

Mount Carmel Roman Catholic High School: A Specialist Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119804
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327137
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Ruth James HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	782
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Dennis Ford
Headteacher	Miss Katrina Ryan
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2006
School address	Wordsworth Road Accrington Lancashire BB5 0LU
Telephone number	01254 233458
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Age group	11–16
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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

Mount Carmel Roman Catholic High School is a smaller than average sized school. Most students are of White British heritage but about one fifth are from other backgrounds, mainly of Asian heritage. Most students come from the immediate locality which includes many disadvantaged areas. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational need. The school achieved specialist status as a Science College in September 2003. The school has the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mount Carmel is a good school. The strong ethos contributes very well to the harmonious, supportive atmosphere that is found in the school community. Most parents agree and are happy with the school. One parent commented that it is a school where, 'Pupils are safe, feel valued and are taught by dedicated hard working staff.'

Since the last inspection senior leaders have implemented many strategies to raise achievement. Standards have risen in recent years and are now broadly average. Students are making good progress in many subjects. In 2008, girls did particularly well. However, results in English, mathematics and science were not as good as many other subjects.

Teaching is good, with a few lessons outstanding. Teachers work hard to encourage students, to make lessons enjoyable and interesting and to explain things clearly. The minority of less effective lessons do not involve students sufficiently actively in their own learning. Students know their targets and progress towards these is monitored carefully, with a range of interventions put in place to tackle underachievement. However, marking and feedback are inconsistent.

The curriculum includes a range of options that meet different needs and it includes a variety of vocational courses at Key Stage 4. Good advice and guidance is offered to students when making choices for GCSE options and when they leave school. Progression to further education is good. Participation in extra-curricular activities, especially sporting activities, is very good.

Students' personal development is good overall. Spiritual development is a particular strength, and students' contribution to the local community is outstanding. The student voice includes representatives from all groups within the school and ideas are listened to and acted upon. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good, and for some students it is outstanding. Attendance is broadly average. The pastoral care that students receive is very good, and excellent links with external agencies are used to support students in a variety of ways. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well supported, which enables them to achieve well.

Specialist status has been used to improve links with partner institutions. Increasing numbers of students go on to study a science subject at advanced level. The science specialism has enabled the school to support transition from primary schools, to offer more science enrichment opportunities such as visits and science week, and to encourage parental interest in science. It is now being used to encourage all school departments to consider aspects of science relevant to their subjects. The school recognises the need to raise attainment in science at Key Stage 4.

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy is complemented by an effective balance of skills amongst the senior leadership team, who together drive forward improvements. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and governance is good. Value for money is good. The school's capacity to improve is good, as is demonstrated by improvement since the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop and refine strategies to address underachievement in English, mathematics and science in order to raise standards further.

- Further develop strategies to increase the active involvement of students in their own learning to accelerate progress further.
- Ensure that school policies on marking and feedback are implemented consistently by all departments so that students understand what they need to do to reach their targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' attainment on entry to the school varies but it is typically below average. Standards have improved since the last inspection and they are now broadly average. The proportions of pupils attaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C or equivalent has increased substantially, from well below average to above average. Standards in English and mathematics have improved but remain below average. Almost all pupils gain five or more passes at grades A* to G at GCSE.

In 2008, students' results were good in GCSE art and design, drama, and physical education. Students also did well in vocational courses including information and communication technology, health and social care, and construction. The percentage of students gaining five or more high grade GCSEs including English and mathematics was well below average. Staffing difficulties contributed to the poorer results in English and mathematics than in other subjects. Results in science were disappointing because of poor results in the additional applied science course. Standards for boys were lower than for girls in 2008.

Since the last inspection the progress of both boys and girls has improved. Girls who completed their studies in 2008 made very good progress. Boys made slower progress in English and mathematics than in several other subjects, but overall their progress was satisfactory. Inspection evidence from lesson observations and the school's progress tracking data shows that current students are making good progress. The school's records indicate that the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A* to C including English and mathematics is expected to rise in 2009 and boys are expected to do better than before. Data from module examination results and internal assessments indicate that standards in science are also improving. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the effective teaching and support that they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Spiritual development is a strength of the school underpinning the young people's personal development. The vast majority of students are polite, courteous, smart and friendly. Consequently an orderly and calm atmosphere prevails around the school. Students understand right from wrong and are confident in expressing their views. Most students have positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is good overall. Excellent behaviour was observed in many lessons and around the building. Relationships within the school community are good. There are a few instances of low level disruption in lessons. The school has developed strategies and support systems to tackle this. Attendance is similar to the national average. The impact of sporting activities, the promotion of healthy eating options and good advice on health-related issues encourage students to adopt healthy life styles. Students' contribution to the school and local community is outstanding. They take on responsibility by serving on the student voice, acting as prefects and peer mentors, supporting and organising school events, raising money for charities and working within the local community. Vocational courses, enterprises

