

# Our Lady's RC Sports College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105576
<b>Local Authority</b>	Manchester
<b>Inspection number</b>	336524
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 March 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Leszek Iwaskow 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 of pupils on the school roll</b>	745
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr John Lamb
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Teresa Dervin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14 March 2007
<b>School address</b>	Alworth Road Higher Blackley Manchester M9 0RP
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 35 lessons, observed 36 teachers and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at school policies and procedures, data and analysis about students' current and past performance, schemes of work, subject leaders' files, students' work, monitoring reports and 67 parental questionnaires.

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

- attainment and progress, especially in English, mathematics and science, to determine whether progress is being made securely and quickly enough
- the quality of learning in a range of different subjects to establish whether teaching is both challenging and supportive to enable all students to succeed
- whether the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of all students
- how effectively the school promotes students' personal development especially good behaviour, attendance and punctuality
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels in improving students' outcomes and developing classroom practice.

## Information about the school

This smaller than average Catholic High School lies on the north-eastern outskirts of Manchester and serves an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for a free school meal is more than three times the national average. Most students are of White British heritage but there is an increasing number entering the school from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, as is the proportion of those whose first language is not, or is believed not to be, English. A slightly higher than average percentage of students are boys. Our Lady's has been a specialist high school since September 2003. The school is currently involved in the Greater Manchester Challenge Project aimed at raising standards and has recently moved into new purpose-built accommodation.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

Our Lady's Roman Catholic High School is an improving school. The move to new premises heralds a new beginning but also a realisation that there is still a great deal of hard work ahead before the school's vision of 'wanting the school to be the very best it can be' is achieved. Firm foundations have now been laid on which improvement can be fast-tracked.

Current provision is satisfactory overall and reflects the fact that although there have been improvements in some aspects such as, behaviour and rising standards, including English, there still remain weaknesses in key subjects such as mathematics and science. Low attendance and punctuality to lessons continues to cause concern as improvement here has only been very gradual. The increase in numbers of students taking vocational subjects has boosted the numbers attaining five A\* to C grades in external examinations but has also reduced the academic options for the more-able students. Standards remain low but are improving. However, given their below average starting points, many students make at least satisfactory progress. Nevertheless, the most-able are not always sufficiently challenged in some lessons and in some subjects and fail to reach their full potential.

A strict discipline code has improved behaviour and enabled students to focus better on their learning. Attitudes in most lessons are positive and students make better progress in those where they can become practically involved in their learning. Currently, provision is not consistent across the school and there remain some curriculum areas such as science, mathematics and social sciences where there is a concentration on coverage of content rather than on the quality of learning. Progress, in these lessons, is often at best satisfactory with more-able students, in particular, not being challenged by many of the mundane tasks set. Where lessons are prescriptive and dominated by teachers, students are often passive recipients of information. Where learning is good, lessons are more interactive and discussion is encouraged rather than stifled. Teachers' use of assessment information is developing and is currently satisfactory. Sometimes, activities are not planned well enough to be able to take students onto the next step in their learning.

The curriculum is evolving as the school considers the best way to meet students' needs. Vulnerable and disaffected students are well catered for in terms of support and alternative pathways, as is evidenced by the small numbers of students who fail to continue into employment, education or training. Innovative approaches, such as 'Extended Learning Fridays' are also discouraging absenteeism. However, weaknesses in several subjects mean that aspects of community cohesion are not well developed and requirements for citizenship are only partially met due to a fragmented approach to

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planning. Students' experiences, however, are enriched by the wide range of sporting opportunities open to them which reflects the positive impact of the specialism of the school on students' healthy lifestyles, self-esteem and growing confidence in their own ability to succeed.

