

Our Lady and St John Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119790
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	379889
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Not Applicable
Number of pupils on the school roll	930
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Jude Harrison
Headteacher	Colette Gillen
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 43 lessons taught by 41 teachers, one cover supervisor and one behaviour support assistant. Inspectors held meetings with school leaders, groups of students, governors, staff and the School Improvement Partner. They observed the school's work, and scrutinised a range of documents including students' work books, school policies, records relating to safeguarding, improvement plans, minutes of meetings, monitoring reports and the school's self-evaluation. They analysed 125 questionnaires received from parents and carers, 146 completed by students and 49 by staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The progress made by groups of students, particularly girls, and whether this is rapid enough to raise attainment.
- The effectiveness of the school's care, guidance and support, particularly with regard to improving attendance, raising aspirations and enhancing achievement.
- The impact of the school's work in promoting basic skills across the curriculum.
- The consistency and accuracy of leaders at all levels in evaluating performance and implementing improvement strategies.

Information about the school

Our Lady and St John Catholic College is an 11–18 comprehensive school, with specialism in arts and applied learning, situated on the outskirts of Blackburn. A sixth form vocational centre opened in 2009 and admits students from local high schools and a neighbouring special school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is around double the national figure. A higher than average proportion of students is identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. An above average percentage of students are from minority ethnic groups, of whom the majority speak English as an additional language. The school is accredited as an Investor in People and has gained the Inclusion Award. It is part of a Building Schools for the Future project which will result in extensive remodelling and refurbishment of its current premises.

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 and St John Catholic College is an inclusive, nurturing school that provides a satisfactory education for its students. The headteacher, senior leaders and governors articulate a clear vision for the school's development and are firmly committed to removing barriers to students' achievement, raising their aspirations and preparing them to be responsible, successful citizens. Attainment is well below average, particularly when considering the proportion of students leaving school with five or more good GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics. In the past, girls and students known to be eligible for free school meals have attained lower results than boys, but these gaps are now closing. Inspection evidence indicates that performance will rise significantly in 2012 as students' progress has accelerated quickly and securely, particularly in mathematics where it has been weaker. Behaviour is good; the vast majority of students are courteous, polite and caring. A large number of students take on responsibilities in school and make a significant contribution to the wider community. The vast majority feel safe and enjoy all that the school has to offer, including an impressive range of extra-curricular activities. Attendance remains low, despite the concerted efforts made by school to improve it. Students demonstrate positive attitudes that equip them well for the next stage in their education or for the world of work. However, their skills in writing are less well developed than their other skills. The school's specialist college status makes a valuable contribution to the students' enjoyment, self-esteem and team-working capabilities.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing proportion that is good and a small amount that is outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and strong relationships with students. Many lessons are interesting and vibrant but sometimes teachers spend too long providing information and instructions and this results in students becoming passive and progress slowing. On occasions, students who are reluctant to answer questions in class are not sufficiently encouraged to participate. Teachers' marking of work is regular and celebrates students' achievements, but there is inconsistency in how errors in spelling and sentence structure are addressed so students do not always correct mistakes. The school provides a good curriculum, with increased opportunities at Key Stage 4 for students to choose pathways that suit their aptitudes and interests. Pastoral care continues to be a significant strength of the school. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive excellent personal support. All students make satisfactory progress but tightly-focused monitoring, advice and support are ensuring that progress is beginning to accelerate.

The headteacher and senior leaders are taking rigorous and appropriate action to embed improvement. Self-evaluation at all levels is undertaken conscientiously but there is inconsistency in its quality and the entire range of evidence is not always fully explored, so that some judgements are too generous. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. There has been concerted, effective action to eradicate inadequate teaching, secure good behaviour and accelerate progress. There are clear plans in place to raise achievement and a 'can do' culture permeates the school, epitomised by the outstanding and innovative sixth form vocational centre which provides young people with excellent opportunities to access high-quality training and gain qualifications in state-of-the-art premises.

