

Burscough Priory Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119746
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313412
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Brine HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	696
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Forshaw
Headteacher	Mr Roger Leighton
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Trevor Road Burscough Ormskirk Lancashire L40 7RZ
Telephone number	01704 893259
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Age group	11-16
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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

Burscough Priory Science College is an 11–16 mixed comprehensive school which was awarded specialist science college status in 2004. It is a smaller than average community school situated in the town of Burscough, Lancashire. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is also well below the national average. The proportion who have special educational needs is just below average. The school achieved a Sportsmark award in 2005 and 2007 and was also recently re-awarded with Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Burscough Priory provides its pupils with a satisfactory education. The school has some important strengths but there are also a number of areas which require some improvement.

There is a clear commitment in the school to promoting the pupils' personal development and in many respects this is successful. The school has a very friendly and harmonious atmosphere and staff are focused on the well-being of the pupils. The behaviour and attitudes towards learning of pupils are positive. Extra-curricular provision in the school is strong and some of the teaching is very effective. The school's science status has been successful in improving the quality of the provision and building links with the local community.

A number of factors have restricted the overall effectiveness of the school. The targets the school has set in terms of pupils' achievement have been too low and, as a result, the school has not always monitored its performance against appropriate benchmarks. Action is now being taken to introduce more challenging targets.

The inspectors agree with the school that the overall achievement of the pupils is satisfactory. Recent results show pupils reaching standards which are in line with or just above average. Given their starting points in Year 7, this represents satisfactory progress overall. Results in some areas of science are good and they are also positive in mathematics at Key Stage 4. Some aspects of achievement, most notably in English, have been less than satisfactory, but the factors which caused this have been resolved and the school anticipates that standards will now rise.

While there is some good and outstanding teaching, it is satisfactory overall. At its best, teaching inspires high quality learning, but pupils are not always challenged appropriately or given enough opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. There is inconsistency in the quality of marking and in the use made of assessment to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve. The curriculum, while still fairly traditional, is being extended to reflect the needs of all pupils. The provision in subjects such as science and modern foreign languages is strong, reflecting the commitment of the school to ensuring pupils have good access to these areas of learning. There is not enough opportunity for pupils to develop their understanding of cultural diversity.

Many aspects of the provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils are good. Pupils in need of additional help or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Links with external agencies are strong. The school is taking action to improve the effectiveness and coordination of the arrangements for identifying and addressing the needs of pupils who are underachieving.

Until very recently, the school was not using the information it had about pupils' performance effectively to ensure it set appropriate targets. In addition, the approach adopted towards improvement planning is not strategic enough and priorities are not always clearly understood at all levels. The recent development of the role of the middle leaders in the school, together with the recruitment of new staff, is now providing the school with a much needed impetus.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that targets at both whole school and pupil level are more challenging and that arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress are more effective.

- Clarify the priorities in the school improvement plan and ensure these are communicated effectively.
- Improve teaching further to ensure work is matched to different abilities and pupils take more responsibility for their learning.
- Ensure greater consistency in marking and in the use of levels to help pupils understand better how to make progress.
- Extend the opportunities for pupils to explore cultural diversity.

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

Inspectors agree with the school that achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils join in Year 7 with standards that are just above the national average. They make satisfactory progress and leave school having reached standards which are in line or just above the national average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well, reflecting the high quality care and support they receive.

While at the end of Key Stage 3 some results are above the national average, overall achievement is satisfactory and has declined over the past two years. In 2007 there was underachievement in mathematics and also in English. Results in science were significantly above national averages.

Standards achieved in 2007 at the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly in line with national averages. The proportion obtaining 5 A*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics was above national averages and has been for the last three years. In 2008 the school expects to obtain a figure of 61% achieving the higher GCSE grades which is in line with its target. There has been underachievement in English over the past three years, reflecting previous staffing difficulties which have now been resolved. The school predicts that there will be an improvement in results in 2008. Pupils do particularly well in mathematics. Pupils achieve well in, for example, biology, design technology and history. Less progress is made by pupils in other subjects including art, physics and chemistry.

