

Newman Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112399
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325598
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Brian Dower

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
Number on roll	
School (total)	507
Sixth form	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Shovlin
Headteacher	Mr John McAuley
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2007
School address	Lismore Place Carlisle Cumbria CA1 1NA
Telephone number	01228 607470
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Newman Catholic School is smaller than the average secondary school. Parts of the area it serves are economically and socially disadvantaged. Students are mainly of White British backgrounds but the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds has been increasing and now accounts for about 10% of the school population. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. The percentage of students joining or leaving the school at times other than the start or end of an academic year is greater than that seen nationally. The school has been granted engineering college status for September 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with good features.

Parents are appreciative of the good care and support their children receive and many praise the school highly and in the warmest possible terms. For example, 'What impresses us about Newman is how well the staff know each individual pupil. The ethos of caring stands out – even through the difficult times of the past.' The school's standing in the community has risen and it is over-subscribed in the younger year groups. Christian values are at the heart of all that the school does and, although many students are not Catholic in their beliefs, all subscribe to those values. As a result, the school is a harmonious working community where students make good progress in their personal development and show tolerance and understanding of others. Students' behaviour is good and they work hard.

Standards are below average but improving. There was a significant improvement in 2008, for example, in the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C. The proportion of students obtaining five or more A* to G passes has also risen significantly. Overall, the progress students make, and what they achieve in relation to their below average starting points on entry to Year 7, are satisfactory. Standards are improving in English but are not yet high enough. Standards are inadequate in mathematics. Staffing difficulties in the subject have been resolved but it is too soon to see the impact of change on what students achieve.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They say they feel safe in school, enjoy their work, take plenty of exercise and eat healthily. Many take on responsibilities helping younger students and all are involved in raising money or working for charitable causes. Students have a keen sense of fair play and understand that with rights come responsibilities.

There is variation in the quality of teaching and learning, which is satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, learning activities are interesting and cater for the needs of all students. The pace of learning is brisk and teaching assistants provide effective support to those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language. In some lessons, however, expectations are too low and the work provided lacks challenge. Opportunities are sometimes missed to move question and answer sessions beyond checking on students' understanding to engaging them in discussion about their work. The awarding of the engineering college status is recognition of the breadth of the good curriculum and its relevance to students' interests and aspirations. Students receive the guidance they need when making decisions about academic or vocational courses and future employment.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. The leadership of the headteacher and his senior team is focused on improving the rate of students' progress and raising standards. This is happening because development planning is good. Senior leaders, however, have too generous a view of how far along the road to improvement the school has travelled. Leaders and managers work hard to ensure that the school is inclusive and every student has an equal chance. In this they are successful. The budget deficit has been reduced considerably and resources are managed well. Although good subject leadership is evident in the work of many departments, poor leadership in a few areas has resulted in students' inadequate progress and attainment. The school has been robust in tackling this and changes have already been made to strengthen provision. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of such improvements. There

have been significant improvements since the previous inspection and the school's capacity to get even better is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school provides for a wide range of students by offering an appropriate choice of academic courses, together with vocational opportunities. Collaborative arrangements with other schools and colleges broaden the curriculum offered. The attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is below that seen nationally. The rate of progress they make in Year 12 is variable because some students need more time and greater support in working independently. Progress quickens in Year 13 and, by the time students leave, their achievement in relation to their starting points is good. Standards by the end of Year 13 are broadly average and all students progress to higher education or into employment. Teaching and learning are good. Students have positive attitudes to learning and work hard. Leadership is effective in monitoring performance and progress closely, and providing timely and appropriate support when weaknesses are revealed. Students' personal development is good. They say that they enjoy being in the sixth form and they readily take on responsibilities, for example, as mentors to the younger students. Overall, students grow in confidence and are mature and self-reliant.

What the school should do to improve further

- Quicken the rate of students' progress and raise achievement, particularly in mathematics.
- Improve the rigour and accuracy of self-evaluation.
- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are below average, and students' progress and achievement in relation to their below average starting points on entry to the school are satisfactory. This is so for all groups, including those students whose first language is not English and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Girls' progress was less rapid than that of boys in 2008, but the school has measures in place to address this. In that year, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C GCSE passes increased significantly compared with 2007, although standards remained below average. When that measure includes English and mathematics, the rate of improvement was less marked. The school's overall performance targets were missed. Students' achievement in English that year was satisfactory, an improvement on the progress they had been making in recent years. Achievement remained inadequate in mathematics. The proportion of students attaining five or more A* to G passes has increased since the last inspection and was average in 2008. This is because in some subjects, students attain above average standards and achieve well, as in art, information and communication technology (ICT), and English literature. In others, such as French, Spanish, geography and physical education, standards are average. Inspection evidence and the school's own assessments show that students are continuing to make satisfactory progress in English. The evidence provided by the school does show an improvement in progress in mathematics, but it has not yet quickened sufficiently to have reversed past underachievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Staff know the students well and students say that they enjoy school and feel valued. This is reflected in their considerate behaviour in and around school and in their positive attitude to learning. The attendance of students has improved and is in line with the national average. There has been an increase in the number of students achieving 100% attendance which has contributed significantly to the improvements seen in GCSE results. Students say that they feel safe in school and that rare instances of bullying are dealt with effectively. They have a good understanding of issues around healthy eating. The benefits of healthy lifestyles are reflected in their involvement in sport and the other extra-curricular activities. Spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good and students have respect for each other, staff and visitors to the school. They contribute well to the community, taking part in the School Parliament, acting as mentors to other students and through pro-active national and international charity work. They are confident young people and have good ICT skills and secure literacy skills which prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage in their education. Their numeracy skills are less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Many lessons seen were good and some were outstanding, but a substantial proportion of them were not as effective as they might have been. Classroom relationships are good. Students are attentive and conscientious in their work. In the best lessons, teachers show good subject knowledge, plan an appropriate range of activities and set a brisk pace. Support staff provide timely and effective help for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In several lessons observed, students worked successfully, taking the initiative in pairs or groups. Occasionally, peer assessment was developed effectively so that students gained a clear understanding of what they were aiming for. In a vocational joinery workshop session, students worked with impressive speed and accuracy and took great pride in their accomplishments. Physical education lessons brought out students' best efforts and provided them with great enjoyment in their learning.

