

# The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105581
<b>Local Authority</b>	Manchester
<b>Inspection number</b>	308891
<b>Inspection dates</b>	31 October –1 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	John Coleman HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	885
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fr Brendan Curley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Michael O'Neill
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 October 2003
<b>School address</b>	Parrs Wood Road East Didsbury Manchester Lancashire M20 6BX
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 4458053
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 4456350

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The Barlow High School is a specialist science college, with a Roman Catholic religious foundation. It is an average-sized comprehensive school for boys and girls, which serves a socially mixed but generally disadvantaged area of south Manchester. Most students who join the school come from families in the associated Roman Catholic parishes. The number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average. Over 85% of pupils are White British, a number of other ethnic groups are represented in small numbers, and the number for whom English is not their first language is small. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is in line with the national average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is slightly above average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. It is an improving school where standards are rising due to improvements in teaching brought about by effective strategies put in place by the senior leadership team. Students' achievement is satisfactory. Their personal development is good: students enjoy school and behave well as a result of good pastoral care.

From a position in 2004 and 2005 when students' academic results showed significant underachievement, standards have risen consistently and significantly, particularly at age 16. This improvement has been so great that provisional indications for 2007, based upon students' GCSE grades, indicate that the percentage gaining five A\* to C grades will be above the national average. This improvement is down to developments in the curriculum on offer to students, as well as an effective intervention programme in Key Stage 4 combined with better teaching. The choices available to students allow them to choose pathways which are well suited to their needs. These include work-based learning and vocational studies provided through good links with local colleges of further education. All students take GCSE religious education in Year 10 and the most able students can take GCSE mathematics, allowing them to complete an AS level in either subject in Year 11, or an alternative course. Lessons are increasingly of good quality because the senior leadership team has worked with staff to identify the features of teaching and learning which are needed in successful classrooms. As a result, the school has a good policy to guide teaching which is used when lessons are monitored. Training is regularly provided for staff which targets areas for improvement emerging from lesson observations. The school provides insufficient opportunities for teachers to share best practice more widely across the school.

The school acknowledges that due in part to the priority given to students in Year 10 and 11, some improvements to the curriculum, monitoring of students' progress and the rise in standards seen in Key Stage 4, are not evident yet at Key Stage 3. Instability in staffing has also hindered improvement. In Key Stage 3 standards are average overall, and the progress students make varies, but is satisfactory overall. The curriculum is tightly structured, provides the statutory requirements, but is far narrower and less personalised for the students than the curriculum at Key Stage 4. Attempts by the school to support lower attaining students, by allowing them to study one foreign language instead of two and to receive additional lessons in key literacy skills, has met with some success. Although the quality of teaching is improving in Key Stage 3, there are barriers to students' learning which the school should address. For example, many students arrive late to lessons because they dawdle in the corridors, and this hampers their learning. At the beginning of many lessons the students laboriously copy the aims and tasks into their work books; this loses their interest and slows the pace. Monitoring of students' progress in Key Stage 3 is not as rigorous as that in Key Stage 4; for example, tracking is completed each term rather than every half-term. Academic mentors, who are an established strength of student support in Key Stage 4, are at an early stage of beginning their work with Key Stage 3 students.

Several parents who completed the inspection questionnaire commented about the good personal development of students. One typical example said, 'There is very strong pastoral care, and relationships between parents and staff is very good ... Mr O'Neill and staff deserve praise for their commitment and dedication to pupils.' Students show good attitudes towards their peers. Staff provide good role models, and treat students with respect and consideration.

They expect this in return and are not disappointed. Students have good opportunities to take responsibilities and contribute to the life of the school and to the wider community. Support and guidance for students' academic progress is mixed. Whilst students are set challenging numerical targets and grades, they are insufficiently helped to achieve these because guidance is too broad and generalised. Many student targets describe improvements to concentration or behaviour rather than detailing specific skills or knowledge to be learned.