activities and a range of other work related learning activities enable students to develop appropriate skills and qualities for future working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and there are examples of outstanding practice. This shows the outcome of the high priority given to improving the quality of teaching and learning through monitoring and the professional development programme. Good relationships in nearly all classes create a secure and positive climate for learning so the vast majority of students are confident about seeking help and contributing ideas to class discussions. Most teachers provide interesting and challenging learning activities which are generally well matched to the students' capabilities and ensure that subject knowledge and skills are built up systematically. In the best lessons, learning objectives are clear, there is a brisk pace and teachers ask probing questions which extend students' understanding. As a result, most students work hard, enjoy their lessons and make good progress. In less effective lessons, students are not as actively involved in their own learning, teachers talk for too long, pace is slower and students are not sufficiently challenged. Throughout the school, students are aware of their targets and how well they are doing. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent and students are not always given clear feedback on what they need to do to improve further. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported by teachers and teaching assistants so that they make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements. The school has worked hard to introduce new courses that provide greater relevance for students. This flexible approach tailors students' learning programmes more closely to their individual needs and aspirations. Students say they appreciate the school's work in this respect. In Key Stage 3, students study a balanced curriculum that gives priority to improving their literacy and numeracy skills. The delivery of a 'Learning to Learn' programme is beginning to promote the development of independent learning. In Year 9, the school has begun to introduce elements of GCSE courses. At Key Stage 4 there is a good balance between academic and vocational qualifications. Effective partnership work with local schools and colleges enables the school to offer a wide range of courses both on site and at partner institutions. These courses have significantly improved enjoyment with the result that many more students are opting to continue their education when they leave school. A range of science courses is offered in Key Stage 4 but it does not always meet the needs of less able students. Science activity weeks encourage students to take a greater interest in science. Teaching across the curriculum promotes understanding and valuing of people's diversity and equality. The curriculum for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective. It includes support sessions designed to meet their specific needs. There has been an increase recently in the number and range of extra-curricular activities in physical education, including lunchtime and early morning clubs. Participation in these and other activities is very good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Mount Carmel is an inclusive and very caring school. The school places a very strong emphasis on ensuring that students' wide-ranging personal and academic needs are met. The care and support for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good. Students and parents value the support that they receive. Students say that they feel safe in school knowing that the few incidents of bullying and racism are dealt with and that there is always someone available to talk to, including older students, if needed. Support is greatly enhanced by the work of the school's academic mentor and effective links with external agencies. Strong links with primary schools and post-16 institutions smooth the transition at different stages of students' education. Sound advice on Key Stage 4 courses and post-16 opportunities enables students to make informed choices about their futures. Progression into further education and training is very good. Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are in line with government regulations. Systems for tracking aspects of students' personal development and welfare are very good. Procedures for tracking students' academic progress are good and are making an impact on students' learning. Underachievement is now more readily identified and intervention strategies are becoming far more effective. Most students are aware of their target grades but they do not always have a good understanding of how to improve their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy provide clear direction. They are ably supported by the highly effective senior leadership team. Since the last inspection there has been a focus on raising achievement. As a result, standards and progress have improved but the school recognises that more needs to be done to raise standards further, especially in English, mathematics and science. Staffing difficulties in some areas have hampered the school's progress. Members of the leadership team work with specific middle leaders with a clear agenda for raising attainment. Challenging targets are set and progress towards them is monitored carefully and discussed at regular line- management meetings, which ensures that middle leaders are held accountable for the performance of their departments. A number of strategies have been put in place to support underachieving students. The school's data indicates that these are increasingly effective. Senior leaders continue to make good use of resources from the local authority to further improve the quality of teaching and learning in subjects such as English, mathematics and science. The science curriculum has been reviewed and an additional course more suited to the needs of less able students is planned from September 2009. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and senior staff know the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan is appropriately focused on key issues, including the need to support and develop middle leaders. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good. Great care is taken to give all students a strong sense of belonging to the school community. The school's work within the local community is very good, with strong links with a wide range of community groups including those of different faiths and cultures. Articulate members of the student council spoke with self-assurance about their roles and with a good understanding of the role of the school in the community. Governance is good. Governors know the school well, take an active part in decision making and challenge the school

appropriately. The school provides good value for money and has a good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	2
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	2

Achievement and standards

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

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
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	1
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Mount Carmel Roman Catholic High School: A Specialist Science College,
Lancashire, BB5 0LU

Thank you very much for making us welcome when we inspected your school. As you know we visited lessons and talked to staff and students. You told us that you think yours is a good school and we agree. We also looked at the results of questionnaires sent in by your parents. Most of them are happy with the school.

Results have improved and you make good progress in many subjects. In 2008, girls did particularly well. However, results in English, mathematics and science were not as good as many other subjects.

We found that teaching at your school is good. Your teachers work hard to encourage you, to make lessons enjoyable and interesting and to explain things clearly. You know what your targets are, and your progress is monitored carefully so that you can have extra help if you fall behind. The school offers you a good choice of courses, including vocational courses. You are given good advice about making choices for your GCSE options and when you leave school.

Your behaviour in lessons and around school is good, and for some of you it is excellent. Most of you have good attitudes to learning. We were pleased that so many of you join in with the lunchtime and other activities. We found that the contributions you make to the school and the local community are outstanding. The school looks after you very well, including those with particular needs. The school has excellent partnerships with other agencies which benefit many groups of you.

It was a pleasure to meet members of the student voice and to hear that your ideas are listened to and acted upon. Your headteacher and other senior staff lead the school well and are constantly looking at ways of improving it.

Although your school is a good school, we have asked the headteacher to work with the staff to make some improvements, which will help you to achieve even more.

First, we want them to help you to do even better in English, mathematics and science. Second, we have asked them to give you more opportunities to be actively involved in learning in lessons so that you make faster progress. Third, we want them to make sure that all teachers mark your work in a way that gives you more feedback about what you need to do to achieve your targets.

We are sure that you will keep up your good work and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Ruth James HMI