

Mount Carmel Roman Catholic High School

Wordsworth Road, Accrington, Lancashire, BB5 0LU

Inspection dates

13–14 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In 2015, the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was significantly below the national average. Standards in mathematics lag behind those in English.
- Achievement in mathematics requires improvement. Recent improvements are not reflected across all year groups. The quality of teaching in mathematics is strengthening, but outcomes are still variable.
- Gaps in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students, compared to others in the school and nationally, are not yet closing at a swift rate in mathematics and English.
- Teaching and progress declined after the last inspection.
- Occasionally, teachers do not ensure that they match activities to the specific needs of students. Work, particularly for the most-able students, sometimes lacks challenge. These students do not always make the progress they should.
- Occasionally, teaching does not instil strong learning habits to support good achievement. Homework does not always support students' learning.
- Sometimes, teachers miss opportunities to enhance students' numeracy, reading and writing skills.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has astutely recruited new strong leaders and teachers. A successful drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning has led to confident, improved practice.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have implemented robust plans, which are accelerating students' progress after an earlier decline.
- Recently appointed senior and middle leaders are rapidly improving teaching and assessment. Good practice is shared effectively across the school.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and captivate the interest of their students.
- Leaders ensure that students' welfare is a high priority for all staff; they have built a strong culture of care across the school.
- Students' behaviour is good and improving. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Students are well prepared for the responsibilities and diversity of life in modern Britain.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the attainment and progress of students across the school, particularly for the most able and disadvantaged students by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is used confidently by all teachers to provide students with activities which challenge and support them regardless of their academic ability and starting points
 - ensuring that teachers consistently provide effective homework that improves students' progress and instils strong learning habits.
- Accelerate students' progress in mathematics to secure a rapid raising of attainment by the end of Key Stage 4.
- Further strengthen the impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that opportunities for the embedding of students' reading, writing and numeracy skills are strengthened across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has worked assiduously to ensure that all staff share his passion and vision, which include the identification and removal of barriers for learning for students and their families. The restructured leadership team has rapidly steered change and put in place strong systems and routines that are leading to improvements in students' attainment and progress, reversing a decline after the previous inspection.
- Leaders set high expectations of students and staff and have created a culture of respect and tolerance. Leaders at all levels are determined to make a difference to young people's lives. They build positive relationships with staff and ensure appropriate training and support are available to underpin school improvement. Senior leaders model good practice during their weekly meetings with middle leaders, at which they ask challenging questions about teaching and progress.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity and understand the diverse needs of students within their school. Staff and leaders are vigilant and are clear how to protect students from radicalisation and extremism. Discrimination and harassment are not tolerated within the school.
- There has been a substantial change to middle leadership within the school with a significant, positive impact on learning. Teaching is strong and growing in effectiveness. This has greatly accelerated students' progress, but has not had time to overcome a legacy of weak teaching and progress after the previous inspection.
- Middle leaders regularly and systematically review students' progress and identify those who are falling behind; they provide additional support swiftly to help students progress. Participation in joint lesson observations with senior leaders helps to develop middle leaders' understanding of how to improve teaching.
- New leadership in English, science, religious education, humanities, French, design technology, business and information technology is invigorating the teaching and learning, and good practice is shared with teachers. These departments are now growing in strength.
- Leaders' judgements about the impact of teaching over time had not always been consistent. Too much focus had been placed in the past on the observation of individual lessons without taking account of students' achievements. Leaders recognised this issue and adapted their practice; consequently, more recent school information on attainment and progress presents an accurate picture.
- Leaders have worked hard to build positive relationships with parents and the community. They understand the challenges within the local community and find solutions through consulting with parents. Leaders have found creative solutions to improving parents' evening attendance by sensitively meeting the needs of family members. The school has an active parent teacher association, which works alongside leaders at regular school events to support community cohesion. Parents display strong support for the leadership within the school. The school provides clear information to parents about their children's progress and attainment and advises them on ways to support learning.
- Senior leaders celebrate the achievements of students through regular assemblies, awards evenings and detailed and regular newsletters. The use of social media also provides parents with up-to-date information on school activities such as the celebration of the primary netball festival and the recent Year 7 Damascus day and welcome mass.
- The curriculum is of good quality. Leaders review and amend the curriculum to ensure it is appropriate to students' abilities and aspirations, as well as academic development. For example, leaders have implemented a new textiles GCSE due to popular engagement with a textiles lunchtime club. The curriculum is broad and balanced with a good range of enrichment activities available for students to experience.
- Careers guidance is relevant and helpful so that students can make well-informed decisions about their future. All senior leaders meet and discuss students' GCSE choices with parents in Year 9 and ensure that there is a smooth and effective transition into Key Stage 4. Students are well informed about higher education and benefit from a programme of work experience that helps to develop their employability skills. The school provides a range of experts and opportunities to guide students' next steps, including the provision of a careers fair, which hosts representatives from local colleges, further education providers, vocational and apprenticeship providers.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, and has identified strategies that are proving effective. The school is starting to close the gap in attainment and progress

between disadvantaged students, particularly at Key Stage 3. The gaps are wider at Key Stage 4 but are being thoughtfully addressed.

