



Archbishop Beck Catholic High School Sports College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104717
Local Authority Liverpool
Inspection number 295667
Inspection dates 1–2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Jane Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 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 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Cedar Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Liverpool
Age range of pupils	11–18		Merseyside L9 9AF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 5256326
Number on roll (school)	1292	Fax number	0151 5242465
Number on roll (6th form)	177		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Joe Hanson
		Headteacher	Mr A Traynor
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	1–2 November 2006	295667

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Archbishop Beck Catholic High School is larger than average. It is situated in the Liverpool City ward of Warbreck and draws its pupils from a wide area, parts of which experience high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Nearly one third of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is twice the national average. Few pupils are of minority ethnic heritage or have home languages other than English. Pupils enter the school having achieved results at primary school that were broadly average. About 16%, an average proportion, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Of these, 14 pupils have a formal statement of special educational need. There are many more boys than girls in Years 7, 8, 10 and 11. Few pupils join or leave the school at times other than at the start of Year 7.

When the school was inspected in June 2005, it was found to require special measures because it provided an unsatisfactory standard of education. Subsequently, its progress has been monitored regularly by HMI. There have been many staffing changes in the last 15 months, including at senior leadership and head of department level. The headteacher has been in post since September 2005. Nearly half of the teaching staff joined the school within the last two years.

The school has held specialist sports college status since 2000 and added a second specialism, information and communication technology (ICT), a year ago. It holds a number of local and national awards including Sportsmark Gold, the Arts Council Silver Artsmark and the Liverpool Healthy Schools award. The sixth form is part of the Alt Valley post-16 collaborative: about a quarter of the students study courses at partner institutions.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Archbishop Beck Catholic High School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The headteacher's exceptional leadership has transformed the school: its improvement over the last four terms has been rapid. Supported very well by the two deputy headteachers, he has united the school community in a drive to raise standards and in establishing an environment where all feel nurtured and can flourish. Pupils and staff alike speak of how the school has become a much happier place in which to work and learn. Leadership and management at other levels are good overall, as is governance. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work are effective and the outcomes inform improvement planning well. However, not all policies are routinely developed or updated to reflect best practice and to underpin future developments. The school operates smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Resources are deployed appropriately: the school provides satisfactory value for money.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The positive impact of the school's work is most vivid in the improvement in pupils' GCSE results in 2006, which are the best in the school's history and reverse the downward trend of recent years. The results of national Key Stage 3 tests in 2006 were similar overall to the previous year's. At both key stages standards remained below average, due principally to the legacy of earlier unsatisfactory education. Currently, pupils of all ages and abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make at least satisfactory progress. Pupils want to do well: they know 'Only the best will do.'

The school has striven to improve the quality of teaching and learning and has reaped the reward - they are now satisfactory and over a third of lessons is good, although more needs to be done to ensure that learning is always active, challenging and enjoyable. There are several strengths in the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4. Specialist sports college status makes a significant contribution to promoting pupils' personal development through sporting opportunities, through high standards and good examination results in physical education and through the sharing of good practice throughout the school.

Pupils are proud of their school and are beginning to play a more active part in all its aspects and in the wider community. They behave well and their attendance has improved. Relationships between pupils and with staff are good, underpinned by a caring Catholic ethos and, as a result, pupils feel safe.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Improvement in the sixth form has lagged behind the main school, having got off to a slower start. Nevertheless, its overall effectiveness is satisfactory. In 2006 pass rates rose but remained too low, partly because of weaknesses in the guidance given to

students before they started in the sixth form. This has now improved and is satisfactory, as most students now in the sixth form are studying courses appropriate to their ability. Some are benefiting from the broad range of courses available in the Alt Valley Collaborative. Year 12 students enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities, such as sign language and 'dancercise'.

Teaching and learning have improved and this ensures that students make the expected progress. Some students are very confident learners who are actively involved in lessons, take responsibility, and thrive on intellectual challenge; others are too reliant on teachers. Improved provision for students' personal development and well-being has led to higher attendance; more rigorous signing-out procedures safeguard students better. Students are thoughtful, caring members of the community and proud ambassadors of the school.

Leadership and management have improved and are satisfactory; a new head of sixth form took up post in September. The school is accurate in its overall judgement that the sixth form is satisfactory but its evaluation of the effectiveness of provision, and of students' personal development, would benefit from greater emphasis on students' achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in the weaker performing subjects.
- Continue to improve the effectiveness of the sixth form, focusing sharply on students' achievement.
- Increase the amount of good teaching so that pupils enjoy learning more actively and independently.
- Review all policies systematically as part of longer-term planning to improve the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

2006 saw big rises in GCSE results with 42% of the pupils gaining at least five A* to C grades. Although this figure remains below average, it represents at least satisfactory progress over the two years of Key Stage 4 with some pupils making up for ground lost in Key Stage 3. Almost all pupils passed at least one GCSE qualification and most passed five or more; this reflects a real change in the school's ethos to one where all are enabled and expected to succeed.