The school does many things well. Students are generally positive about the recent improvements inside the classroom and around the school. They have noticed the impact the move to the new building has made towards improving behaviour and they comment positively about the healthy quality of the catering. They feel that the school is a much calmer and safer environment and, as a result, the quality of their lives has improved. The strong emphasis on reducing disaffection is commented on very positively by those students who have been well supported and advised. As one student remarked, 'The school has given me another chance in life.' Good care and guidance are key aspects of students' personal development and growth. Parents are generally positive about the school and what it is accomplishing for their children.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. The school has been very honest in analysing weaknesses in provision and is clear that improvements need to be fast-tracked in several areas, notably in science, mathematics and the social sciences. Management and governors are well placed to drive forward these improvements. There is a clear vision and understanding that underperformance needs to be challenged more rigorously. Staffing issues have slowly been resolved and there is now a clear determination to take the school forward. Current staffing has a youthful profile, is relatively inexperienced but is enthusiastic and teachers have confidence that collectively they can make a difference to the lives of the students in their care. Senior managers are aware that this energy needs to be nurtured and supported if their vision for the future is to become secure.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that the development of consistently high quality leadership at all levels contributes to:
  - improvements in standards and provision particularly in science, mathematics and the social sciences
  - providing greater challenge, especially for the more-able students through: learning based on enquiry rather than instruction; tasks which build well on previous work; better use of technology to stimulate thinking; providing more opportunities for students to discuss and exchange ideas.
- Providing a relevant curriculum that meets the needs of all students, by:
  - ensuring a wider range of pathways are available for more-able students, in particular, who wish to follow a more academic route
  - ensuring that requirements for citizenship are fully met identifying more clearly how community cohesion can be reinforced through lessons
  - continuing improvement in attendance and punctuality to lessons.

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- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

Students enter the school with attainment and skills which are below the national average. Standards remain low but are improving. Students attaining five A\* to C grades in examinations have increased to 71% due to increased success, especially across a range of vocational options. When English and mathematics are included however, improvement has been more gradual with 33% of students attaining five A\* to C grades. Results from early entry this year show that this is due to accelerate to 40% with the higher grades. However, few students attain the very highest grades. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has varied over time depending on the nature of the group. A very small hard core of persistent absentees have failed to make progress, whilst most students have made at least satisfactory progress. There still remain weaknesses in certain areas, notably mathematics and science which nevertheless does not detract from an overall upward trend.

Students have positive attitudes in lessons and generally behave well. Progress made in lessons is variable with least progress observed in mathematics, science and the social sciences. Students responded best in those lessons which had a practical component and which clearly built on previous learning or which they perceived as being relevant. For example, a good lesson on poverty consolidated students' previous experiences when they had participated in 'The Trading Game' during their Extended Learning Friday session. A mix of humour, video clips, paired work and group discussion enabled students to explore the key issues, express their emotions, develop their thinking and challenge their own materialistic values. In contrast, progress was stifled and students were less motivated when lessons were dull, too easy or dominated by the teacher. This encouraged a dependency culture with an over-reliance on the teacher to provide the information or answers and where teaching fails to stimulate the more-able students in particular. Where tasks are closely controlled by the teacher the great majority of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress, but few make good progress. The wide range of sporting opportunities and the reorganised Extended Learning Friday curriculum have proved motivational in encouraging better attendance from many potential absentees. However, the number of persistent absentees remains too high. Lessons are also frequently delayed by students arriving late. Poor attendance, along with weak punctuality and below average skills in mathematics means students are only satisfactorily prepared for their future working lives.

The recent move to the new purpose-built premises and firm discipline by staff have improved behaviour both in lessons and around the school. Students comment positively about the increasing impact this is beginning to have on their learning. They also feel their new environment is much safer. There are positive relationships around the school

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which reflects the caring Catholic ethos. Students are sociable and offer each other mutual support. There are fewer incidents of bullying and these are resolved promptly. Students are aware of the need for rules and the consequences that result from their actions. The sporting culture around the school encourages teamwork. Students make a good contribution to life in school. They are also becoming increasingly involved in a number of community activities, several linked to outreach sports-leadership work in local schools.