- Staff are positive about the school and its leadership. Successful training is improving the quality of teaching and learning and supporting teachers' development needs. Teachers are rigorously held to account for students' performance by leaders across the school.
- Leaders provide newly qualified teachers and trainees with high-quality support and, consequently, they are developing good teaching skills.
- The school's safeguarding procedures meet requirements and are effective. Leaders keep a close check on the safety, attendance and achievement of the students who study on other sites.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body has been reconstituted and is now smaller, comprising members who have a good blend of experience and skills. The Chair of Governors is passionate about improving the school and pays frequent visits. Strong links between governors, headteacher and senior leaders support effective decision making and accountability. All governors seek appropriate training and understand the information provided to them in reports.
 - Governor committee meetings are directly linked to the needs of school improvement. These meetings allow governors to challenge senior leaders and ask questions regarding the impact of school initiatives and the use and impact of funding across the school.
 - Governors have strong links with curriculum areas and ensure that regular meetings take place with middle leaders so that they have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including the quality of teaching and learning.
 - Governors consider pay progression carefully and only proceed where there is clear evidence that it is justified by teachers' performance. They do not shy away from difficult decisions when teachers' performance falls below par.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Students benefit from good teaching. Lessons are generally well planned to engage students in challenging activities. Teachers' questioning encourages deeper thinking and understanding in most lessons.
- Teachers regularly assess the progress that students make within their classrooms. Teachers frequently use annotated seating plans as brief reminders regarding the specific needs of the students and how to address these needs. Leaders systematically review progress with all teachers, recognising where additional support is required. Support programmes are used effectively to improve outcomes for students.
- In lessons students enjoy their learning, behaviour is positive and they make good progress. Teachers work hard to form good relationships with students; they understand what barriers to learning the students might have, and help them to overcome these barriers. Students feel comfortable in their learning environment; they are keen to contribute and learn from mistakes.
- Teachers show good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects. This secures students' interest in the activities provided, extending knowledge and increasing understanding. However, challenge for the most-able students is occasionally not strong enough to enable them to make maximum progress.
- Marking of students' exercise books and assignment work is frequent. Teachers provide focused feedback and students respond to their suggested next steps. Time is provided to allow students to improve their work in response to their teachers' comments. Students benefit significantly in English through the school's approach to deepening their learning.
- A good proportion of teachers use homework well to raise expectations and consolidate learning, but this approach to instilling strong learning habits is not consistently applied across the school.
- Some teachers plan very well and support students' knowledge and next steps in learning through developing their skills to assess and refine their own work and that of their peers. Students expertly used GCSE grade criteria in drama lessons, for example, to identify how their own performance could be improved. This well-organised peer assessment developed students' confidence and knowledge.
- Leaders provide clear direction on how teachers can improve their own teaching. Good practice is shared across the school through meetings, observations and regular teaching and learning bulletins.

Consequently, teaching and learning have significantly improved across most areas of the school.