However, too many lessons have a pedestrian pace and time is not used effectively. Expectations are sometimes too low and the work set is too easy for most. In a few lessons, students struggle because the necessary stepping stones in performing a task are not explained, or teachers' explanations are unclear, or the key points have not been emphasised. Some teachers do not do enough to enable students to make learning their own by engaging them in penetrating discussion. Opportunities to use open-ended 'how' and 'why' questions to get students talking about their work are sometimes missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is particularly successful in meeting the aspirations and motivating the efforts and achievement of boys. In the light of progress made in Key Stage 3, guidance enables students to make sensible choices for Key Stage 4. Courses in engineering and construction and other vocational possibilities have proved to be very successful provision for

many boys. The school is entrepreneurial in making the most of the opportunities available through its status as a specialist engineering school. Courses are provided that are likely to appeal to girls, and this provision is now being revised for the new school year. The vocational course in ICT, which for some students counts as the equivalent of two GCSEs, has a very high pass rate. There is additional coaching during school time for those who have disappointing scores in GCSE mathematics tests and some examination booster classes take place out of normal school time. This extra provision is helpful in promoting achievement. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students' personal and social development and understanding of citizenship. Though religious education GCSE is a requirement for all, it does not enjoy as much success as the school would wish. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities, for instance in music, drama and sports, and these are valued by students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good quality care, guidance and support for students, which promotes overall well-being. The transition from primary school and for those who transfer at other times is well managed and this allows students to settle quickly.

Arrangements to ensure the health and safety of students are in place. Procedures for child protection are well established and understood by all staff; systems for safeguarding students meet government regulations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those whose first language is not English receive effective support from teaching and non-teaching staff which strengthens their learning. For the most vulnerable students, support is enhanced through regular Social Inclusion Forums which draw upon the expertise of a raft of external agencies. The additional support given by the inclusion unit has had a positive impact on reducing exclusions, helping students to remain engaged in education. Students are involved in evaluating their own progress. They know how well they are doing. However, written guidance to help them improve their work is better in some subjects than others. Parents are well informed about their children's progress through regular contact with the school. Older students have the opportunity to discuss their options and career choices with teachers and careers advisers at key points during their time in college. As a result, they are able to make well informed decisions.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. The headteacher is setting a clear direction to the work of the school, with the focus on improving teaching and learning and raising standards. He is well supported by able and committed senior staff. As a result, standards are rising and the quality of provision improving. Excellent management of the school's budget has brought a significant reduction in the financial deficit. The school is a harmonious community where students from widely different backgrounds work well together and where equality of opportunity is actively promoted. The school's contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. It has yet to evaluate just how effective it is in promoting unity and a sense of belonging in the school and wider community. Governors are involved in the life of the school and play their part in development planning. Self-evaluation, however, lacks sufficient rigour and accuracy. The school has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to raise standards but its judgements about what it has achieved so far are too generous. There is variation in the

effectiveness of subject leadership but the school has been active in addressing this and past staffing difficulties have been resolved. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of these changes on students' development. There have been improvements in many areas since the previous inspection. Students' levels of achievement and the standards they attain have risen. Their study skills and the guidance they receive have also improved.

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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	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?	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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**

1 April 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Newman Catholic School, Cumbria, CA1 1NA

Thank you for the welcome you gave to my colleagues and I when we visited your school recently. We appreciated the time many of you gave to talk to us. You helped us to understand what is special about your school, what is good and what could be improved upon.

We found that Newman School provides you with a satisfactory education. Standards are rising and in some areas the rate of that improvement has been rapid. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C has increased substantially, as has the proportion attaining five or more A* to G passes. Our judgement is that the school is well placed to build on such improvements because of your hard work and that of your teachers and teaching assistants. We have asked that the focus remains on improving achievement, particularly in mathematics. We have also asked that senior staff review their own judgements about how well the school is doing now. We believe this will help in taking the school forward.

Your school is led and managed by caring and committed people. You and your parents have told us about the support you receive and that staff go to great lengths to help you. We agree that this is good. You get on well together and the progress you make in your personal development is good. Teaching and learning overall is satisfactory. There are many occasions when it is good or outstanding and our suggestion for improvement here has already been identified by the school, namely to increase that proportion substantially.

There were a few parents or carers who returned the questionnaire. Please thank them. Nearly every response was fulsome in praising the school and it is clear that those parents hold it in high regard. Those of you we spoke to said it is a good place to be and that you enjoy your work and feel you are making rapid progress. You certainly impressed us as mature and sensitive young people.

Our best wishes to you all.

Brian Dower

Lead inspector