The targets the school has set itself in terms of pupils' achievement have been too low but action is now being taken to raise expectation and introduce greater challenge. The lack of robust and challenging assessment information has contributed to pupils' underachievement in the past. Examination results achieved by pupils in Year 9 and Year 11 are analysed but the evaluations in some subjects are over-generous.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Pupils behave well in and around the school reflecting the positive mutual respect amongst peers and with staff. Lessons and extra curricular activities support their good social skills. Moral development of pupils is good; their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, although their awareness and understanding of cultural diversity is limited as it was at the time of the last inspection. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their attendance which is above the national

average. They generally have very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils feel safe in school and are secure that action is taken should an issue relating to bullying arise, although this is rare.

Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles. These are supported through the wide range of extra curricular activities and the emphasis on healthy education in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and science fortnight. Pupils contribute to the school and the wider community in a variety of ways including the school council which has organised local fundraising activities for charity. Enterprise skills are fostered through a variety of activities including work experience. These, together with the pupils' overall good literacy and numeracy skills, help to secure their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are well planned. Clear objectives enable students to understand the purpose of lessons. The consistent use of behaviour management systems and positive relationships support learning. Good use is made of displays to ensure classrooms are attractive and stimulate learning.

In the best lessons, learning proceeds at a brisk pace; good questioning by the teachers checks and develops understanding. Pupils contribute and share ideas eagerly, and enjoy working together and taking responsibility for their learning. They evaluate their own and each other's work and this helps them to understand how to improve. At its very best, teaching conveys a sense of enthusiasm and love of learning, and staff are willing to take risks using more challenging teaching strategies.

In weaker, but nevertheless satisfactory, lessons, learning tends to be too teacher-led. There is limited challenge and pace can be slow. In some classes, work is not well matched to the varying abilities of the pupils and, as a result, some do not make enough progress. Work is often not marked effectively or regularly enough. Some marking gives clear guidance on what to do to improve but, in other cases, not enough specific guidance is given on what should be done next.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Curriculum provision is satisfactory. The weaknesses raised by the previous inspection have been tackled effectively and the requirements of the National Curriculum are now met in full. The school is beginning to introduce new courses that provide greater relevance for its pupils.

At Key Stage 3, pupils study a balanced curriculum which is enriched by the provision for drama and the opportunity for the more able to take two foreign languages from Year 8 onwards. Much of the teaching at Key Stage 3 takes place in mixed ability groups where, in some lessons, learning is not differentiated sufficiently to ensure the needs of all pupils are met.

In Key Stage 4, the schools' specialist status has enriched the curriculum and promoted the extension of the science courses it offers. The broad range of GCSE courses is a good and successful feature. A breadth of experience for pupils is maintained by the requirement that all follow a technology and a humanities option, and that most include a modern foreign language in their programme. However, the school has been relatively slow in developing the

vocational dimension of the curriculum. This provision now includes the ASDAN course and some alternatives to GCSE that provide more appropriate experiences for a growing number of pupils, whose needs are not well suited to a full GCSE programme. Collaboration with a local college is helping to develop this further through the Young Apprenticeship scheme. Pupils enjoy a very good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities many of which are the result of the school's science specialism; this is a strength of the school, recognised and valued by parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils is satisfactory with some good features. All statutory duties are met. Transition arrangements for pupils from primary to secondary school are strengths of the school, as confirmed by parents, enabling pupils to settle quickly into their new school. Another strength of the school is the special educational needs department which provides a caring, supportive and challenging environment for vulnerable pupils. Pupils who experience problems with their behaviour receive appropriate support.

