

Carmel Roman Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114324
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	325992
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed section 5 under the same Act

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,154
Sixth form	246
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Alan Mitchell
Principal	Mr James O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	The Headlands Darlington County Durham DL3 8RW
Telephone number	01325 254525
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons, and held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and representatives of the governing body. They observed the college's work, and looked at a selection of documentation such as the college improvement plan and systems for assessing pupils' achievements and monitoring their progress. They analysed the college's examination results, attendance and exclusion data, procedures for safeguarding pupils and a wide range of policies. Inspectors also reviewed a number of case files that illustrated how the college works in partnership with parents and other agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Approximately 17% of parents returned the Ofsted inspection questionnaire and their responses were also analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How well all groups of pupils achieve; including the impact of actions to improve pupils' progress in English.
- The quality of the college's work, particularly teaching and learning.
- Leadership and management of the college.
- The sixth form.

Information about the school

Carmel is an oversubscribed comprehensive college, serving the Catholic community in Darlington local authority and the surrounding areas. It is larger than average and the number of pupils on roll continues to rise both in the main college and the sixth form. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, although a below average proportion is known to be eligible for free college meals. The majority of pupils are White British. Within the small proportion of pupils of minority ethnic heritage, a very small number are in the early stages of speaking English. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, as is the number who has a statement of special educational need.

The college attained Technology College status in 1995 and became a High Performing Specialist College in 2005. It gained a second specialism in Applied Learning in 2005. It is also a Training School for post-graduate certificate in education students across Darlington as well as an accredited Initial Teacher Training provider for the delivery of qualified teacher status to graduate trainees. The college holds a wide range of national awards including Chartermark, Artsmark; Investors in People, The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents award, the International Schools and the National Inclusive Schools awards.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

One parent's comment: 'This college treats every child as an individual. Children excel academically because they are praised, nurtured and cared for in a very positive climate', eloquently sums up exactly what Carmel is about. Strong visionary leadership from the Principal provides a constant driving force and a culture of care, support and continuous improvement. Senior leaders very successfully promote the college's shared vision. This is seen in the outstanding achievements, personal development, attitudes and behaviour of pupils across the college. There is a shared sense of pride among all those who work and learn here. Pupils develop as mature, confident, responsible and caring members of this inclusive community and are exceedingly well prepared for their future lives as citizens in an increasingly diverse and complex world.

Pupils make excellent progress in their learning regardless of their background, starting points or learning difficulty and/or disability. They enter the college with attainment that is generally above the national average, attain highly and make better progress than similar pupils in comparable schools.

Carmel is a college where standing still is not considered as an option. Leaders have successfully built on the strengths and tackled the few areas for improvement identified in the last inspection and have outstanding capacity to improve. Self-evaluation procedures are incisive and involve managers, staff and governors. These procedures are based on a detailed analysis of information and resulting priorities and areas identified for further improvement are tackled resolutely. For example, very good action has been taken to make sure that pupils' progress in English is now as impressive as that in mathematics and science. The tenacious analysis by staff of pupil performance data ensures that work is well matched to their needs and interests. Senior leaders and middle managers are successfully held accountable for their pupils' performance. They relish their roles and responsibilities and speak highly of the support and professional development opportunities provided. They also value the range of opportunities they have to influence developments across the college.

The college's specialisms have been very effective in promoting pupils' high attainment and progress and specialist targets in design technology, science and mathematics are regularly met and often exceeded. The college's specialisms not only enhance opportunities available to pupils but increasingly involve families, the community and local schools in the enrichment of their own learning experiences.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The college's leaders are already successfully tackling all the minor points that could be improved in order to ensure the college maintains and builds on its outstanding effectiveness.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

Pupils' very high attendance rates and promptness to lessons are indicators of their outstanding enjoyment. Relationships between pupils and staff are of the highest order. Such attributes contribute to the exemplary attitudes, behaviour and involvement of pupils seen in lessons. Consequently, they attain high standards and make at least good, and often outstanding, progress in their learning. Because of the strong focus on valuing every pupil, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the small proportion of pupils from ethnic minority communities, looked after children, pupils entitled to free college meals, traveller pupils and those experiencing temporary difficulties in their lives all make similar progress to their peers.

