



St Ambrose Barlow RC High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105989
LEA Salford
Inspection number 277462
Inspection dates 9 November 2005 to 10 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr Terry McDermott CfBT Lead Inspector

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Shaftesbury Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Swinton
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Manchester, Lancashire M27 5SZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 794 3521
Number on roll	735	Fax number	0161 794 1932
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr B Bridgen
Date of previous inspection	12 June 2000	Headteacher	Mr W Livesey

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 9 November 2005 - 10 November 2005	Inspection number 277462
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Ambrose Barlow Roman Catholic High School is broadly average in size. It is an oversubscribed specialist technology college for pupils aged 11 to 16, which holds the Artsmark Gold Award and Investors in People status. It mainly serves the town of Swinton in the city of Salford, but also draws pupils from across the city. There are very few pupils with a minority ethnic heritage. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment which are broadly average. About 20% of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of pupils taking free school meals is average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Its staff are concerned to provide the highest possible quality education and care, therefore enabling every pupil to achieve the best he or she can. Leaders and managers have a precise picture of the school, know where further improvements can be made and, importantly, know how to make them. Outstanding leadership, with an emphasis on developing mature pupils who achieve well, has enabled the school to be where it is today.

Consistently very good teaching and learning, supported by relentless monitoring give pupils the confidence to achieve well. An outstanding curriculum gives all pupils the opportunity to reach their personal ambitions and aspirations. The school has succeeded in raising the attainment of boys. Attendance is good, and a very strong factor in helping pupils achieve is the exemplary care and guidance they receive. Pupils enjoy coming to school and many are involved in sporting activities. Their behaviour is excellent in lessons and this allows them to learn well. The number of excluded pupils is falling and reflects the school's successful work in improving attitudes to learning. The very large majority of parents and pupils are positive about the school and all that it offers.

The school has improved since the last inspection. It has almost completely addressed the key issues for action arising from that report. Standards attained in examinations have risen significantly in recent years, and are expected to rise further. Its capacity to improve further is excellent. Resources are effectively and efficiently managed to secure good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to improve achievement in Years 7 to 9 by giving pupils more specific advice on how to improve their individual pieces of work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school modestly evaluates standards and achievement as good. Pupils enter the school with national test results from Year 6 in English, mathematics and science that are broadly average. They leave the school in Year 11 with general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results in a range of subjects that are significantly above average for pupils of all abilities, and which have been so for a number of years. Validated data for 2004 show that 78% of pupils entered for GCSE gained five passes at grade A* to C, and that 95% of pupils gained five passes at A* to G. Some 99% of pupils gained at least one pass at A* to G. Unvalidated results in 2005 were better, with a much greater number of passes at A* and A grades. In the national tests at the end of Year 9, the number of pupils gaining the expected level and above in mathematics showed a dramatic increase.

The strategies the school has developed to address any underachievement are robust and effective, and have shown positive results, particularly in mathematics. The longer-term effect of the school's efforts enables pupils to meet successfully the high expectation the school has of them, and the challenging targets it sets them, when they take GCSE examinations. Pupils are building knowledge and skills across a broad swathe of subjects.

All groups of pupils achieve exceptionally well in their time at the school. Boys make better progress than is expected nationally. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with gifts and talents, also make similar good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school that the personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Pupils are very positive about school and involve themselves in all activities with enthusiasm and pride. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary and mirror the excellent role models they are given by staff. Pupils are consistently polite and courteous and they are very respectful of the views and efforts of others. Pupils try hard in lessons and generally take great care with the presentation of their work. There are highly effective strategies in place to monitor and raise attendance. Consequently, attendance is improving and is above average. Pupils really enjoy participating in sport and understand the importance of exercise and a healthy lifestyle. They acquire attitudes, habits and skills that will stand them in good stead when they enter the workplace.

Pupils make excellent progress in terms of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The caring and spiritual ethos of the school, and the many good opportunities to become involved in a range of charitable work, teach them to think of others and to show compassion. The school council is an active body through which pupils' views are heard and acted upon. It makes a valuable contribution to the impressive overall personal development of pupils. By the time they reach Year 11, they have become extremely well rounded, mature and confident young people.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school thinks teaching and learning are good, but inspectors judge them to be better than this. About 20% of teaching is exemplary. Pupils mainly work very hard. Their behaviour is excellent and they want to do well. Their teachers' very confident subject knowledge makes sure pupils understand exactly what they must do to improve.

