



# Our Lady and St John Catholic Arts College

Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 119790  
**LEA** Blackburn with Darwen  
**Inspection number** 280660  
**Inspection dates** 5 October 2005 to 6 October 2005  
**Reporting inspector** Jan Bennett

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

<b>Type of school</b>	City technology college of the arts	<b>School address</b>	North Road
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided		Blackburn
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		Lancashire, BB1 1PY
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01254 59055
<b>Number on roll</b>	940	<b>Fax number</b>	01254 697308
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Canon Jude Harrison
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	1 November 1999	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Collete Gillen

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 16	<b>Inspection dates</b> 5 October 2005 - 6 October 2005	<b>Inspection number</b> 280660
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

Our Lady and St John Catholic Arts College is a mixed comprehensive school for 11 to 16 year olds on the outskirts of Blackburn. It is a specialist arts college. There are 940 pupils on roll and the number with special educational needs is high. Many pupils come from homes experiencing economic hardship and the number of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. Over 20% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 9% have a first language other than English.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is an effective and well-led school. The headteacher knows her school's strengths and weaknesses well and has a good understanding of what needs to be done to move the school forward. Key issues for action from the last inspection have been addressed. Finances and resources are managed efficiently and the school provides good value for money. Governors take their responsibilities seriously but they do not challenge managers sufficiently about the differences in achievement and standards across the school.

Standards in examinations are below average and the number of GCSE passes at grades A\* and A has declined since 2003. However, most pupils make good progress by the time that they leave the school in comparison with their attainment on entry, and compared with similar schools. Attendance is satisfactory and pupils generally arrive on time for lessons. Teaching is good but there are serious staffing shortages in English and modern foreign languages. The system for tracking and monitoring pupils' academic progress needs further development. Pupils are very well cared for and there are excellent links with a wide range of external organisations to support the education and welfare of pupils. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is outstanding. Behaviour is good and pupils, whatever their background, feel safe and enjoy their school lives. There is a good climate for learning and a wide range of opportunities for pupils outside lessons. The school provides well for pupils' personal development.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of the most able pupils
- Improve the tracking and monitoring of pupils' academic progress in order to address under-achievement
- Address the staffing shortages in English and modern foreign languages
- Governors should hold managers to greater account over the relative performance of different curriculum areas of the school

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Achievement rates in national examinations are below average but pupils' progress is better than expected for schools in similar circumstances. Most pupils enter the school having achieved slightly lower than average results in their primary schools. At the end of Year 9, standards in tests are below average in science, mathematics and English, but the progress that pupils have made in science and mathematics is in line with or better than that in similar schools. The progress made in English is not always as good. By the end of Year 11, however, many pupils are making better progress than might be expected given their attainment when they start at the school. The progress that pupils make by the end of Year 11, when

compared to similar schools, places Our Lady and St John in the top 10% nationally. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress.

In 2004, 45% of pupils achieved five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above which is well below the national average but unvalidated data indicates this percentage has risen in 2005 to 52 %. There are wide differences in the relative performance of subjects at GCSE; design technology and mathematics perform well and modern foreign languages perform poorly. The fall in the percentage of GCSE passes at grades A\* and A over the past two years indicates that not all of the most able pupils are achieving the high grades that they should.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils feel safe and secure and know that adults listen to them. They say that the school deals with any bullying incidents instantly and are confident that there is little, if any, racism in the school. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds mix together very well both in and out of lessons. The great majority of pupils behave well and those who do not are well managed by teachers. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning and value and appreciate their teachers. Most of them enjoy their education. The number of exclusions has risen since the last inspection but this reflects the school's determination not to tolerate poor behaviour. The attendance rate is average. As a Specialist Arts College, the school places emphases on art, dance drama and music, which develops the communication skills of the pupils and helps them to become confident and articulate.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and is underpinned by the Christian ethos of the school. Pupils are encouraged to learn about and appreciate other cultures. Only limited healthy eating options are currently available but healthier menus are being introduced in consultation with the school council. The pupils make a positive contribution to their community in many ways, including organising a Christmas party for old people, performing at weddings and raising money for charity. Various opportunities exist for taking responsibility, such as mentoring pupils in feeder primary schools and membership of the school council.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and carefully structured with a range of activities to promote effective learning. Teachers make good use of digital projectors to deliver interesting and visually pleasing demonstrations. For example, an introduction to Pythagoras involved lower attaining Year 8 pupils progressing from measuring sides of triangles with matches to finding areas of squares by counting and multiplication. Each task was effectively displayed using PowerPoint and homework was imaginatively linked to the National Poetry Day. Teachers set high