The results of national Key Stage 3 tests in 2006 were more mixed, with an improvement in science and a fall in English. Mathematics is the strongest performing core subject: its results held steady and were broadly in line with national averages. Although pupils in Key Stage 3 currently are achieving satisfactorily, those who sat the tests in 2006 made less progress than average in English and science given their starting points on joining the school in 2003. The school is working hard to eradicate any residual effects of previous weaknesses in provision.

In the sixth form, standards rose slightly in 2006 but pass rates, 87% at A level and 76% at AS level, remain too low.

Throughout the school, variation in the performance of different subjects is being tackled. Senior and middle managers are aware of the challenges and robust action at a practical day-to-day level, coupled with clear strategic planning, mean that the school is well placed to drive standards higher.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory with a number of good features, including pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Most pupils enjoy school and appreciate the improvements that have taken place in the last year. They say, 'the school is a friendlier place now'. Pupils' behaviour is good around school and in lessons, even when the teaching is a bit dull. Exclusion rates are low. Pupils feel safe from bullying and other forms of harassment. Good relationships between staff and pupils, strengthened by shared humour, are well established. Teachers know their pupils well but sometimes miss opportunities in form time and lessons to foster social development and independence. Consequently, pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory rather than good.

Attendance is approaching the national average and punctuality to lessons has improved but could still be better. The school has begun to consult pupils more widely and act on their views. Other new initiatives, such as a buddy scheme, are boosting pupils' self-esteem and increasing their involvement in school life. The school council is growing in importance steadily; for example, it was influential in ensuring a healthier range of food options in the canteen. The school prepares pupils satisfactorily for their future careers.

Pupils take part enthusiastically in a wide range of sporting activities and many achieve outstanding success at local, regional and national levels. Sixth-form students lead sporting activities for younger pupils. Good links exist with the local community, who share the school's sports facilities, and with organisations such as Merseyside Sport and national sports associations.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Since the previous inspection, teaching and learning have been the object of relentless scrutiny by senior staff, the local authority (LA) and monitoring inspectors. All this evidence confirms that steady improvement has taken place: teaching and learning

are now satisfactory and very few lessons are inadequate. The proportion of good teaching has increased and occasionally lessons are outstanding, notably in the more practical and creative subjects. However, the message that pupils learn more effectively when being actively involved has not yet permeated all subjects.

All teachers tell pupils what they are expected to learn and plan lessons adequately but pupils are not always challenged to learn independently; often, teachers work harder than pupils who in turn rely too readily on the teacher. In some lessons teachers could expect more from pupils: the slowish pace of learning means that pupils do not concentrate as well as they might and their learning is only just satisfactory. Nevertheless, most teachers are keen to learn from the best practitioners whose teaching is lively and challenging. Expertise within physical education is used imaginatively to support other teachers in developing their skills.

The use of data has improved greatly over the last year and there is a suitable system for monitoring pupils' progress. Most know their academic targets and many know what to do to achieve them. While teachers have access to detailed assessment information, it is not always used to plan lessons that meet individual learning needs and, usually, pupils all do the same work. In the sixth form, assessment procedures are not refined enough to enable students' progress in individual subjects to be tracked effectively.

Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support and make satisfactory progress. Learning support assistants are attached to particular departments and their subject knowledge and skills are improving quickly. However, their time in lessons is not always planned in detail and so they are not always used to best effect.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. There are some good and outstanding features, including very high quality physical education. At Key Stage 4, many pupils benefit from a thoughtfully planned range of subjects, vocational courses and off-site training. At Key Stage 3, pupils are taught a satisfactory range of subjects and some receive extra help with literacy and numeracy. While each pupil's progress is recorded, information is not analysed sufficiently to determine the impact of this provision or other strategies to support pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Innovative use of outside experts, in activities as diverse as musical composition and judo, enrich the curriculum. The very good range of well-supported sports activities reflects the school's status as a specialist sports college and pupils achieve notable success in local, regional and national competitions: some do outstandingly well. There are good enrichment opportunities in music and opportunities for after-school study in many subjects. Citizenship is firmly established at Key Stage 3 but citizenship and personal, social and health education are not fully covered at Key Stage 4.

