

# Maricourt Catholic High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104960
<b>Local Authority</b>	Sefton
<b>Inspection number</b>	336395
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 November 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jon Lovgreen

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>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1481
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	256
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sr Marie Moore
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Brendan McLoughlin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	0 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	Hall Lane Maghull Liverpool L31 3DZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 3303366
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 2846631
<b>Email address</b>	admin@maricourt.net

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 44 lessons and held meetings with governors, various staff groups and students from across the age range. They observed the school's work and looked at school evaluation and improvement plans, senior management and governing body minutes, departmental reviews and data on students' progress. Safeguarding procedures were also checked. Inspectors checked work in students' books and files across a number of subjects and analysed 116 questionnaires returned by parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the level of challenge in lessons, particularly for more-able students
- whether standards in mathematics are high enough
- how effective the assessment system and teachers' marking are in giving students precise guidance about how to improve their work
- whether the achievement of students in the sixth form matches that in the main school.

## Information about the school

Maricourt Catholic High School is a large school which is located on two sites, some minutes walk apart. Whilst the majority of students come from four primary schools, others join from over 20 others and many travel some distance. The overwhelming majority of students are of White British heritage. Eligibility for free school meals is half the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average and very few students have a statement of special educational need. The school has had specialist status for mathematics and computing since 2004. It has received a number of awards including Sportsmark, the Healthy Schools' award and Investors in People.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

Maricourt is a good and improving school. Excellent relationships and respect for the rights and unique qualities of each individual underpin its work. Complementing this is a desire for improvement and a determination to bring this about. As a result, things are moving forward with pace and direction.

Standards at GCSE have risen markedly since the last inspection, and a relative decline in standards in the specialist subject of mathematics has been reversed. This has enabled more girls to reach the critical benchmark of gaining five or more A\*-C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE in 2009. The progress made by more-able pupils, an issue from the last inspection, has accelerated and is now good. Careful setting and a quality tracking system which regularly updates teachers and students about progress made, standards reached and what to aim for have minimised underperformance at all levels. Work is regularly marked, but comment to guide students' future efforts is too variable in detail. The benefits of a new marking policy are yet to be fully exploited because some teachers do not follow it. Lessons are interesting because more teachers are planning for group work, discussion and activity. Tasks are always suitably challenging. However, a weakness in the teaching is in expecting students to understand the lesson focus and how to measure progress, rather than having teachers explain the lesson objectives and the success criteria for them.

From the moment they join the school, students benefit from excellent care and support. Each is well known and cherished: potential is spotted; problems are shared; the vulnerable are sensitively supported. Personal guidance and an expectation of hard work and academic success go hand-in-hand.

The school provides good value for money. Improvements in attendance and behaviour, more stimulating teaching, and the step change in examination results in 2009, confirm that the school has good capacity to improve. There is no complacency. The morale of staff and students is high. Targets have been raised in the light of more up-to-date information on students' progress and the school has firm evidence to suggest that these will be met. Leaders evaluate the work of the school thoroughly and insightfully. Supportive line management and rigorous departmental reviews let staff know what is expected of them, but also help them to get there by identifying and providing precise training needs.

Governors make an exceptional contribution to the school, maintaining the spiritual core of the school's work whilst being vigorous in ensuring that standards continue to rise. Students make a good contribution to the life of the school and the local community. They are much involved in charity and other links with communities both at home and

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abroad but have limited experience and understanding of the scope of cultures and beliefs across Britain today.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - ensuring that in all lessons teachers tell students exactly what they will be learning and explain how they can check the extent of their success
  - insisting that teachers follow the marking policy so that students get clear and consistent advice about where and how to improve their work.
- Increasing students' awareness of cultural diversity by:
  - finding more opportunities for students to research, learn about and experience the customs, cultures and beliefs of other communities.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

The rate at which students make progress is accelerating and the progress of all groups is now good. From average standards on entry, students gain above average and rising results at GCSE. Achievement is, therefore, good. Students behave well in lessons and their willingness to listen and learn equips them with important study skills. When given the opportunity to work in groups, use initiative and present ideas, students show increasing confidence in their presentation skills. They rise to the challenge of demanding work and show determination in tackling it. Even when teaching is less effective they keep on task, but fall into the trap of concentrating on finishing the work rather than taking in what they should be learning.

