



St Joseph's RC High School and Sports College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105262
Local Authority Bolton
Inspection number 287180
Inspection dates 14–15 February 2007
Reporting inspector Susan Wareing HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Chorley New Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Horwich, Bolton
Age range of pupils	11–16		Lancashire BL6 6HW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01204 697456
Number on roll (school)	875	Fax number	01204 669018
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rev Fr Henry Jones
		Headteacher	Mr L Conley
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	14–15 February 2007	287180

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This smaller than average comprehensive school provides education and care for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 within a strong moral, social and spiritual ethos. The school draws students from a wide area. Although most students come from areas of higher than average social and economic advantage, there are nevertheless pockets of deprivation. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than average and most students are of White British heritage. The student population is settled with few movements in or out of the school. The school is well established as a specialist sports college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Joseph's RC High School is a good and happy school that provides its students with a good education. Its values are well demonstrated in the good provision throughout the school for students' personal development and well-being and in the extensive range of activities offered to students outside the school day.

There is a real sense of community in the school. Students feel cared for as individuals because the staff know all of them well. Parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the school and students respond well to its very supportive environment. The students usually enjoy school and their behaviour is outstanding. Attendance is satisfactory and the school is working hard to improve it. The school's encouragement of students to take up healthy lifestyles is an outstanding feature of the school. Specialist sports status underpins these strengths. It has enhanced the school's partnerships with the wider community to promote students' social and cultural development, for example, through sports links such as visits to two schools in Russia. Students also value opportunities to participate in musical and drama productions and to contribute to charitable work.

Students generally reach good standards and achieve well. In 2005 and 2006 overall standards at the end of Year 9 were above average, although progress in science dipped below average. Students make good progress during Years 10 and 11 and attainment is well above average. There are pockets of underachievement, notably amongst a small group of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has recognised this and measures are in place to tackle it.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. In all lessons seen relationships were very positive. In most lessons teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and enthusiasm and effective questioning encourages students to participate actively in lessons. However, there is some inconsistency across subjects in the matching of work to students' individual needs. The marking of homework does not always give students enough detailed feedback on their progress. Across the school students have few opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons.

The curriculum is good. Some new vocational courses have been introduced and work-related learning is a strength.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory, although the school judged them to be good. An inherited budget deficit has constrained the school's actions for improvement since the last inspection. The school has done well to maintain standards and its very positive ethos in the context of considerable staff reductions. However, the headteacher and senior leaders have assumed a substantial teaching load which sometimes inhibits a sufficiently strategic overview of the school's performance. For example, the analysis of information from monitoring and evaluation does not allow new initiatives to improve teaching and learning to be consistently implemented across the school. This was an issue at the last inspection. Early analysis and tracking of students' progress to raise achievement further is also at an early stage of development. The school is working determinedly for a planned return to a sound

financial footing in the near future. Overall, in terms of the outcomes for students, the school offers good value for money. Since the last inspection new courses have been introduced to meet the needs of a wider range of learners. New appointments at middle management level have strengthened the leadership and management of the school. These demonstrate the school's satisfactory capacity to make further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement a whole school strategy for checking the progress of initiatives to improve teaching and learning.
- Increase opportunities for students' use of ICT in all subjects to enhance their independence and study skills.
- Ensure that the setting and marking of homework is consistent and provides constructive feedback to students on their progress and how to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good overall. The majority of the students that enter the school in Year 7 have achieved standards that are above the national average. In 2005 and 2006 standards at the end of Year 9 were above average. Overall progress from Year 7 was good when compared with that made by students of similar ability levels, although progress in science was below average.

Students make good progress during Years 10 and 11 and attainment is well above average. In 2005 and 2006 the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C that include English and mathematics was well above the national average. Although most students achieve well there is evidence of some underachievement by a small group of students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is no significant difference between boys' achievement and girls' achievement.

Very few students leave with no qualification. There is some variation in achievement across subject areas: standards attained in history, mathematics, music and design technology are well above national averages.

The school knows where improvement can be made: new appointments and revised strategies are starting to have an impact as evidenced from lesson observations.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students is good overall. Attendance is average and improving. The school provides a safe and secure environment in which students are happy and their behaviour is outstanding, both in lessons and around the school. Bullying is rare and is effectively dealt with when it arises. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is enriched by a very broad range of opportunities. Cultural understanding is enhanced by outstanding

international links. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and the importance of exercise is effectively promoted through sports college activities. Students are aware of how to keep safe and well. The majority are actively involved in school life and links with the community are very well established. Student and parent surveys have been conducted and action taken in response to concerns. The majority of parents and students are proud of their school and speak very positively about it. Innovative enterprise education and effective careers guidance for all students ensure that they develop skills and understand the world of work. However, there are currently too few opportunities across subjects for students to develop their ICT skills. Students are encouraged to adopt leadership roles through schemes such as the Junior Sports Leadership Award, the student council and a local student forum. Older students also act as very effective peer mediators and mentors for younger students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers' subject knowledge and positive teacher student relationships are strong features. Most lessons are well planned with a good variety of activities and the pace of learning is challenging. Effective questioning enables all students to participate. Students enjoy these lessons because they are actively engaged in their learning. However, in some lessons, planning is weak and not tailored to the needs of all students. There is also an over reliance on teacher-led activities. Students' use of ICT in lessons is limited in some lessons.