Students have a good understanding of the need to lead healthy lifestyles. Widespread participation in sport supports this well and students are justifiably proud of their many sporting successes. School meals are nutritious, well-balanced and there is an increasing take up. The new canteen has been given a positive 'thumbs up' in terms of variety and improved quality. Unfortunately, best intentions at school are not always continued when students return home. Students tend to be insular in their outlook and have a more limited view of the diversity of the world beyond Blackley. Opportunities to develop a wider understanding of other faiths and cultures through the curriculum, and especially in social sciences, are sometimes missed.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>3</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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## How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although there are wide disparities across faculties. Consistently good teaching was observed in those faculties which were well managed, had a clear focus on learning and where the curriculum was well planned and relevant. Weaker teaching was synonymous with those areas which were less well organised, where the planning was focused on coverage of content and where there had been little emphasis on improving the delivery of lessons. In weaker lessons, the focus is often on the teaching rather than the learning. These lessons were often characterised by:

- teachers often dominating input and discussion
- low-level tasks which occupied students rather than challenged their thinking
- oral instructions which lacked clarity
- activities for students which were not always based on prior learning and did not meet the needs of all students, particularly the more able
- technology often being used as a substitute for the whiteboard by providing students with information rather than engaging them in meaningful interaction
- compliant and passive students displaying a lack of exuberance about their learning.

Students especially enjoyed those lessons which were practical and which enabled them to work collaboratively. In these lessons:

- teachers had clear and attainable objectives for the lesson
- students clearly understood what they needed to do because the tasks had been clearly modelled
- a wider variety of teaching approaches made learning accessible and interesting
- there was clear progression in the learning with tasks building well on previous work
- technology was used to stimulate ideas and bring learning to life
- humour reflected positive relationships and a growing interest in learning.

The curriculum is currently acknowledged as being 'a work in progress'. There is a clear determination to make it more relevant to the students and to support improvements.

The school recognises the need to engage with students to bring about more improvement. New innovative and creative approaches such as Extended Learning Fridays, when more traditional lessons are suspended for an extended full-day session linked to faculty priorities, are proving popular in engaging students and have led to increased attendance on that day. When the planned for extended activities are integrated into to a cohesive programme of lessons on other days of the week, this adds real quality to students learning allowing them time to explore issues in greater depth. Unfortunately, this is not consistent across all faculty areas and weak planning can lead to a disjointed curriculum which is faced with further pressure to complete coverage rather than extend learning. Provision for citizenship is fragmented and is currently under review.

Alternative pathways linked to apprenticeships and other work placements have proved successful in re-engaging the interest of a number of disaffected students. This has



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significantly reduced the numbers of young people who fail to continue in education, employment or training. Equally, the range of vocational examination choices offered meets the needs of the majority of students. However, those more- able students who may wish to pursue a more academic route are less well catered for. The school recognises the need to provide a more balanced curriculum and is reviewing provision and exploring alternative options. The curriculum is also enriched by a wide range of sporting extra-curricular activities. However, opportunities to broaden students' insight into the diversity of the world beyond Blackley are less well developed in several subject areas.

The school prides itself on the care and support it offers students especially those from vulnerable groups and with learning difficulties. Pastoral support for students is good reflecting the firm but fair caring ethos that permeates school life. This is reflected particularly in the improved behaviour around the school. Good use is made of external agencies and partners to not only support students but also to raise aspirations. This has been particularly successful for several of those students who were disaffected. The sports specialism provides a very useful additional outlet for students in helping to raise their self-esteem and in promoting a desire to succeed. This has also proved useful in ensuring students are kept within education, training and employment. There are clear systems in place for target setting and tracking students' progress. While the data gathered help to identify and monitor progress, the use of data to support learning is not effective enough in all classrooms to support learning. It is best in those faculty areas which are well managed and organised.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The school has emerged from a relatively difficult period in its history with a new building, a strong sense of purpose and a new belief that it can make a real difference to the lives of the students in its care. The need to make many staff changes, the disruptive impact of preparing to move into new premises and problems recruiting staff in some curriculum areas have meant that progress in some aspects has been slow. Attendance, although improving, still remains an issue to be addressed. Equally, although progress has been made in improving behaviour and raising overall standards, especially in English, weaknesses remain in other areas, notably mathematics and science. However, there is good evidence to show that there are now clear structures in

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place to fast track further improvements based on a well-established and cohesive framework to monitor classroom provision to which the governing body now contributes. There is a shared and clear vision for the school based on firm discipline, the duty of care and the desire to raise the aspirations of students. This is being well-supported through involvement in the Greater Manchester Challenge. The governing body increasingly holds the school to account. It challenges, and supports the school and is more involved in the strategic management and direction of the school.