standards with an appropriate emphasis on accurate use of language and specialist vocabulary. Lessons usually start promptly with a brisk, lively pace maintained throughout. In-class assessment is used very well by class teachers and by learning support assistants to give individual help and feedback. Questioning is used effectively to promote sound learning, but sometimes opportunities are missed for pupils to explain their thinking. Learning is less effective in lessons where the work is not as well matched to the pupils' abilities and pupils have not fully understood the task or the work is too difficult. Teachers usually manage time well, but sometimes they allow insufficient time at the end of the lesson to check and consolidate pupils' learning effectively. Pupils' good behaviour, application and pride in their work contribute significantly to their good learning and progress. Relationships are invariably good and this contributes to pupils' enjoyment of lessons.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school offers a rich and varied curriculum with very good opportunities for pupils to study the performing arts. In addition to the full range of national curriculum subjects, higher attaining pupils study Spanish as well as French in Years 8 and 9. There is very good provision for additional literacy lessons for lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9. The school offers a range of vocational courses, for Years 10 and 11, alongside the traditional academic subjects to suit pupils' different needs. The vocational options include the opportunity to take a hairdressing and beauty therapy, information and communications technology or leisure and tourism course at a city learning centre or at a local college. The school has not been able to offer vocational courses in construction or engineering which leaves a gap in provision for some less academic pupils, particularly boys. Lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are well provided for with an accredited "Skills for Working Life" course. Personal health and social education, which includes citizenship, is satisfactory. Work-related learning is well embedded within the curriculum and includes good provision for careers education, work experience and community service. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities including trips, sports, drama and dance which are highly valued by the pupils. As one girl remarked, "This is an area in which the school really shines".

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school cares for all its pupils well. Health and safety procedures are fully in place and risk assessments are routinely carried out. Child protection procedures are understood by all staff. The school has excellent procedures to help pupils in their transition from primary to secondary school. Pastoral support is a major strength of the school, but the monitoring of academic progress for pupils is not yet fully effective. There are good links with external organisations to support the welfare of pupils. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. The school also has a centre which helps pupils from Years 7, 8 and 9 who have serious

emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. They spend half a term in the centre receiving individual support to develop the strategies they need to cope in mainstream classes. The school has a very good reputation for supporting pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and the local authority is making a video at Our Lady and St John in order to spread the good practice to other schools.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good and the headteacher provides clear direction to the school and staff. There is a greater emphasis upon devolved and shared leadership than at the time of the last inspection which has been welcomed by middle managers. The senior leadership group is relatively new but has a shared vision and commitment to continuous improvement. Performance management systems have been introduced that have already improved the quality of teaching and raised overall achievement in Years 10 and 11. The school's development planning expresses well the strategic direction the school is intending to take. The self-evaluation report is accurate and very detailed and senior managers are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors, parents, staff and pupils are increasingly involved in this process. Governors would be even more effective, however, if they were to challenge the managers more on the relative performance of different curriculum areas of the school.

Day-to-day management is effective and the school runs smoothly. The school is aware that the systematic monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress is an area for attention and the newly appointed deputy head is leading this development. The management of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and other vulnerable children is outstanding. Resources are well managed but the school has failed to fill the vacancies for English and modern foreign language teachers. The management of the budget is secure and the most recent audit showed no serious concerns. Governors oversee financial matters well and they take their legal responsibilities seriously. The school provides good value for money.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

## Inspection judgements

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

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	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	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
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**

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Dear pupils,

Following our inspection of the school we would like to tell you our findings. We think Our Lady & St John Catholic Arts College is a good school.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well-planned and usually lively. The vast majority of you take a pride in your work and work hard. You get on well with your teachers and this contributes to your enjoyment of lessons. You also enjoy taking part in a very wide range of activities outside lessons including charity fund raising, sports and visits.

Pass rates in national examinations are below average but your progress is better than expected for schools similar to yours. The statistics that we use to measure pupils' progress by the end of Year 11, place Our Lady & St John in the top 10% nationally when compared to these schools. However, we are concerned that there has been a fall in the number of grade A and A\* passes at GCSE in the last two years and are recommending that you and your teachers work hard to remedy this.

Our Lady & St John is a safe and happy school with a strong Christian ethos. You show concern and respect for each other and your behaviour in and out of lessons is good. You receive good care, guidance and support from staff. We are recommending, however, that a better system is introduced for recording and monitoring your individual progress so that anyone who is not getting on fast enough can be identified quickly. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and are very well supported by the special educational needs team. The careers advice and guidance you receive is good and your school prepares you well for life beyond school.

Mrs Gillen and her team of managers are doing a good job in leading and managing the school but we are recommending that they try even harder to fill the vacancies for English and modern languages teachers.

We would like to thank you for contributing to the inspection and for being so polite and helpful. We enjoyed our visit to the school and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett HMI  
Lead inspector

Annex B