Links with external agencies such as Connexions are strong. Pupils receive clear guidance on career option choices with information on alternative routes when they leave school being readily available. The Aim Higher programme encourages pupils to have positive aspirations as regards future pathways. There are termly assessments but some Year 7 parents consider that the first formal opportunity to meet their children's subject teachers towards the end of the summer term is too late, a view shared by the inspectors.

Pupils in most subjects have targets which are monitored. However, in too many subject areas, the targets are not sufficiently challenging. Although not consistent across all subjects, most pupils know their targets and current level of progress; but they are not always clear how to improve. This reflects the variable quality of marking. Tracking of pupils' progress is inconsistent across key stages and across subjects. Pastoral and curriculum leaders share information on pupils' progress but there is a lack of clarity about who leads on any resulting actions. Pupils at risk of underachieving are identified but support is not always coordinated well enough. These issues are beginning to be addressed through the recent introduction of learning leaders and pastoral managers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school judges the quality of leadership and management to be good; inspectors judge them to be satisfactory.

The headteacher and senior leadership team know the school well and have established a positive ethos which values individuals and promotes a sense of harmony and well-being. The school's science status is well managed and makes a good impact on, for example, links with primary feeder schools. However, a number of key specialist targets have not been fully met.

There is a clear commitment to improvement and a number of recent initiatives have helped promote this. However, the school does not yet have a set of strategic priorities which are clearly defined and understood in order to drive this improvement. There is an extensive school improvement plan and the arrangements for linking this to subject reviews are becoming more

systematic. However, the plan does not make it sufficiently clear how the many targets should be prioritised and evaluated; the underlying vision driving the plan is not well enough articulated and understood across the school. For example, staff are not clear enough about the key priorities in relation to improving teaching and learning.

The school's use of data and target-setting, while improving, are not yet sharp or analytical enough and the targets have not been sufficiently challenging. As a result, the more detailed monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance lack rigour and, in some regards, expectations are too low. A more systematic approach to monitoring the effectiveness of teaching has been established. While not entirely reliable, this is providing a more secure basis for identifying strengths and weaknesses.

A recently established middle leadership group is proving effective as a context within which to secure greater consistency and share good practice. Clear arrangements have been established for subjects to carry out their own self-evaluations and these are beginning to improve the quality of reviews and action planning at department level.

The school is effective in promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination. A number of initiatives have been established to promote higher achievement amongst boys, and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The school's use of its resources and the value for money it provides are also satisfactory. Careful management of the school's budget has enabled the school to address some of the limitations of its accommodation. The school's science status has been used well to develop the ICT resources which are now good and are used effectively.

Governors discharge their responsibilities satisfactorily and the issues raised at the last inspection have been resolved to ensure all statutory requirements are now met. Their committee structure has been reorganised to make sure business is more focused. However, the governors need to be more strongly involved in monitoring standards and achievement.

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Annex A

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?	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

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	2

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	3
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

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

Annex A

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 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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

04 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Burscough Priory Science College, Lancashire, L40 7RZ

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with many of you. We also read carefully the questionnaires completed by your parents. These were very helpful to us.

We think Burscough Priory provides you with a satisfactory education. The school is very friendly and harmonious. The relationships between pupils and with staff are good and we were impressed by your behaviour and attitude towards school. Many of you told us how much you enjoyed school and you particularly like the wide range of extra activities which the school provides. The school's status as a science college has helped to move the school forward; it has provided you with a lot more computer equipment.

Some of the teaching we saw was impressive. You particularly like the lessons when you have a chance to take responsibility for your work and we think the school should allow more of this to happen.

The test and examination results in the school are satisfactory but we think that they should be better. We have asked the headteacher to set higher expectations and make sure more of the work is challenging; this will help to improve the results. We also think that there needs to be a bit more consistency in the way your work is marked and in the guidance you are given about how to improve.

While we think the school does a good job in promoting your broader personal development, more needs to be done to help you understand and appreciate the cultural diversity of modern Britain.

Thank you again for welcoming us to your school. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Brine HMI

Lead inspector