

SS John Fisher and Thomas More Roman Catholic High School, Colne

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119785
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313424
Inspection dates	13–14 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Vincent Ashworth HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	753
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Thomas
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Bohills
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Gibfield Road Colne Lancashire BB8 8JT
Telephone number	01282 865299
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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

Saints John Fisher and Thomas More Roman Catholic Humanities College is a smaller than average sized school. It serves a community that includes some areas with high levels of social and economic deprivation. Most students are from White British backgrounds; a very small minority are of Pakistani heritage. There are only a few students for whom English is not their first language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average and increasing. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around the national average, although there is a higher than average proportion with a statement of special educational needs. A small number of students are in public care. The school has achieved Investors in People status and the Sportsmark award. It became a specialist humanities college in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Saints John Fisher and Thomas More Roman Catholic Humanities College provides its students with a satisfactory education. The school enjoys considerable parental support and is well regarded in the community it serves. The school's major strengths are its caring ethos, supported by the Chaplain, and the pastoral guidance it provides for students. Since the last inspection the school has coasted along; progress in addressing areas for improvement from the last inspection has been slow. Consequently, standards and achievement declined and GCSE results in 2007 were at an all time low. Standards at Key Stage 4 and the achievement of less able students have not been as good as they should be. A new head teacher and a newly invigorated senior leadership team have already turned the school's fortunes around; students make better progress and standards are on the rise.

The impact of steps already taken to improve students' progress is now clearly evident in the higher standards being demonstrated in the work of current students and their attitudes to learning. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the school is on course to meet the higher, challenging targets set for 2008 at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Achievement and standards are now satisfactory.

The newly appointed headteacher has been quick to gain the hearts and minds of students and staff and is providing a strong impetus for improvement. Data on students' performance is accurate and more accessible for teachers to use. Senior management is focussed and has a grip on subjects that underperform. Staffing is more stable. These factors along with the school's accurate judgement of its strengths and weaknesses indicate good capacity for further improvement.

Teaching is generally sound, but varies in quality. The best learning occurs in lessons where teachers are skilful in allowing students to develop as independent learners, whilst having fun at the same time. Very recently, the school has made great strides in evaluating the quality of lessons. The outcomes of lesson observations are now being used as a basis for sharing good practice. However, in planning their lessons, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to preparing activities that are suitably matched to students' individual needs. The use of assessment is not sufficiently rigorous or consistent across all subjects to ensure that all students make the progress they are capable of.

Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and keep safe, though some parents expressed concern about poor behaviour and bullying. School governors are aware of these concerns and are actively reviewing school policies. Students state that they know what to do and who to go to if they feel threatened in any way. The majority of students behave well in lessons. Nevertheless, there is a lack of self-discipline, in particular during unsupervised times. This is compounded by inadequacies in the school's accommodation and narrow stairwells. Attendance is satisfactory; punctuality in the morning and at the start of lessons is unsatisfactory. The school council is proactive in working with school leaders to ensure that all students have a voice and school leaders listen to their concerns. The school's full-time chaplain and the productive links with local parishes are a significant strength. The chaplain's influence on students' spiritual and emotional well-being is clearly evident from their strong spiritual and social awareness and their consideration towards other people and communities who are less fortunate than themselves.

The school's specialist humanities status is founded on strengths in English, drama and religious education. The newly appointed co-ordinator has already planned a number of initiatives to support teaching and learning in weaker subjects through the sharing of good practice and expertise between departments. There is a good programme of activities within the community including a drama project with partner primary schools and a basic literacy course for adults.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards at Key Stage 4.
- Ensure that teachers' planning better meets the needs of all students, especially the least able.
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance so that students can improve their work and meet their targets.

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

Standards overall are now broadly average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Students enter the school with standards in English and mathematics that are broadly average. In 2007 results for GCSE examinations were very disappointing to the school; many students did not reach the standards they were capable of. Staff absences in some subjects had an adverse impact on students' progress. Results in mathematics and science were low and consequently the proportion of students who left with five or more passes at grade C or above was lower than in previous years. The new senior management team has been swift to make the improvements necessary to tackle a legacy of underachievement. Internal tests and results for external examinations taken in the current year indicate standards are now rising and that achievement is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. The most impressive improvement has been in science. Standards at Key Stage 3 are broadly average and improving. Students make steady progress to Year 9 and achieve particularly well in national tests in English. Their average results in science and mathematics have remained static over time, but are now improving. The school provides a particularly strong start for students with a statement of special educational needs, including those with physical disabilities and they make good progress. Other groups, in particular the less able students are not challenged to give of their very best and many do not achieve their full potential.

Evidence from students' current work in lessons and from their coursework confirms a steady improvement in achievement in the current academic year. The maturity of students' work in art, drama and religious education is commendable. Students' achievements in modern foreign languages, English and physical education are good. There is room for improvement in history, geography and information and communication technology (ICT).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. The majority of students make the best of all the school has to offer, attend regularly and behave responsibly. They know about the importance of