- The work in students' books across different subjects indicates that some students struggle with literacy and writing at length. Some teachers use well-structured literacy strategies to support and develop students' writing. Other teachers use effective questioning in lessons to ensure that they can explain their ideas well, although students' comprehension is not always reflected as strongly in their written work. Teachers and leaders are continuing work to address the priority of improving students' extended writing in different subjects.
- Students read in a range of different subjects, but this is inconsistent. The library is used to support learning and is well stocked. Students are encouraged to read books that appeal to their interests. A culture of independent reading for pleasure is better developed at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4; this is reflected in weaker vocabulary development among some students.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported, both in class and in extra sessions delivered by skilled teaching assistants. Younger students with weaker attainment on entry are provided with additional English and mathematics support through a successful small-group approach.
- Inspectors saw examples of where students' mathematical skills were applied in other subjects, for example in science. However, opportunities to develop numeracy skills across the curriculum are at a relatively early stage of development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote students' personal development and welfare is good.
- Students of all ages have a good grounding in how to keep themselves safe. Students access further support and advice through well-structured assembly programmes, special timetabled days and from the school nurse. Students understand the different forms that bullying can take, including prejudice-based and cyber bullying. They say that bullying does sometimes occur but that they trust staff to deal with it quickly on most occasions. Incidences of racism are rare.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is very effective. Parents are positive about the school and would recommend it to others. There is a strong culture of care and nurture, which is appreciated by students and their parents.
- The school site and buildings are safe and secure. Safety procedures are well established around the school, including in science laboratories, where students are well informed on safety procedures. There are effective checks for all visitors to the school and for all staff appointed within the school.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. The school builds a family community through its use of 'peer mentors' – students who guide younger students – and through encouraging a sense of belonging and personal development.
- Students are encouraged to develop beyond the classroom through a range of activities, including sports and charity fund-raising. Archery and fencing are among the popular activities available to enrich students' experience.
- Pastoral care for students is strong, particularly for those who face challenging circumstances. Teachers and support staff build the confidence of the large number of students who have complex needs or whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. Staff liaise effectively with external agencies in cases where further support is required. These students appreciate the care and support that adults in school provide for them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students behave well in lessons and appear happy and content in all parts of the school.
- Students respect the environment, there is virtually no litter around the school, and the atmosphere is one of purposeful calm. Some students choose to attend the chapel mass as a form of worship and appreciate this opportunity.
- Students' attendance is similar to the national average. The school engages well with parents and agencies to improve attendance.
- The school's approach to behaviour management encourages students to reflect on the causes and consequences of any poor behaviour. This approach, combined with the temporary isolation within school

of any students whose behaviour may interfere with others' learning, has led to the effective reduction in the rate of fixed-term exclusion.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Students' achievement requires improvement.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils who attained five GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was significantly below the national average. This cohort included an untypically high number of students who had joined the school at a later stage in their secondary schooling.
- The progress made by disadvantaged students in English and mathematics has not been consistently good over time. Achievement varies within the school and disadvantaged students at Key Stage 4 are not yet making the same progress as students nationally. The school's information indicates that progress in mathematics is not rapid enough. Teaching in mathematics has demonstrably improved but there is still a lag of learning from prior years for some older students. Their attainment is not rising quickly enough to reach national standards.
- In 2015, some of the most-able students did not make or exceed the progress expected of them. Stronger teaching is now leading to better progress for the most-able students but their achievement is not even across all year groups and subjects.
- Although achievement is rising, and increasing numbers of students are making good progress in many subjects, there is still a minority of students who do not make consistently good progress across subjects, particularly mathematics.
- Disadvantaged students are making swifter progress in Key Stage 3. New leaders and new teaching staff have galvanised teaching so that better outcomes are now seen. However, there is a lag of learning for some students at Key Stage 4, who have not experienced strong teaching over time.
- Work scrutinised by inspectors and progress reviewed in observed lessons confirmed improving trends for both disadvantaged students and the most able at Key Stage 3, but less consistently at Key Stage 4.
- Students make good progress in reading upon entering the school but participation in reading for pleasure wanes beyond Year 9.
- Students perform particularly well and secure good attainment in a range of subjects. In 2015, outcomes were strong in drama, English language, English literature, French, general studies, religious education, physical education, information and communication technology, further, additional and BTEC science and business studies.
- The school's information indicates that nearly all students progress into education, employment or training after leaving school. Students are well supported by leaders in raising aspirations for lifelong learners.

School details

Unique reference number	119804
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10000565

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	727
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Rushton
Headteacher	Xavier Bowers
Telephone number	01254 233458
Website	www.mountcarmelhigh.co.uk
Email address	office@mountcarmelhigh.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 September 2012

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average-sized 11–16 voluntary aided comprehensive school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Diocese of Salford.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is above the national average. Pupil premium funding is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Around half the students are of White British heritage, and half of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is almost twice the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 are educated off-site at Accrington, Rossendale College and The Heights free school.
- There have been significant changes in staffing since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in most subjects and all year groups, including four lesson observations that were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also undertook a 'learning walk', when they observed learning briefly around different parts of the school.
- Formal discussions were held with three groups of students, the governing body, and an officer from the local authority, the school nurse and with senior and middle leaders.
- Informal discussions were held with students at breaktime, lunchtime and around the school to gather their views about behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in students' books in all lessons observed during the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of supporting documentation about safeguarding and child protection, the school's self-evaluation, monitoring information and improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings, information relating to teachers' appraisal, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and information relating to students' achievement.
- Inspectors took into account the 45 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) along with the 58 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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