

Holy Cross Catholic High School, A Science and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119803
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313428
Inspection date	26 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Katrina Gueli 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	828
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Malcolm Holt
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Anne White
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2005
School address	Burgh Lane Chorley Lancashire PR7 3NT
Telephone number	01257 262093
Fax number	01257 232878

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Introduction

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

The inspector investigated the following issues: the achievement of students and the progress they make; the strength of the evidence base and the accuracy of evaluation by middle and senior leaders; the students' personal development and well being, and their care guidance and support. Evidence was gathered from national published assessment data and the school's own assessment information, the school's own self-evaluation, lesson visits, discussions with leaders, teachers and students, and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Holy Cross Catholic High School is a slightly smaller than average secondary school. Since September 2004 it has been a designated science and sports college with its sports facilities used by the community out of school hours. The school is popular and is frequently over subscribed. The majority of students live in areas with no more or less advantage than average, as reflected in the below average proportion of students eligible for a free school meal. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average. However, there has recently been a significant increase in the number of Polish students joining the school, most of who are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. The school has received the Eco silver and Healthy School awards, and 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: 2

Holy Cross Catholic High School is a good school with many outstanding features. The school provides a very friendly, caring environment, underpinned by strong Catholic values where students are highly successful in developing their personal qualities and achieve well. The vast majority of parents rightly have a very positive view of the school and appreciate the quality of education provided.

Students' attainment on entry is above average overall. By the end of Key Stage 3 standards are significantly above average in English and mathematics and exceptionally high in science. Despite improvements in mathematics in recent years, progress in this subject is slower than in English and science. However, achievement by the end of Key Stage 3 is good overall.

At the end Key Stage 4 standards are significantly above average. The number of students being awarded the highest grades at GCSE in 2006 and 2007 has risen to twice the number who attained these grades in 2005. In the last two years there has also been significant improvement in the number of students gaining five or more A* - C grades at GCSE. However, the number of students gaining five or more A* - G grades at GCSE has remained broadly average over the same time. The school is aware of the need to provide additional accredited option choices for students following alternative curriculum routes to raise attainment further. Achievement at Key Stage 4 has been variable, but is now good. Students following the alternative curriculum achieve well and all students in the 2007 group progressed into work or continued their education. Achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good because of the high quality support and intervention they receive.

The development of the specialist subjects of the school has made a difference to achievement and standards with the targets for the physical education being surpassed and the highly ambitious target in science almost reached in 2007.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They really enjoy school life and are very appreciative of the extra time that staff give to help them make good progress. Attendance is consistently above average. Behaviour is excellent and attitudes to learning are mostly very positive creating a very good climate for learning. Students feel very safe in school and say instances of bullying are rare. They know that any incidents are dealt with effectively and are confident that someone will always listen, and respond to their concerns. Students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is outstanding and this is reflected in the excellent personal qualities that they display and their wide ranging contributions to the school and wider community. 'Student voice' is increasingly shaping the actions of the school including improvements to the boys' toilets and changes to styles of teaching. The curriculum experiences and the guidance that students receive ensure they are very well prepared for their future beyond school. The wide variety of extra-curricular provision makes an excellent contribution to students' personal development including their health, well-being and enjoyment. Students value the high quality sports facilities available and note the strong team spirit that has been developed through the work of the staff in the physical education department.

Teaching and learning are good with some that is better. A 'can-do' culture for students has been successfully established and teacher expectations are high. Best practice incorporates well paced, engaging and enthusiastic teaching using a wide variety of activities and high levels of student involvement. Modern technologies are frequently used effectively to enhance learning. Often students are involved in assessing their work themselves and this helps them

to understand how to improve. Students are aware of their targets, but in some instances they are not always clear what they need to do to move onto the next level. This is due in part to the variable quality of the written and verbal feedback that they receive. The school has identified where practice needs to be of a higher quality and is already working with departments and individuals to increase consistency. Teaching and learning have been improved through coaching, regular training and frequent sharing of best practice within and between departments. Key drivers in these developments have been the Advanced Skills Teachers and other staff from the specialist subjects. This improvement in quality has contributed to better progress, increased levels of enjoyment and students becoming more effective, independent learners.