exercise in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, though they do not always put into practice their awareness of healthy eating. They benefit from good access to advice from visiting health professionals and a full-time chaplain. Most show concern for the safety of others and feel that the school provides a secure and friendly environment, because good relationships are the norm. Incidents of serious misbehaviour by a small but significant minority have been reduced but not eliminated. Bullying is not a concern for most students, though those who do experience it are not always confident that the school's response will be sensitive and effective. Many students are active in the school community, for example, as school councillors, prefects and Year 7 mentors, and are generous in their commitment to charity fund raising. The relaunched School Council has already sought students' views in identifying a number of ways in which they believe the school could be improved. When given the opportunity, students have the self-confidence to work collaboratively in groups and they develop satisfactory basic skills to prepare them for their life beyond school. Attendance has improved and is broadly average. Punctuality at the start of the day and to lessons is unsatisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching is improving. The school has initiated a range of strategies and implemented regular staff development which is having a positive impact. In the lessons where students make the most progress teachers communicate a high expectation, provide challenge, capture students' interest and imagination and make learning enjoyable. One pupil summed this up very succinctly when she said, 'learning is good when it's fun, we're encouraged to be creative and learn independently'. Inspectors agree with her. However, the quality of teaching and learning is variable between and within subjects. Teachers do not plan sufficiently well to provide learning activities that meet students' individual needs. In the weaker lessons there is an over reliance on activities led by the teacher and consequently students lose interest and become passive learners. In these lessons interaction between teacher and students is often limited to question and answer sessions, with little opportunity for independent or group work. The school recognises the need to raise the level of challenge for the most able and increase levels of support for the least able students.

Most students are aware of their target grades. However, the use of assessment to tackle underachievement and raise standards is underdeveloped. Marking is inconsistent between and within departments. There are examples of good practice but marking sometimes lacks the detail to help students to identify their strengths and know how to improve. Some parents are concerned that students do not get enough homework and even when it is set, it is not systematically marked. Inspectors agree.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory range of subjects, courses and wider learning experiences fully meets statutory requirements. A wide variety of well attended visits, visitors, lunchtime and after school clubs and other activities successfully broadens students' experiences, particularly of extra curricular section music, drama, art and sport. Recent, more focussed action to review the curriculum is giving managers a more detailed view of relative strengths and weaknesses. This is beginning to steer improvements such as the introduction of new courses to suit the learning needs of

less academic students. Elsewhere, detailed analysis of the 2007 GCSE information technology results has highlighted more effective ways to approach and assess Year 11 students' coursework. These have been introduced and can already be seen to be having a positive impact on students' progress. Provision for students with substantial learning needs is frequently well matched to their needs and supports their progress well. Strategies to systematically provide for the needs of gifted and talented students are at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Provision for care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Pastoral care is good and there is a strong commitment to providing for students' welfare. Procedures for child protection, ensuring the suitability of staff to work with children and for risk assessments are in place and understood by staff. Most students feel that the school is a secure and welcoming environment, though overcrowded corridors and staircases can be intimidating to some. Good links with primary schools smooth the transfer of Year 7 students. Students in Years 9 and 11 receive helpful advice and guidance about the next phase of their education. Sensitive support is provided for the most vulnerable students, including those with statements of special educational needs. Teachers and support staff work closely with outside agencies to give constructive, individual help which enables them to make good progress. Other students, for example, those who need extra help with their learning, feel they are not always given the support they need in lessons. Systems to set targets and track students' progress are much improved but are not underpinned by effective academic guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new headteacher provides vision and direction for the school, with a clear focus on school improvement. His good team building skills have resulted in very good relationships and a shared sense of purpose within the newly formed senior team. Senior leaders are enthusiastic about leading initiatives to improve achievement and standards. Although it is too early to evaluate the full impact of these initiatives, there are improvements already emerging. Standards are rising in mathematics and science, attendance is improving and the number of exclusions has been reduced significantly. There is a schedule for monitoring the performance of each department through regular subject reviews. However, action taken has not always been sufficiently swift or effective in raising standards. Subject leaders are responsible for more frequent monitoring but this is not yet rigorous enough in all subjects. As a result, the quality of marking and the usefulness of homework is inconsistent, and the quality of teaching and learning variable. The school has accurately identified its strengths and areas for development and has made a good start in addressing the latter.

Governors know their school well and are aware of what needs to be done to improve further. They are committed and supportive and prepared to challenge and hold the school to account. They are aware that progress since the last inspection has been slow and they understand that they need to monitor progress more closely. Despite this they have taken decisive action on issues important to parents, for example, in reviewing the school's policies on behaviour and bullying. Governors have tried to improve accommodation within the constraints of funding and space. They have improved access for disabled students but overall accommodation remains inadequate.

Day-to-day management is effective and the school runs smoothly. Financial management is good. Staff and resources are well deployed despite the difficulties caused by poor accommodation. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

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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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ 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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

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	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	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

15 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of SS John Fisher and Thomas More Roman Catholic Humanities College, Colne,
Lancashire, BB8 8JT

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for your very warm welcome. Many of your parents returned a questionnaire; this was also very helpful as I was also able to take their views into account. We found that overall your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Some of the changes that have taken place since the appointment of your new headteacher and his impressive team of senior managers show that your school has good potential to make further improvements.

Your school is a friendly place. Many of you attend school regularly and take a pride in its Roman Catholic traditions. We were particularly impressed with how well you work with your school chaplain on initiatives to support others who are less fortunate. You enjoy learning when your teachers make their lessons fun and packed full of activities that allow you to work with, and learn from, each other. The majority of you behave well, but we noticed that a very small number of you are not as considerate as you could be towards some of your classmates and younger students.

In the past some of you have not always progressed as well as expected. However, there are signs that things are improving; your progress in maths and science is looking much better. Keep it up! I have asked your headteacher and governors to focus on three areas for improvement so that:

- standards rise and your GCSE results improve
- all teachers plan their lessons to match everybody's needs
- you fully understand what is said and written about your work so that you can meet or even exceed all your targets to improve.

You can all help your school to improve further by behaving well and trying hard in your studies, so that you achieve your full potential in life.

With all my best wishes for your future success

Vincent Ashworth

Her Majesty's Inspector