The pace of learning is very fast in the exemplary lessons. Pupils enjoy different tasks such as group and independent work. They progress quickly because teachers make sure they have many chances to reflect on the lesson's aims. Expectations are high,

informed by the school's challenging targets. The pupils have many chances to explain their understanding. This accelerates their learning.

Most lessons challenge all learners hard, especially when there is an emphasis on what the teacher wants to assess. This approach helped one third of Year 9 pupils to gain the highest levels in the 2005 mathematics tests. The high turnover of teachers in English slowed the rate of improvement in that subject. Support for lower attaining pupils is highly effective. Some teachers' marking gives excellent subject guidance about both the strengths of the pupils' work, and how to improve their grades or levels. Not all teachers mark as well as this. The pupils' presentation of work is usually good. However, it is not always organised clearly enough to help revision.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is an exemplary outcome of a fusion of the underpinning gospel values of the school, and the requirements of the national curriculum. It is broad and balanced, and is augmented by an expanding range of vocational courses. This enables the curriculum to meet the diverse career and personal aspirations of all pupils.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent. The gifted and talented programme includes helpful additional challenges for designated pupils. An excellent and varied range of enrichment activities enhances the formal curriculum and adds to learners' enjoyment and achievement, particularly in creative arts, sports, drama and musical productions. Extra revision classes exist in many subjects, and help pupils to make clear progress. Specialist College status affects the curriculum positively, particularly in the additional provision and use of computerised schemes to aid learning.

Safety and healthy living are promoted very well. Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that the curriculum is outstanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for pupils is outstanding. Vulnerable pupils, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in public care, flourish because they are valued and given extremely good support. The school is highly effective in fully involving all pupils in monitoring their own progress. Consequently, pupils know exactly how well they are doing. The mentoring system is exemplary, and is a significant factor in helping Year 11 pupils do very well in the GCSE examinations. As a result of this success staff have been appointed to extend the system into Years 7 to 9. Building successfully on thorough preparation, pupils transfer confidently to post-16 education, or the world of work.

The school is a harmonious community where pupils feel safe and free from bullying. Pupils speak very positively about the staff and feel that there are many people that they can turn to if they have a problem. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are securely established and understood by staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school judges leadership and management to be good. It is being modest. The headteacher's outstanding leadership has, during his tenure, transformed a small inner city school at risk of closure into a model of the very best practice in a number of areas. Within a positively Catholic Christian ethos, the headteacher gives clear and purposeful leadership to the school. He is very well supported by an able and balanced senior team, and challenged by a dedicated and knowledgeable governing body.

Teamwork and communications are excellent. Relentless attention to detail by the headteacher provides a role model for all teachers. The school's capacity to improve is excellent. It makes full use of the data available on pupils' progress and uses this most effectively to tease solutions to apparently intractable problems. Exemplification of this is seen in the improved results at the end of Year 9 and in the higher percentage of good GCSE grades achieved in 2005.

Partnership with parents is very strong. Parents and pupils are consulted regularly, and are involved in reviewing the school's performance. Parental and pupil satisfaction is high.

The impact of specialist school status is clearly evident in the school's rising standards, improved teaching and learning, and its wide variety of stimulating enrichment activities. All the necessary legal requirements are met. Financial planning and management are excellent.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly when we visited your school. All the inspectors enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. We are very pleased that you have such pride in your school. We think that you work very hard, and the school's GCSE results prove this.

We think that St Ambrose Barlow High School is an outstanding school, and here are some of the things that impressed us most.

You have an outstanding headteacher who is a fine role model for teachers and pupils alike. Your attitudes to work and your behaviour are a credit to you and the school, and ensure that you achieve well. The help and guidance the staff give you are outstanding. The excellent curriculum you follow meets your needs and ambitions. Your teachers teach you well.

We think that the school and yourselves could do even better, so we have asked the teachers to give more information about how you could improve when they mark your work. You can help by doing as they suggest.