Examination results reached a plateau in 2008. The school identified a number of concerns, both about the progress of more-able students in both key stages and results in individual subjects. Concerted action, allied to tight and well informed target setting, saw almost all of these issues well resolved in the 2009 GCSE results. The proportion of the very highest grades A\*/A at GCSE, a long term issue for the school, improved significantly, notably in mathematics and science. Year 11 students are adept at relating formulae to practical activities, for instance, in calculating circumference. Reflecting the impact of the specialism, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) results were amongst the best in the school. The good progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to be a feature. Auguring well for the future, students' standards by the end of Key Stage 3 improved and ambitious targets were broadly met. Lively debate with teachers and students exploring ideas together are a feature of the best lessons in Key Stage 3. A Year 7 lesson saw more-able students comfortable in using scientific knowledge and vocabulary to counter ideas put forward by their teacher.

Students have a good understanding of the value of healthy diet and exercise as demonstrated by the Sportsmark and Healthy Schools awards. They take responsibility seriously. As form captains, charity organisers, and managers of the school bank and

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newspaper they make a significant contribution to school life. One group helped devise a more suitable format for the student planner and negotiated a cheaper price for its production! Smart attitudes to school and work, added to good literacy and numeracy standards and increasing teamwork skills, give students a good grounding for the next stage in life.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

### How effective is the provision?

Responding to comments in the last inspection report, the school has worked hard and with success to encourage teachers to use a wider range of styles in their teaching. Students comment that lessons are more interesting because they are expected to discuss ideas and answers rather than just get the 'right' answer. Group work to solve problems is a regular feature in subjects such as mathematics, science and geography. Students are attentive, keen to learn, and very cooperative when working together. Teachers are subject experts and so demonstrate and explain things well. This also enables them to plan tasks which will bring the best out in students of differing abilities. They manage classes well and move lessons on at pace. However, it is rare for lesson

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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objectives and success criteria to go beyond tasks or outlines and this leads to cases where students are unclear about the purpose of a lesson and how to judge their progress in it. Students' books and files are neat, orderly and regularly marked. Whilst marking is accurate about standards, it gives too little specific guidance about what students do well or on which aspects they need to improve.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been improved by a focus on 'Thinking Skills' in Year 7 and a general move towards helping students understand and use differing strategies to learn. There are wide and extensive pathways at Key Stage 4. These allow flexible choice. A range of vocational courses are available, as are options such as those for two modern languages and considerable provision for separate science subjects, both allowing for continuity into sixth form studies. The school has made good use of the specialism to ensure that all students follow courses in ICT to examination level. Increasing laptop availability and activities such as mathematical representations of geographical data show the wider impact of the specialism. Students talk enthusiastically about the extensive range of enrichment activities offered, both in sport and beyond. Revision and extension study sessions and focus days offer additional opportunities to students.

Very high quality care, guidance and support are at the heart of the school's work. Extensive work ensures that students settle into Year 7 very quickly, as parents testify. They comment on the school's 'excellent ethos and outstanding care'. Strong pastoral teams, excellent support in class for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and extensive and appropriate use of support agencies all make certain that the student's well-being comes first. A focus on attendance has been successful in improving an already above average pattern. Guidance about GCSE options and moving into the sixth form, another college or work is personalised, highly informed and impartial.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher's highly effective leadership, coupled with the able support of other skilled senior leaders, provides a sharp focus on raising standards and achievement. At the same time, the bedrock of strong care and guidance, which is at the core of the school's beliefs, has been sustained. Teamwork at all levels is good. The monitoring of teaching is regular and rigorous, and the resulting issues are followed up thoroughly. An

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increase in the amount of good and stimulating teaching has been the result.

The process of reviewing departments involves subject staff, managers, governors, parents and students. It is a powerful tool, well used. Middle managers are positive and enthusiastic about being accountable for their areas. They get the training to do this effectively. They have the time to monitor progress and the information to evaluate standards. Weaknesses are tackled head on. This has resulted in a significant rise in students gaining the highest grades, GCSE results are improving strongly, and standards in key areas such as mathematics, science and ICT are rising.

