice.

In a small number of lessons, teachers' planning does not adequately address the needs of the most able students to provide sufficient challenge for them. In some lessons teachers talk for too long and do not make learning interesting or provide enough opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.

Support staff are well deployed to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has a broad and balanced curriculum in which all students continue to study a technology and a humanities subject. The majority also study a modern foreign language, in addition to the compulsory national core curriculum. The school offers a range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and post 16. The school's specialist status resulted in investment in ICT equipment for staff and students which has enhanced teaching in the classroom. Teaching time meets recommendations, and all statutory requirements are met with the exception of citizenship. Citizenship is neither assessed nor reported at Key Stages 3 or 4. The work-related curriculum, careers education and enterprise are outstanding. There are a wide range of projects involving local industry, such as the Matrix project where Key Stage 3 students design and model a supercar and make a presentation at the International Conference Centre in Birmingham.

There is a diverse programme of extra-curricular activities. Sport is strong. There are trips abroad, residentials and a range of musical activities including a gospel choir, steel band, jazz band and string group, which enrich the learning and personal development of all students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Form tutors play a central role in care, guidance and support; they make an outstanding contribution to both the personal and academic development of students. The daily contact with students through the well structured form period and the continuity of the tutorial system are key features in ensuring that students have positive attitudes to learning and are able to make good progress. Form tutors check individual progress through the annual reviews which enable students to gain a good understanding of how well they are doing and help them to reach challenging targets. The careers guidance given to students on how to progress to the next stage of education,

employment and training is also outstanding. The annual careers convention for older students provides an external dimension to the advice students receive and this is highly valued by students. There are also very good arrangements in place when students transfer from primary schools. All Year 7 students joining the school have an individual interview with a member of staff and special arrangements are made for vulnerable students to ensure their needs are met at an early stage. Health and safety procedures and rigorous child protection arrangements ensure that students thrive in a secure and safe environment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher and senior leaders work well as a team to provide clear leadership to colleagues through the school improvement plan. Staff at all levels are involved effectively in its implementation. Subject and year leaders are supported well by senior leadership. They have worked hard to implement plans to improve students' achievement and the quality of the school's provision. As a result, improvement since the last inspection has been good. Recruitment of key staff of good quality at senior and middle management level has been a major contributor to this.

The school monitors its work effectively, looking at a range of its activities to identify strengths and areas for development. The school listens to and acts on the views of students and parents as part of this process. The effectiveness of evaluating the information that is collected is generally good, but there are inconsistencies. For example, recent improvement in standards in science in Year 9 was the result of senior and middle leaders correctly identifying the causes of underachievement and employing appropriate strategies to address them. In some sixth form subjects, evaluation does not always focus on the causes of underachievement when it is identified. The school's leadership has recently changed its focus of review from departments to the whole school. This has increased whole staff awareness of developments and has improved consistency of practice. The reviews are at an early stage of development and are not yet focused sharply on students' progress to support early and effective intervention. The school recognises that the system needs development.

Governance of the school is good. Governors know the school well, and are fully involved in its work.

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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection of your school. We appreciated the openness and honesty with which you shared your views with us. You were mature and sensible and gave us an enthusiastic account of school life. Many of you were keen to tell us how much you enjoy school. You are right to be proud of your school.

We found that yours is a good and improving school. The two main reasons for this are the way the staff work consistently to improve your learning in lessons and the very strong relationships you develop with tutors and other adults that help you set and meet individual targets. As a result, you become mature and confident young people and you achieve well. We found that the school prepares you outstandingly well for your future working life. To improve the school even further, we have asked staff to look more closely at the progress you make in your different teaching groups so that support can be given earlier, where it is needed. We have also asked the school to ensure that you know how well you are doing in citizenship.

In the sixth form, your personal development, the curriculum and the quality of guidance are good but we found that standards and achievement are only satisfactory. We have asked the school to take action to improve the sixth form so that you achieve as well as you do in the main school.

The senior managers, middle managers and governors make a good team. They have achieved success in improving examination results. All staff at the school are highly committed to their work. Your parents are overwhelming supportive of the school and comment on the dedicated staff and good range of extra-curricular activities.

We encourage you to continue to support the school and to play your part in making it even better. We wish you all the very best for the future.