The school's specialist status includes science and mathematics. The impact of this is seen through good liaison with feeder primary schools where curriculum resources and visiting specialist staff are improving the provision for pupils. There are improved resources in information and communication technology (ICT) which make a good contribution to teaching methods. Students may take GCSE mathematics early and links with the University of Manchester exist for students with a particular interest in mathematics. In Year 8 there is an annual mathematics trip to Paris which received many favourable comments to inspectors from students and parents. Results at GCSE are improving in mathematics and science.

Governors who spoke to inspectors described a school which has 'been turned around', and they were confident the reason for such improvement was the performance of the headteacher and the senior leadership team. Several responses in parent questionnaires made similar comments. Inspectors agree. Due to the improving standards by the time students leave the school, there is satisfactory capacity to improve further and the school gives satisfactory value for money.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3.
- Ensure the best practice in teaching and learning is shared more widely across the school.
- Provide clear academic guidance to students to ensure that they are informed about what they need to do next to improve.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Most students enter Year 7 with standards of attainment which are in line with those found nationally. During Key Stage 3 students make satisfactory but variable progress overall so that standards reached by age 14 are average in English, mathematics and science. Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 show consistently average standards in these subjects over the last 4 years. Students' attainment at Key Stage 4, as shown by the percentage achieving five A\* to C grades in GCSE examinations, was below average in 2004 and 2005, average in 2006 and the provisional figure of 68% in 2007 points towards this being above average. The number of students gaining five A\* to C grades including mathematics and English was below average in 2004, average in 2005 and 2006, and early indications are that the school's provisional figure of 54% will be above average. Students achieve especially good results in art and physical education. Overall students' progress in Key Stage 4 is good. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall. Given students' starting points and their variable progress across Key Stage 3 and 4, students' achievement overall is judged to be satisfactory.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good, because the students demonstrate good attitudes to other people. The level of attendance is good. Behaviour is good in lessons, and is satisfactory around school. Punctuality to school and to lessons for a small number of students is not good enough.

Students feel safe in school. They are aware that all forms of bullying and racism are unacceptable and they are confident that where such incidences occur, they are swiftly dealt with. Students show a good understanding of the need to follow healthy lifestyles. They demonstrate this by supporting healthy eating options at lunchtime, and through widespread participation in sporting activities. Good relationships with teachers help students to enjoy their learning. In lessons, students work well together; they provide their peers with good support. Students show satisfactory levels of key skills, show good attitudes, and participate well in enterprise projects. As a result, they are well prepared for the world of work.

The development of students' social, moral and spiritual education is good. Their social awareness is developed through helping to organise and run a sports day for students at local primary and special schools. A prefect system enables older students to develop responsibility; other students take an active role in open evenings, help younger students with key skills or work in the library. The Catholic ethos of the school puts spiritual awareness at the heart of the curriculum and this bears fruit in retreats, which develop teamwork skills in a spiritual context. The school has plans for further development in the area of cultural education, where pupils' current learning is satisfactory.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is an increasing and significant proportion of good teaching and some outstanding practice. Strong features are teachers' subject knowledge and the positive relationships between the students and their teachers. Good questioning skills by teachers enable students to build effectively on prior learning. Students enjoy and make the best progress in lessons which are interactive and stimulating. In these lessons, the teachers' enthusiasm engages the students, there are high expectations and challenge, and there are clear links to grade criteria. However, the proportion of teacher talk is too great even in some of the better lessons, with a lack of opportunities for the students to discuss their ideas. ICT is used as a teaching tool for clarity of presentation rather than for students' learning. In a number of lessons observed, although different ability groups are highlighted on lesson plans, teachers do not provide work that accurately matches the full range of students' learning needs. There is little urgency in the movement of students between lessons and time is lost in late arrival and the copying out of sometimes long aims and objectives by the students before the lesson can start. This has an adverse affect on the initial impact and pace of the lesson. Marking is not consistently frequent or rigorous enough, resulting in a deterioration of presentation. The students are aware of their target grades but comments are not specific enough to help them know what to do to improve their work.