Governors make an exceptional contribution to the school. They encourage and embrace change to raise standards and achievement, whilst holding fast to the strong spiritual foundations of the school. They support the school and hold it rigorously to account, being involved at all stages of progress review and development planning.

Good safeguarding procedures are in place. All in the community are afforded equality of opportunity. Gaps in students' performance have narrowed. The strong personal, social and health education programme and the school's valuing of student opinion allows stereotypes to be challenged. Respect and tolerance abound. Whilst the school is a cohesive community and works well with the local community, students have limited awareness and understanding of what makes the cultural diversity which is modern Britain. Their horizons and insights are thus narrower here than they are in terms of knowing about the life and customs of other countries.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

**Sixth form**



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Achievement in the sixth form is improving and is now good. Students speak highly of the excellent guidance they get to help them choose the right courses. As a result, they are motivated to work hard and retention rates are high. A focus on learning styles and questioning techniques is making teaching more interesting. Aware that some higher attaining students were only making satisfactory progress, teachers have devised more challenging activities for them. In the 2009 examinations, the proportion of A or B grades was higher than for three years. Differences in subject performances have narrowed significantly because managers scrutinize results and departments are expected to remedy weaknesses. Expectations of both students and teachers have been raised. Opportunities for collaboration with other institutions have been taken. These ensure that a wide range of subjects can be offered, that duplication is avoided, and that staff resources are economically used. Good leadership and management have overseen the growth of the sixth form and a significant rise in examination results. Sixth formers have been successfully encouraged to make a major contribution to the main school as role models and helpers for younger students.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

### **Views of parents and carers**

A very large majority of parents and carers are highly supportive and appreciative of the school's work. Many comment positively on the improving results and the high quality of care provided. They say that students quickly settle into school and relish being in such a strong and supportive community. A typical comment praised 'this happy and safe school where students gain self-confidence'. Parents and carers are very happy with the quality of teaching and the way the school is run. A minority of Year 7 parents and carers would like earlier information about their child's progress since joining the school, but inspectors judge that arrangements for reporting on this over the year are good.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Maricourt Catholic High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 116 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,481 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	51	69	59	7	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	64	55	64	55	4	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	50	43	71	61	9	8	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	57	49	72	62	4	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	58	50	70	60	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	39	78	67	7	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	34	87	75	7	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	42	36	79	68	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	51	44	73	63	5	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	43	71	61	7	6	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	33	79	68	8	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	53	46	76	66	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	69	59	59	51	4	3	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



18 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Maricourt Catholic High School, Liverpool, L31 3DZ

Thank you so much for your warm welcome when we visited recently, and your willingness to share your views with us. Your politeness, maturity, and ability to be open and fair in expressing opinions do you great credit. We were especially grateful to those of you who gave up your lunchtime to have more formal meetings with us.

You feel that you are in a good school and we agree with you. All the staff work very hard to make sure that you settle in quickly when you join the school, and you soon feel that you belong. You, too, contribute to the caring and positive atmosphere. Your attendance is good, you behave well and you work hard. Most lessons are interesting and well taught. As a result, you are making good progress not just in terms of examination grades, but also in learning how to develop and use those skills, such as, teamwork and your initiative which will stand you in good stead in the future. However, we do feel that in many lessons it would help if teachers set out more clearly the point and purpose of the lesson, and exactly what skills and understanding should come from it. Whilst accurate, marking is not consistent enough in giving you a clear steer on how to improve work.

The headteacher and senior staff know exactly what is working well, where there could be improvement, and what needs to be done for this to happen. As a result, standards are rising and improvements are taking place quickly. Your school offers you a secure and harmonious community and you are aware through visits, charity work and things such as the Sierra Leone link, of life beyond it. However, we do feel that you know too little about other cultures and beliefs in this country.

Inspectors, senior staff and governors agree that to build on the many improvements already going on the school needs concentrate on:

- making sure that lesson objectives are clearer and more detailed and that teachers explain what you will need to do to show progress with them
- improving marking, which at present varies too much in the amount and quality of advice it gives you
- broadening your horizons in terms of giving you better awareness and understanding of the many different cultures in Britain today.

With best wishes to you and the school for continuing happiness and success.

Yours faithfully

Jon Lövgreen

Lead Inspector

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