There are inconsistencies in the use of assessment data by teachers to identify underachievement, set targets and track students' progress. Opportunities for peer and self-assessment are variable. Marking is regular but sometimes lacks the detail to help students to identify their strengths and know how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. In Years 7 to 9 the mainly traditional curriculum meets statutory requirements and offers good extra support for students who are underachieving. This includes a project with a small group of Year 9 students to raise self-esteem. In Years 10 and 11 there are a wide range of courses with alternative provision for some students, including vocational opportunities and college and work placements, which is appreciated by the students involved.

Work-related skills are developed across curricular areas, in mock interviews involving many individuals from the local community and business world, and a variety of enterprise activities. Year 10 students take part in a work experience week. The specialist sports status has improved links with the community and with partner schools in the local area and in other countries.

Extra-curricular activities include a very strong sports provision as well as activities in music and science. The St Vincent de Paul Society, Amnesty International Club and Conservation Group add to students' personal development in addition to making valuable contributions to the community. The students also have opportunities to go on trips and residential visits at home and abroad.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support for students are good overall. The pastoral team, which includes student counsellors, offers high quality support. All students are known well as individuals and the school works very effectively with families. Vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and tracking of their progress is improving as a result of new strategies that the school has recently put in place. Assemblies are used very effectively to promote values and to offer guidance. Students receive appropriate advice when making choices at times of transition and the school's induction programme is outstanding. However, there is some inconsistency in the monitoring of students' progress. They are not always clear about their personal targets and the steps needed to reach them. Homework is often not set in line with the agreed timetable and some tasks do not develop students' research skills as much as they could. Child protection procedures and measures to safeguard students meet current requirements. The tutorial programme for personal and social education and citizenship education is satisfactory but is being reviewed to increase its impact.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Strengths include the very strong relationships and sense of community fostered by the headteacher and senior leaders and shared by the whole school. Their determination to clear a significant budget deficit as rapidly as possible reflects the collaborative ethos of the school. However, these financial constraints have inhibited senior leaders from developing a sufficiently strategic overview of the school's performance. Self-evaluation is satisfactory. Strengths and weaknesses are generally correctly identified and included in the school improvement plan, but the school was overgenerous in its judgement of leadership and management. Senior leaders' heavy teaching commitment and multiple management roles leave insufficient time for the detailed analysis of information to measure the progress of improvements. Consequently, the sharing of good practice in teaching is limited and does not yet have the consistent and coherent impact across the school that it could.

In particular, the use of information about students' progress is at an early stage. The student council enables students to participate in some decision-making. However, more could be done to involve staff, parents and students in the process of self-review. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are very knowledgeable about and supportive

of the school, but there is scope for them to challenge senior leaders more effectively. Overall, the school provides good value for money because outcomes for students are good.

The school has satisfactory capacity to make further improvement. This is shown by new curriculum developments that are proving effective in motivating more disaffected students. Work-related learning has also developed well since the last inspection and new appointments at middle management level have strengthened leadership.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

Following our visit to inspect your school I would like to tell you about the things we found out. St Joseph's RC High School is a good school which gives you a good education, so that most of you reach good standards and achieve well over your five years in school.

We thought that there was a real feeling of community in the school, where you have very strong relationships with your teachers and each other. You told us that you enjoy coming to school because you feel cared for as individuals and we were pleased to hear how very satisfied your parents and carers are with the school.

Your behaviour in lessons and around school was outstanding, as was the way the school helps you to take up healthy lifestyles. We were impressed too with the wide range of activities that you can take up outside the school day. You told us how much you appreciate being in a sports college because it also gives you good links with schools in other countries. During the inspection we heard, for example, that some of you were representing the school on a sports visit to Omsk in Russia. We know that other students enjoy performing in school music and drama productions.

Teaching overall is good and we agree with you that in the best lessons the teachers are really enthusiastic and ask questions that get all of you involved in activities. We thought that in some subjects the marking of your homework did not tell you as much as it could about how well you were doing or about how to improve your work. We also think that you should have more chances to use ICT in lessons, so that you can learn more independently of the teacher.

We were glad to see that since the last inspection some new courses have been introduced to make sure that the interests and needs of all of you are catered for well. Your headteacher and all the staff have worked hard to keep up the good standards and happy atmosphere in the school that helps you to become very mature and responsible young people. We think that the school should:

- make sure that you learn to work independently by:
 - setting you enough homework
 - giving you enough chances to use ICT in all your subjects.
- make sure that all marking shows you how well you are doing and how to improve your work.

I would like to thank those of you who talked to me and my colleagues to let us know what you think of the school. We found this very helpful.

I would like to wish you all every success for your future at St Joseph's RC High School.