Expansion and investment in ICT have been considerable and opportunities for pupils to develop ICT skills are increasing. Sixth-form students appreciate the availability of ICT during their supervised private-study periods. While more teachers use ICT as a teaching aid, its potential for learning across the curriculum is yet to be realised.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pupils feel safe at school and are confident they can confide in the headteacher, staff, chaplain, and learning mentors should they have a worry or, equally, if they want to share good news or talk about what they have been doing. The caring friendliness of the school is one of its notable characteristics. Vulnerable pupils are supported very well by staff and learning mentors and through good links with external partners. They are identified early and their progress is monitored and reviewed regularly. Pupils who are having difficulties in particular subjects, or who need extra support when being re-integrated into school, spend time in the learning support centre. These good short-term arrangements make an important contribution to raising pupils' self-esteem, steering them back on track and putting into practice the principles of 'Every Child Matters'. Parents are increasingly positive about the school's work and are participating more fully, for example, in 'academic review days'.

The school works well with partner primary schools to ensure a smooth transition into Year 7. Thoughtful guidance is given to Year 9 pupils to ensure they follow a curricular pathway that meets their needs and aspirations. Guidance for potential sixth-formers has improved. Academic guidance is satisfactory: the school has tackled earlier weaknesses in homework and marking. Teachers set homework regularly and record it carefully. Marking is improving and most teachers are trying 'next step marking' where they tell pupils what to do to reach the next level or grade.

A start has been made on a systematic review of policies. While the most recent records are up to date, there has been some delay in confirming that all recommended checks have been made; this means the school does not meet current government guidelines. The school and LA are tackling this as an immediate priority. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to check that this weakness has been remedied.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher's outstanding leadership is warmly acknowledged by many pupils, staff, parents and governors. He has won their loyalty and, bringing out the best in them, has ensured a strong focus on raising standards and a positive ethos for learning. One teacher commented that the headteacher 'has renewed the Catholic ethos of the

school'. Others spoke of the increased professionalism of staff who value the mix of support and challenge they receive from senior managers and, increasingly, from each other.

The headteacher is very well supported by the two deputy headteachers who carry out their high profile roles effectively. All three are very good role models. They work in close partnership to provide clear direction for the school. Underperformance is challenged robustly and change managed skilfully, with adroit reassigning of responsibilities to make the most of individuals' strengths. The newly appointed business manager, the fourth member of this senior team, has improved financial management: swift remedial action has been taken to remedy shortcomings and the school is on course to recover last year's budget deficit. Refurbishment and bright, interesting displays have made a significant difference to the learning environment and in developing a culture where pupils' diverse achievements are celebrated.

The leadership and management of the assistant headteachers and middle-level leaders have improved and, although still variable, are good overall. Some heads of department act as 'champions' to peers: this initiative has been well received. Line management arrangements are good. Monitoring is effective with consistently applied and well understood systems and procedures. It is carried out regularly and feedback provided; points for action or improvement are followed up and good practice shared. Consequently, the school knows itself well. Its self-evaluation is accurate, identifying what the school does well and what needs to be better. The school has a good track record of driving improvement through its coherent and decisive action. The headteacher has rightly identified that now is the time to link such focused planning into a longer-term vision for the future of the school. The capacity for further improvement is good.

Governance is good. The chair of governors is very well informed and the committees contribute effectively to strategic management. A sub-group of governors monitors the school's progress against its action plan: this is good practice. Support from the LA has been effective and will continue for the next couple of years, tailored to the school's identified priorities. Relevant training from within the school, the LA and archdiocese has benefited staff.

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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?	3	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?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

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

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	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
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

I am writing to tell you about the findings of our inspection but, first of all, I would like to thank you for welcoming us to Archbishop Beck. We enjoyed visiting your lessons, seeing your work and hearing your views and experiences of school.

You will know that I have visited your school several times over the last two years to check how well it was doing. You emphasised how much better the school has become and how friendly a place it now is. We agree with you! What's more, we found that the school has improved so much that it no longer needs special measures. So, well done to all of you!

Here are some of the things we liked best about your school.

- Last year's GCSE results were the school's best ever. The teachers tell us that if you carry on working hard, then next summer's results should be even better.
- You know 'Only the best will do' and you want to do well. We saw that you particularly enjoy learning when your teachers give you interesting and practical things to do.
- Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. You get on well with each other and with staff.
- The school's specialism in sports is very good. Most of you enjoy sports a lot and some of you are just brilliant at it.
- The headteacher is excellent at leading the school. You know he has made a real difference. I wonder if you know just how proud he is of you?

We have asked Mr Traynor, staff and governors to do the following things to improve your school further.

- Help you gain better results in Key Stage 3 tests, GCSE and sixth-form examinations.
- Continue to improve lessons so that they are lively and challenge you to think hard.
- Make the sixth form a really good place to study.
- Plan for the future development of the school.

I am sure you will want to play your part in helping Archbishop Beck go from strength to strength. Share your ideas with the school councillors. Study hard and join in lessons fully. You have already improved your attendance and punctuality - could you make them even better?

I look forward to hearing about your future successes.