Up to 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further accelerate progress and raise attainment, especially of girls and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Raise attendance and reduce the number of students who are persistently absent from school.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or outstanding by:
 - providing a greater range of opportunities for students to work independently and collaboratively
 - ensuring that all students participate actively in lessons
 - improving the consistency of feedback to students, particularly regarding the development of their basic skills.
- Ensure that self-evaluation at all levels takes wide-ranging evidence into account.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students enjoy their learning when they are actively engaged in lessons, when tasks are varied and when their achievements are celebrated. They particularly appreciate the time that teachers make available to support them if they are having difficulties with a piece of work. Their enthusiasm for learning decreases when they are required to listen for too long to information or explanations or when they are unclear about the purpose of their work. The great majority of students behave well and apply themselves readily to their learning. However, some show reluctance to express their ideas in an extended way when answering questions. Students work cooperatively in groups, respect each other's viewpoints and readily offer support to each other, including in the mixed-age tutor groups where older students help younger ones, for instance with their reading. Inspectors observed good or outstanding progress being made in lessons where students were challenged to think for themselves and explore ideas in depth. Progress was only satisfactory in lessons

where activities failed to generate interest or when students could disengage because there was reliance on volunteers answering questions.

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. Attainment in GCSE examinations was well below average in 2010 and 2011, but there are robust indications, from the school's tracking, from lesson observations and from results achieved by students in recent modular assessments, that it is set to rise in 2012. Students enter the school with below average prior attainment. They make satisfactory progress, which is accelerating securely as a result of improved teaching, particularly in mathematics, and swifter intervention to support students identified as making less than expected progress. The school recognises that there has been underachievement for some girls and for students known to be eligible for free school meals, and has taken action to boost their confidence, increase their engagement and improve their results. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at a similar rate to that of their peers. Some make very good progress when they are provided with specific support, through the school's teaching assistants, mentors, behaviour support workers and counsellor.

The vast majority of students think that the school is a safe environment. They report that incidents of bullying or harassment are extremely rare and that they are addressed effectively. Recently, students from the school have produced a powerful film about the dangers of sexual exploitation, which is used as a teaching resource in other schools. They have a mature awareness of internet safety. Students participate enthusiastically in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including various sports. Students understand what constitutes healthy eating and enjoy the nutritious meals provided in school. Attendance remains low, despite regular monitoring and intervention by the school, and the number of students who are persistently absent from school for a variety of reasons is too high. Most students develop skills satisfactorily to equip them for life beyond school. They are punctual, smartly dressed and take responsibility for their own actions. Their skills in using information and communication technology are good, although their writing skills tend to be weaker.

Students make a positive contribution to the school community through their courteous behaviour and their willingness to take on additional responsibilities, as prefects, counsellors and team leaders. They have raised money for a wide range of local charities that they have researched and selected themselves. Through the school's arts specialism, they take opportunities to perform in their local primary schools, as well as producing dance, drama and musical events in their own school, which are highly regarded by the community. The school's inclusive ethos underpins Interfaith projects that strongly support the integration and mutual understanding of students from different ethnic and faith backgrounds. As one student commented, 'If you come to Our Lady and St John's you are part of our family.'

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing amount that is good and some practice that is outstanding. This was the case in an inspirational music lesson that exemplified independent learning, precise assessment, positive self-esteem and impressive teamwork. Students' enjoyment was evident as they rose to significant challenge, willingly performing to their peers and responding to sensitive feedback. Similarly, in a highly effective mathematics lesson students enjoyed solving a complex problem about budgeting for a holiday and made strong progress because they were provided with a clear framework and sufficient time to explore their thinking collaboratively. On occasions progress slows when students spend too long listening to information or when questioning is directed to volunteers and others in the class become passive. Teachers assess students' work regularly and accurately but they do not always indicate weaknesses in spelling and sentence structure and there is no clear expectation as to how students should respond to written feedback.

An increased focus on skills acquisition at Key Stage 3, including through an effective integrated humanities programme, is helping students to make links between subjects and accelerating their progress in reading and writing. The school has worked hard to promote a reading culture, including through initiatives such as 'Book and Brew' which are highly regarded by participants. Pathways offered at Key Stage 4 enable students to select accredited courses that match their interests and support their future plans. A varied enrichment programme encourages students to develop their talents, and is particularly vibrant in drama, dance and music.

The quality of pastoral care is a continuing strength of the school and strong multi-agency working ensures that students are safe, happy and making improved progress. An effective transition programme ensures that students are well supported as they enter the school. Robust action to tackle poor attendance is having a positive impact and attendance rates are beginning to rise for all groups of students.