## Curriculum and other activities

### Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. The school ensures that the curriculum matches a wide variety of students' interests, abilities and needs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from improved provision, supported by teaching assistants and key workers.

The school has effective links with local colleges, employers and other providers. As a result, the curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 is good. They are offered a good range of courses, opportunities for work-based learning and some advanced courses for the more able. These options help motivate students' learning, help to increase achievement and equip students well with self-confidence and skills for the future. Students in Years 7 to 9 benefit from a satisfactory range of subjects and activities. Some students are given specialist support with literacy and numeracy. The curriculum overall is enriched by a good range of activities. For example, special days related to enterprise and art, enrichment activities provided by individual subject areas, alongside charity and voluntary work.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. The school provides good pastoral care for all students, including the most vulnerable. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported by a range of staff, and as a result they make satisfactory progress. A strong ethos of inclusion and good support for individual students demonstrate that the school is successful in promoting equality. All appropriate child protection procedures are in place. The school has made good progress in ensuring that students' education focuses on the Every Child Matters outcomes. Provision for monitoring and improving attendance is good, and has had a clear, positive impact on attendance figures. Good levels of supervision around the school help to maintain students' safety and ensure that incidences of misbehaviour are rare.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. The school provides students with suitably challenging targets. Students' progress over time is monitored, and there are appropriate processes for identifying those students who are performing below expectations. Underachieving students, especially at Key Stage 4, benefit from the support of learning mentors. Assessment, including day-to-day marking, is satisfactory. Whilst there are examples of good practice, assessment is too inconsistent between teachers and between departments. Too many students understand how to improve only in general terms; their targets are not sufficiently focused on individual subjects.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The headteacher provides a strong steer to the school and he is ably supported by the senior leadership team. Effective monitoring by the senior team has led to an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Senior leaders give clear direction to the programme for school improvement and raising standards. Strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning have been successful. Although the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, there is an increasing number of good lessons.

Students' attendance has risen for three consecutive years from below to above average. The percentage of students achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE has improved for the fourth consecutive year and provisional results show it is now above the national average. Plans to improve students' progress at Key Stage 3 are less successful and the school rightly continues to give this a high priority. Action plans are in place but there are insufficient ways to measure their success in a systematic or quantifiable way.

The role of middle leaders has developed as a result of effective training and mentoring opportunities. For example, heads of faculty have carried out joint observations of lessons with the leadership team which has provided quality assurance and consistency. Nevertheless, there is inconsistent leadership and variation in the depth of monitoring and evaluation between faculties. Best practice is not shared across the school.

Governors provide effective support to the school and they are well informed by reports from the headteacher. Some governors take the chance to visit the school in session and thus gain a first hand view of day-to-day activities. The statutory duties of the governing body are met through a range of committees. Financial management of the school's budget is satisfactory. There are advanced plans to reduce a significant budget deficit brought about by a reduction in student numbers.



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**Annex A**

## Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

**Annex A**

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
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

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## Annex B

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for talking to us about your experiences. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

- We judged that your school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education.
- The headteacher and senior staff of the school know what it does well, and why, and know what to do to make it even better in the future.
- You reach average standards, make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3, good progress at Key Stage 4 and, taking into account your starting points, you achieve satisfactorily overall.
- Your behaviour and attitude to school are mostly good and this helps you to get the best out of many of the things your school has to offer you. Some of you need to get to lessons on time more often.
- All the staff in school care for you very well and you feel safe and enjoy school.
- You are helped to develop as mature and responsible young people because the school teaches you right from wrong and respects and values your opinions.
- You like school and attend well because lessons are satisfactory but increasingly good and interesting; you particularly enjoy learning when it involves practical activities.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements.

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3.
- Share the very best teaching practice so that all teaching is as good as the best.
- Make sure that the guidance you are given to help you improve is clear.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope that you will carry on working with your teachers to make The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College an even better school.