Standards across the main college have been consistently high for many years, particularly in mathematics and science. Results for 2008 show that this picture of high attainment has continued and improved further. English results in the higher levels at both key stages have tended to be above average but not as strong. The school has taken decisive action to improve standards in English and inspection evidence showed they have been successful in this task. For example, current Year 11 pupils took the English language GCSE examination in November and 25% achieved grades A* or A.

Parents, staff and pupils say that pupils are very safe in college. Many opportunities are provided, through the rich curriculum and partnership working, to ensure they have a clear understanding of how to be safe. For example, the fire service, police, health professionals and transport staff work with pupils to help them understand risks, including rail safety. Many activities and aspects of the curriculum promote pupils' physical health and support their very good understanding of what they need to be healthy. This enables them to make well informed personal lifestyle choices. Pupils particularly rate the impressive range of sporting opportunities available within and beyond the college day.

The care and respect pupils show for adults and fellow pupils in college is impressive and pupils are helpful, considerate and thoughtful. They embrace readily all of the opportunities to take part in the full life of the college and they express a strong sense of belonging to it. Pupils have many opportunities to reflect and explore spiritual, moral, ethical and social issues as well as considering the diversity of cultures and faiths within their immediate community and beyond. Such understanding is celebrated in the variety of colourful and thought provoking displays across the college.

Pupils' views are canvassed regularly and these inform developments. They make outstanding contributions to the wider community, including their charity work that extends across the globe. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of the world of

work, through, for example, work shadowing and placement at local engineering firms and courses such as travel and tourism.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

High quality teaching ensures that pupils make the best possible progress in their lessons. First-rate relationships and teachers' excellent subject knowledge harnesses pupils' enthusiasm and help maintain very high levels of interest. Teachers and pupils have high expectations of what is possible to achieve. This is evident in the substantial amount of work that pupils produce in lessons and their good or exceptional progress. Marking is often of a very high quality. For example in art, pupils learn to assess their own work as well as the work of their peers, closely supported and monitored by outstanding informative comments from the teacher.

One of the key ingredients enabling the outstanding progress made by all pupils is teachers' use of the highly effective and sophisticated assessment strategies that are embedded across the college. Staff systematically monitor and track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils and target interventions where necessary to ensure that no pupil is left behind, and all make rapid progress in their learning. Pupils are fully involved in evaluating the progress they are making in lessons and tests and know exactly what they need to do to improve further.

The outstanding curriculum is continually developed to ensure it offers a wide variety of vocational as well as academic courses which are very well matched to individual needs. An additional strength is the extensive range of extra-curricular activities in which a large number of pupils participate and achieve highly.

Teachers know their pupils extremely well and care for them very effectively. The college works closely with outside agencies and parents to help to ensure pupils who face challenging circumstances have the best possible support. There is very good

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

support for younger pupils coming into college and links with feeder primary schools are particularly noteworthy. One Year 8 student said, 'we felt we knew a lot about the college and the teachers before we came so we weren't scared'. The Emmaus Centre is exceptionally effective at supporting those pupils who find difficulty in becoming fully engaged in their learning. It provides a safe haven for pupils experiencing any kind of emotional or behavioural difficulty.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Because each pupil is valued as an individual, every effort is made to include all pupils into the life of the college, to help them achieve their potential and to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all. This can be seen in the high attainment of all groups of pupils and the way staff go out of their way to make sure their needs and interests are met. Their very effective safeguarding procedures assure the safety of pupils. The college values diversity and through its curriculum, and work locally, nationally and globally, promotes community cohesion very well.

Highly effective partnership working is assiduously focused on adding value to the work of the college and supporting vulnerable pupils in times of need. The college is outward looking, and shares its expertise locally and nationally. It is at the forefront of development and dissemination of best practice. Such actions guarantee that pupils access the best possible expertise available to support them during their time in college. Senior leaders work tirelessly to improve the ways they communicate with parents and carers. They listen to the views and take action as a result. For example, they canvass views through questionnaires; provide newsletters and hold termly academic mentoring days. Following concerns of parents, the college invested heavily in providing strong and secure lockers for pupils. They have recently launched a parent's website to improve communications further.