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The well-established leadership team articulates a clear vision for the school which staff and students subscribe to. Leaders have taken effective action to secure improvement, including to the standard of behaviour and quality of teaching. Their ambition and innovative thinking are reflected in the development of the vibrant new sixth form centre. Governors are committed to the school, discharge their responsibilities diligently and provide welcome support to staff and students. Safeguarding is given high priority and the school's policies to ensure students' safety are very effective. The school functions as a harmonious, inclusive community where no form of harassment is tolerated and equal opportunities are promoted. However, girls and students known to be eligible for free school meals do not always make the progress they should. There are strong and imaginative links with local and international communities that shape students' understanding and promote community cohesion well. Leaders at all levels monitor their areas of responsibility regularly and develop appropriate plans as a result. Aspects of self-evaluation are overgenerous and the school recognises that its analysis sometimes overlooks useful sources of evidence.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form centre provides vocational education at levels 1-3 for students who have previously attended Our Lady and St John Catholic College, as well as those from various high schools and a local special school. It is an inspirational setting that, in its short time of operation, has had a powerful impact on the aspirations and skills

of those who attend. The teaching and support received by every individual are carefully personalised and enable them to make excellent progress. Course completion rates are high and there is effective, supported transition into employment or higher education. Teaching, including that provided by staff who have professional expertise and skills from their experience working in a range of industries, successfully engages, challenges and motivates students. The sixth form centre is a valuable resource within the community and is rightly regarded with great pride by all those connected with it. The leadership of the sixth form centre is outstanding at all levels. The school clearly recognised a local need and made a brave decision to create provision that has the capacity to enhance the life chances of students, some of whom have complex special educational needs.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire indicated that they are happy with their children’s education. They feel that the school is well led, keeps their children safe and takes account of their views. They believe that teaching is good. One parent noted, ‘I am grateful to a teacher who sent home detailed individual advice on how my child should complete a piece of maths that she had found difficult. This was tremendously helpful.’ This comment was echoed by others who provided evidence of staff making considerable efforts to support students with their learning or with pastoral issues. A small number of parents expressed concerns regarding the standard of behaviour in school. Inspectors took particular note of this viewpoint by observing students’ behaviour around the school premises during social times as well as in lessons, and by scrutinising behaviour records. They found behaviour to be good and its management to be sensitive and effective.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Our Lady and St John Catholic College 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 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 930 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	51	41	71	57	2	2	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	42	34	80	64	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	29	73	58	8	6	3	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	42	34	70	56	2	2	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	42	34	77	62	3	2	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	24	76	61	10	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	24	81	65	6	5	1	1
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)	36	29	71	57	6	5	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	32	74	59	5	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	34	68	54	7	6	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	26	70	56	6	5	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	44	35	73	58	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	54	43	66	53	0	0	1	1

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



14 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Our Lady and St John Catholic College, Blackburn, BB1 1PY

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Many of you gave up your time to speak to us and to complete questionnaires. You were also very helpful when we visited your lessons. You told us how much your school has improved recently and we agree with you. We judge that you receive a satisfactory quality of education and that most of you are making progress that will help you to reach challenging targets. We were particularly impressed with the impact that being an arts college has on your lives and on your community. We think that most of you behave very well and that you really play your part in making the school a pleasant, safe and inclusive place to be. The sixth form vocational centre is outstanding and offers excellent opportunities for you to gain qualifications and training if you want to enter particular industries.

We are confident that examination results will rise in 2012, provided of course that you keep working hard! Attendance is too low and this stops some of you from achieving as well as you might. Your headteacher and the staff have high aspirations for the future development of your school and it is good to know that you have been involved in decisions about the transformation of the building in which you are learning. In order to help you do even better and reach higher standards, we have asked the staff to concentrate on some key things:

- Make sure that you make as much progress as possible in order to achieve your highest possible standards.
- Improve attendance and reduce the number of students who are absent too frequently.
- Improve marking so that you know what to do to improve your literacy skills in all subjects.
- Ensure that teachers plan lessons which give you opportunities to work together on varied tasks.

I am sure you will continue to work hard and act on the feedback your teachers give you in order to take your school from strength to strength. On behalf of the inspectors, I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

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