

# St Ambrose Barlow RC High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105989
<b>Local Authority</b>	Salford
<b>Inspection number</b>	324310
<b>Inspection date</b>	6 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Vincent Ashworth 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 on roll</b>	
School (total)	735
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr John Kerrane
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Marie Garside
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	Shaftesbury Road Swinton Manchester Lancashire M27 5SZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 794 3521
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 794 1932

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and inspected the following issues: students' achievement and standards, developments since the last inspection and the effectiveness of both teaching and learning, and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; planning and monitoring documents; direct observation of the school's work; meeting with staff and students and from parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

## Description of the school

St Ambrose Barlow Roman Catholic High School is a smaller than average sized school. The vast majority of students are White British; a small and increasing number of students come from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Attainment on entry is above average. The number of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also lower than average as is the number of students with statements of special educational needs. The school has been a specialist technology college for the last nine years and gained a second specialism in applied learning in 2007. It also provides Extended School services and has achieved The Artsmark Gold Award, Inclusion Quality Mark and Investors in People status. In May 2008, the school became a National School of Creativity.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

The excitement and buzz for learning is immediately apparent to any visitor to this outstanding school. St Ambrose Barlow is a very popular school and demand for places is high. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent summed up the ethos of the school saying, 'the school has an excellent Catholic approach, where each child is encouraged to grow and develop spiritually and academically within a safe, caring environment'. The school has much to celebrate, but it has not rested on its laurels following the last inspection. All staff and students have worked hard in their pursuit of excellence. Consequently, overall standards have risen even further. Results in national tests and GCSE examinations in mathematics and science have risen sharply. Weaknesses inspectors previously identified in Key Stage 3 provision have been eradicated. Key strengths identified at the last inspection have been either maintained or enhanced.

In recent years, results in national tests taken in Year 9 have been broadly average and students have generally made steady progress. Provisional data provided by the school indicate that in 2008, overall standards by the end of Year 9 were much higher. This was due largely to dramatic improvement in science as well as very rapid intervention to reverse small pockets of underperformance; for example, amongst middle ability students. In Years 10 and 11, students make rapid progress and their achievement overall is outstanding. Standards attained by boys and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are exceptionally high. Results in GCSE examinations are impressive and have been consistently high over time. For example, two thirds of students gained five or more GCSE A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics in 2007. Some 89% of students achieved at least five GCSEs with good pass grades. Provisional results for 2008 indicate these high standards have been maintained. The outstanding progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the fact that nearly all students leave school with at least one GCSE, is testimony to the school's commitment to inclusion. Although all students make at least good progress, a small number of higher ability girls do not achieve consistently at the highest grades in their GCSE examinations.

Students feel safe at school; they act responsibly and maturely and show consideration for adults and for each other. The vast majority of students enjoy school and make the most of everything it has to offer. Attendance rates are high and there are very few instances of unauthorised absence. Many parents have supported the school's efforts to raise attendance by not taking their children out of school during term time. Arrangements to support students' transition from primary to secondary school are exemplary. The involvement of Year 7 students in presentations to primary school children as well as buddying arrangements ensure students settle quickly in school life and make new friends easily. Students' willingness to take on extra responsibility is impressive. Through their regular involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and school clubs they develop as whole and healthy individuals. The school council takes its role seriously and works collaboratively with senior managers and governors to bring about improvements in school life. Students demonstrate a sound understanding of other cultures.

Teaching is of a consistently high quality and is a contributing factor to students' excellent achievement and their enthusiasm for learning. Visits to lessons during the inspection reinforced the accuracy of the school's judgement on the quality of teaching. The school is already well on its way to ensuring that all teaching is as good as the very best. Excellent behaviour, trusting and caring relationships, creativity and fun are characteristics of many of the best lessons.