The curriculum is good with outstanding features having evolved significantly since the time of the last inspection. A very wide range of academic and vocational courses are now available, both on site and through partnerships with other providers. As a result the needs and interests of students are well met. The specialist subjects have made a considerable contribution to curriculum breadth at Key Stage 4 with an increasing number of science courses on offer and accredited physical education courses for all. Adjustments to the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and different pathways at Key Stage 4 have supported improving outcomes for students. They are very well informed and supported for transfer both between key stages and for progression to post-16 education or training. Innovations such as the complimentary studies programme and activities weeks have ensured that students' learning and personal development is greatly enhanced. The curriculum is enriched significantly by the many and varied extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Systems and communication between teams are coherent and all leaders and staff are focused on maximising student achievement and promoting their personal development and well-being. Assessment of progress is frequent and tracking is rigorous so any underperformance is identified rapidly. Students are helped to get back on track quickly through the use of a broad range of interventions. Guidance for students and communication with parents regarding courses, programmes and progress is of a very high quality. For example, in addition to the traditional parents evening, each year features a guidance evening. This is very effective in ensuring that parents have a good understanding of on-going assessment, are clearly briefed about possible challenges to come in the year ahead, and well informed about how best to provide support for their child's learning. Students with additional needs including those who enter the school at an early stage of English language acquisition receive excellent care and support from school based colleagues in conjunction with external care services. All procedures to ensure the health and safety of students are in place.

Leadership and management are good with outstanding features. The headteacher provides strong leadership and there is a clear, shared drive to enhance learning and ensure the best possible outcomes for all learners. This strategic direction is reflected in all aspects of the school's culture and is central to selecting improvement actions. Rigorous self-evaluation involving senior and middle leaders ensures that the school, including governors, are aware of current strengths and areas for development. Subsequent actions are carefully chosen and their impact evaluated accurately. Whole school priorities, performance management and staff development are very well aligned and effectively support improvement. Governor expertise is wide ranging and well utilised. In addition to regular meetings between the headteacher and the chair of the governing body, other governors are linked with individual departments and attend staff training events. This structure, combined with the work of committees and the full governing body, ensures that governors have a good working knowledge and are well placed to hold the school to account. A very good balance has been struck between accountability for

middle leaders to secure increases in standards and a culture of nurturing and support for all staff. This has been central to the rapid improvements seen over the last few years and supports the outstanding capacity of the school to improve further. Whole school targets are set to reflect the school's high expectations but many individual student targets are insufficiently challenging and are often quickly exceeded. Excellent use is made of partnerships and this contributes well to ensuring students' outstanding levels of personal development and well-being.

What the school should do to improve further

- No significant areas for improvement have been identified of which the school was not already aware and taking appropriate action. However, the degree of challenge in the targets set for individual students could be increased so that they align more closely with those set for the whole school.

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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?	2
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

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?	1

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

28 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Holy Cross Catholic High School, A Science and Sports College, Chorley, Lancashire, PR7 3NT

Thank you for sharing your views with me when I visited your school. I found that Holy Cross is a good school with some outstanding features.

The school is a very friendly, caring community where you are highly successful in developing your personal qualities and you achieve well. You are very appreciative about what the school provides, especially the excellent sporting facilities and the very wide range of extra-curricular activities in which you are involved. Your behaviour is excellent and you show very positive attitudes to your learning allowing you to make good progress. Your attendance is good. The skills that you develop and the experiences and guidance that you receive ensure you are very well prepared for life beyond school.

The curriculum is good and is well matched to your needs and aspirations. Enrichment opportunities, for example those provided during activities weeks are excellent and make a very good contribution to your personal development. Lessons have a 'can-do' culture and teachers have high expectations for your achievement. This degree of challenge is however not always reflected in the individual targets that you are set as these are often quickly exceeded. Activities in lessons are varied, increasing your engagement and enjoyment, and your learning is enhanced by the effective use of ICT. You are often involved in assessing your work yourselves and commented that this help you understand how to improve. The care, guidance and support that you receive are outstanding. This supports your personal development very effectively and promotes your academic achievement. Your progress is monitored efficiently and you are helped to get back on track quickly if you are having difficulties.

All leaders and staff are highly committed to improving the school further and are well placed to do so. You are certainly playing your part in this, well done!

Yours sincerely

Katrina Gueli

Her Majesty's Inspector