Management knows the school well and has a clear understanding of those areas which still need further development and improvement. Time and effort has been invested in re-organising middle management into a faculty structure. Although this has been successful in some areas, some faculties have not done enough to improve outcomes for students notably in social sciences, science and mathematics.

Safeguarding systems and procedures are good and these are very high priority within the school. The school promotes equality of opportunity particularly well for groups of more vulnerable students, but acknowledges that there is still some way to go to meet the aspirations of the more able. Relationships with parents and carers are generally positive although the school recognises the need to make even more strenuous efforts to work with hard-to-reach families.

Students' understanding of their own sense of identity is developing. They demonstrate empathy for those from a different culture but have a narrow perspective on the world. Although some good practice was observed, currently the curriculum is not sufficiently developed to provide suitable opportunities for students to study the key concepts of community cohesion. Weaknesses in science, citizenship, history and geography, for example, do not progressively build students' understanding of issues such as diversity, interdependence or sustainability. Apart from a limited link with the town of Lviv in the Ukraine, the school has no contact with schools in other countries or contrasting places, which can provide students with experience of other localities and cultures and broaden their horizons.

Given the staffing difficulties experienced, satisfactory use is made of the resources available. These have been used well to increase and improve students' welfare. The move to new purpose-built accommodation is also beginning to have a positive benefit on overall provision. However, the current lack of outside space does limit opportunities for students to let off steam and socialise during breaks and lunchtime.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>

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<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

### **Views of parents and carers**

Only a small number of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Most were pleased with the way the school was meeting the needs of their children and the care that was being provided. The limited response makes it difficult to draw further statistically sound conclusions from the returns received.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Our Lady's RC High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 67 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 745 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	42	36	54	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	28	42	38	57	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	35	52	28	42	2	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	43	37	55	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	29	43	37	55	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	31	37	55	6	9	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	34	39	58	4	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	20	30	36	54	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	33	37	55	5	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	34	38	57	3	4	2	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	21	44	66	1	1	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	20	30	40	60	4	6	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	52	30	45	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

# Glossary

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

## Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



23 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Our Lady's RC High School, Manchester, M9 0RP

Thank you for making me and my team of inspectors feel very welcome. This letter is to tell you what we found. We particularly enjoyed talking to you about your lessons, the activities you are involved in and how you are treated and looked after. We found what you told us helped us come to the decision that your school is an improving school which provides you with a satisfactory standard of education. Although there are some aspects which are good, particularly the way in which the school supports and looks after you, there remain areas which need to be better.

You are proud of your school and are supportive of the many positive changes that have occurred recently, especially since you moved into your new building. You remarked that behaviour is much better and you feel much safer. The stricter discipline code and close-circuit cameras are making a difference. As a result, you are better able to get on with your work in lessons and you and your parents are justifiably proud of the recent improvement in examination results. You particularly enjoy practical lessons such as physical education and the performing arts where you can 'show off' and develop your talents but you also find some subjects more mundane and less interesting. We have asked the teachers to improve lessons in some subjects such as mathematics and science especially, where standards are still low. Teachers in all lessons are also going to try to make your work more challenging in order to push you to get the highest grades possible. We have also asked them to look at what they actually teach and make the learning more meaningful and relevant for you.

In your turn, you must also play your part. A small number of you do not attend school regularly and this makes it difficult for you to succeed. Also, many lessons are starting late because some of you are delayed in getting to class. Mrs Dervin is determined to work with all your teachers to ensure that improvements are put in place as soon as possible in order that the school can move forward. With your help and cooperation I am sure they will succeed. On behalf of the inspection team I wish you all the best for your future lives and careers.

Yours sincerely

Mr Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector



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