Teachers empower their students by equipping them with the skills and confidence to learn independently. One pupil said, 'teachers give you the freedom to express and develop your own ideas'. This positive and mature attitude to learning and academic inquiry is commonplace throughout the school. Teachers' assiduous monitoring of their students' performance means they identify their needs quickly and can target support for maximum impact. Consequently, students know how well they are doing and exactly how to reach their next targets.

Teachers have excellent subject knowledge; they have very high expectations of all students and communicate this through their enthusiasm for their subject. In many cases, teachers make excellent use of their industrial expertise and contacts to bring their lessons to life. For example, teaching on the 14 to 19 Diploma in creative and media ensures that students gain an understanding of real situations and the skills that they need to succeed in the industry. In many subjects, students are challenged and inspired by a range of projects and activities that involve employers and professionals who are specialists in their field. Teaching in mathematics, ICT, art, geography and food technology is exceptional.

The rich and inclusive curriculum brings to life the school's ethos which is dedicated to developing the potential of each and every child. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly well suited to their individual needs and aspirations. For example, the school offers a valuable and practical award to support students' personal development, employability skills and their understanding of their own and others' needs. Similarly, learners who are able to work at a faster pace are encouraged to undertake an AS level general studies qualification in Year 10. The school has been very successful in introducing and embedding a 14 to 19 Diploma in creative and media. The cornerstone of this success is the strong engagement with and involvement of employers and other stakeholders.

The headteacher has tremendous drive and ambition for the school. She has clear strategic vision and responds extremely well to local and national priorities. Consequently, the school's core values are wholly learner focused. The headteacher is ably supported by an impressive team of senior managers. Governors and school staff demonstrate a wide range of talents in working hard to achieve their shared goals. The process of self-evaluation is thorough and results in an accurate picture of the school's major strengths and weaknesses. Communications and team working are excellent and staff are well informed about school priorities. Arrangements for managing performance are robust and there are effective procedures to identify and tackle underperformance. The school is a beacon in its local community and arrangements to promote community cohesion are strong. The school recognises that it could do more to provide opportunities for students to learn with and from young people from different backgrounds that are not prominently represented within the school community.

Management of the school's specialist status is innovative, inspirational and entrepreneurial. The headteacher has been particularly astute in attracting additional funding for innovative projects that have impacted positively on students' achievements and their personal development. One example is the Creative Transition Project, which brings together local primary schools, school students and staff and a well known theatre to support transition into Year 7. Ambitious targets in technology subjects are easily met and often exceeded. The poor quality of much of the accommodation presents an ongoing challenge. However, the school has ambitious plans for expansion and a new build to meet future needs.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise the achievement of the more able girls in Years 10 and 11.

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## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

**Achievement and standards**

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

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

## Personal development and well-being

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

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of St Ambrose Barlow RC High School, Manchester, M27 5SZ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited you recently. You helped me to understand how your school works and what makes it so outstanding. I only wish I could have stayed a little longer to take in all the marvellous things you have achieved. I was also pleased that so many of your parents took the time to complete the questionnaire I sent. The vast majority of parents are highly supportive of your school because they feel you enjoy school, you are safe there and that Mrs Garside is a strong leader.

Probably the highlight of my day was meeting the school council. You are all really lucky to have such an impressive group of young people making sure that staff and governors understand clearly the things that concern you about school life. I also managed to see some highly creative collage work going on in art and was very impressed with ideas on sustainable development that I heard bouncing around in a geography lessons. What struck me the most about the lessons I visited was your very positive attitude to learning and the respect you show for each other and the adults who work with you. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding.

Your school has excellent partnerships with other institutions and the business community through both its specialist school status and its lead role in the National School of Creativity initiative. It was interesting for me to see how these opportunities contribute to the high standard of work produced by students on the new Diploma course in creative and media. Similarly, your teachers make excellent use of these links to make their lessons exciting, stimulating and relevant.

You achieve high standards in your work and make excellent progress during your time at school. I did notice, however, that a small number of the more able girls do not achieve the A grades they deserve in their GCSE examinations in some subjects and have asked the school to improve this.

I wish you well in the future.