Governance is strong. Governors play a full and active part in evaluating the work of the college. They challenge and support senior leaders very effectively to ensure the college continues to provide the best possible experiences to pupils. Financial arrangements are monitored rigorously and, given the outstanding achievement, attendance and enjoyment of pupils, the college provides very good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1

Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	1
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The outstanding quality of education provided to sixth form students affords such a secure bridge between GCSE and the rigours of advanced study that even the weakest A level candidates are assured a measure of success. Many of these students do not have the qualifications that other providers require, yet after two years they successfully enter university to study on degree courses. The quality of teaching and the guidance and support that students receive are of the highest order, enabling them to achieve well and reach better standards than might be expected in an area where a proportion of homes are not geared towards study after the age of sixteen. There are many wonderful success stories of individual students who have reached university against the odds. However, not all sixth formers study for A level qualifications. A small but important number go directly to apprenticeships or straight into work because the vocational computer courses provide them with skills that are sought after by local employers.

Retention rates are very high so the vast majority of students who begin advanced courses achieve well and gain valuable qualifications at the end of them. In many respects, sixth form results are above average. For example, pass rates on vocational courses are good and overall A level results in the range A to E are above average. The way that students develop personal skills which will eventually equip them for the next stage of education or employment is outstanding. They speak highly of their opportunities at Carmel and present as very mature and confident young adults who have very well developed social skills. Their attendance at college is extremely good because they enjoy their education and recognise the high quality of the lessons and extra support that they receive. The entire programme is rooted in a relentless drive towards higher standards and excellent levels of support for the individual. The robust system of tracking students' progress is showing that current standards are rising in response to managers' actions to ensure that any weaknesses in subjects are eliminated and lessons are made more interesting. Independent study skills linked to university requirements are being developed extremely well. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. They are responsible for the outstanding programme that the students are privileged to receive.

Outcomes for pupils in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1

Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

As a no-notice inspection, parents had only one day to respond to the inspection questionnaire. Nevertheless, 190 responses were received. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education and care the college provides. 97% consider the college is well led and managed. A similar proportion says their children enjoy college, make good progress and consider they are well informed about their child's progress. 99% believe their children are safe. Around 90% say staff listen to parents' concerns and a slightly higher percentage consider staff deal effectively with any incidents of unacceptable behaviour. Very few parents added negative comments to their responses and some glowing additional comments were received. A handful of parents indicated some concerns around academic mentoring days, but others commented on their usefulness.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

27 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Carmel Roman Catholic College, Darlington DL3 8RW

Thank you for making the inspection team and myself so welcome when we arrived unannounced to inspect your college recently. It was very good to see how positively you dealt with the situation. We were very impressed with your behaviour and you are great ambassadors for your college and community. Nearly all parents who completed the inspection questionnaire were very positive about the quality of education and care you receive.

You attend an outstanding college that has continued to improve since the last inspection. You attain highly and make very good progress in your learning because of your outstanding attitudes, exemplary behaviour and the very good relationships you have developed between each other and your teachers. The care, support and guidance you are given are of the highest quality and you strongly believe there are always people there to support you in times of need. Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is second to none. Other outstanding elements include:

- the leadership and management of the college
- the quality of teaching and the curriculum you are provided with which help you to make such rapid progress in lessons
- the regular and rigorous assessment of your work which ensures you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve
- the wide range of extra activities that you can and do take part in and your contributions to the life of the college and your local community
- the action taken to make sure you are very well prepared for your future lives as citizens in an increasingly diverse and complex world.

We can see that Mr O'Neill and his leadership team know exactly what to do to continue to provide an outstanding education for you so we have not identified any further areas for improvement. Thank you once again; and, on behalf of the team, I wish you all the very best during your remaining time in college and the future.

Yours sincerely,
Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

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