



St Monica's RC High School Specialist Language College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105366
LEA Bury
Inspection number 277344
Inspection dates 29 March 2006 to 29 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Michael Blaylock HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Bury Old Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Prestwich
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Manchester, Lancashire M25 1JH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 7736436
Number on roll	1154	Fax number	0161 7736650
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Monsignor Allen
Date of previous inspection	5 May 2000	Headteacher	Mr F McCarron

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 29 March 2006 - 29 March 2006	Inspection number 277344
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Monica's Roman Catholic High School Specialist Language College is a larger than average sized 11-16 mixed comprehensive school. It is one of two schools which provide education and care for children from Catholic families in Bury. Situated on the southern boundary of Bury in North Manchester it is a popular, over-subscribed school which also attracts pupils from neighbouring authorities. The school acquired specialist status as a language college in September 2003.

Pupils are predominantly white British with a below average proportion of minority ethnic heritage children, the largest group being white Irish. Pupils come from a variety of social backgrounds and travel from a wide area. The proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal is below average. There is very small number of pupils for whom English is not their first language, all of whom are fluent English speakers. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) is below the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Monica's is an outstanding school which provides high quality education and care for its pupils.

Exemplary leadership and management have established an ethos of striving for excellence. This is effective in sustaining and continuing school improvement. Issues from the previous inspection have been rigorously addressed. There is a sharp self-awareness of the quality of the school's work with self-evaluation judgements confirmed by inspectors' findings.

Achievement and standards are excellent overall with exceptional progress made at Key Stage 4 building on pupils' steady progress at Key Stage 3. Similarly the personal development and well-being of pupils are excellent. High attendance indicates pupils' appreciation and enjoyment of school. The excellent behaviour and attitudes of the pupils contribute significantly to their learning and development.

The quality teaching and learning is good overall and at times outstanding. There has been considerable progress in developing a more interactive style of teaching and in using computers although not all teachers are confident in these areas yet. The curriculum is good although work experience is not available for all pupils and information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 10 and 11 is underdeveloped. The positive learning ethos and the outstanding care, guidance and support enables pupils to make excellent progress throughout their secondary education.

St Monica's is a listening and responsive school. Parent questionnaires and pupils' views have highlighted issues that the school has acted on. From the overwhelming 694 families responding to the inspection questionnaire it is clear that the vast majority of parents are very satisfied with the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards reflected in the examination results in both general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in Year 11 and in the national tests in Year 9 over the past five years are consistently high and significantly above national averages. Pupils make excellent progress as they move through the school, particularly so in Years 10 and 11.

In the 2005 examinations 83% of Year 11 pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A*-C. This was a record for the school, and contributes to an upward trend over the past five years. Results in English Language were particularly impressive with over half of the pupils achieving grades A or A*. As part of the relentless drive for improvement the school is focusing on improving the number of top grades in other subjects. At 99% the proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A*-G is also significantly above the national average.

At Key Stage 3 pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science has been variable in recent years. The 2005 results show that pupils made the progress expected of them.

When compared with other schools, pupils' performance in mathematics and science both improved, although English results dipped from the high levels of the previous year. Increasing the proportion of pupils achieving levels 6 or above has been identified by the school as a priority.

All pupils make excellent progress including those with LDD. The achievement of boys is significantly above national expectations. The school's use of assessment data has helped them identify that both girls and boys who enter the school with lower attainment are the groups who have made comparatively less progress than others in the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy coming to school and demonstrate their commitment in very high levels of attendance; they are proud of their school. Behaviour is excellent, both in lessons and around the school and pupils' personal development is also excellent. The school provides a huge range of opportunities for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These opportunities, together with the very supportive atmosphere that exists in school, enable pupils to develop into mature and confident young adults who show a sense of responsibility and genuine concern for others.

Pupils know how to live healthily and how to stay safe. They are confident that any isolated incidents of bullying are quickly and effectively dealt with by the school. Pupils are pleased that the school responds quickly to any concerns they express and to the suggestions that they make, particularly through the school council and questionnaires. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, notably as prefects, and to contribute both to the school and the wider community. They work very hard for various charities, often on their own initiative. Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being, particularly by developing valuable skills, gaining excellent examination results and receiving expert guidance on future options. However, arrangements for work experience do not yet ensure that all pupils take part in the full range of work related activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and includes outstanding practice. The school has developed rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, particularly so for professional development. Under the leadership of a member of the senior management team teachers have an agreed understanding of what is good teaching and learning and an agreed protocol for lesson observation. This provides targeted support to enhance the quality of teaching through a strong focus on how well pupils learn.

Lessons observed were well planned, and most were sharply focussed with clear learning objectives. A varied range of well structured supporting activities were used to sustain pupils' interest and develop their learning. Teachers showed good subject knowledge and high expectations. The very good relationships between teachers and pupils and also between pupils, along with pupils' excellent behaviour and attitudes contribute significantly to their learning. There is scope for some teachers to increase interaction with pupils to promote more collaborative learning, to exploit pupils' ideas and insights more fully and thus increase pupils' engagement with learning.

The school makes good use of computers across the curriculum to support teaching and learning. Most teachers now have access to a laptop and data projector, the intention is to equip all teachers and classrooms. Pupils commented positively on the increased interaction resulting from its use, particularly with interactive whiteboards. Very good progress has been made over recent years but the need for continued development is recognised.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides well for pupils' needs and interests and enables them to make excellent progress overall. In Years 7 to 9 all pupils have the valuable opportunity to study two foreign languages and the choice of GCSE courses for Years 10 and 11 is extensive. The school makes individual arrangements for a work related curriculum for a few pupils for whom the full GCSE programme is inappropriate. Nevertheless, the school recognises that there are some pupils who would benefit from a curriculum that would relate more directly to future employment. The school provides very good support for LDD pupils and enables them to make similar progress to other pupils in their groups. Good opportunities exist for pupils who are gifted and talented, notably the 'fast track' courses which enable some pupils to take a GCSE examination in French in Year 9 and GCSE physical education in Year 10.

The school's emphasis on religious education provides additional opportunities in lessons for spiritual and moral education. Language college specialist status has been used well to extend the range of activities for pupils, both within and beyond the curriculum, including, for example, additional language classes in Italian and Chinese. The excellent extracurricular programme, including visits and retreats alongside the sporting, music and drama activities is much appreciated by pupils who commented 'there are lots of things to do'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides excellent care, guidance and support for all its pupils, putting into practice Christian values and emphasising the importance of treating every pupil as an individual. Procedures for Child Protection, and for ensuring pupils' health and safety, are well established. Pupils could identify many possible sources of support if they have difficulties, including the prefects who also provide very good role models

for younger pupils. They speak highly of the advice they receive when choosing options and planning for life beyond Year 11.

The school is rightly proud of maintaining high standards of behaviour. The use of fixed term exclusions to deal with incidents of poor behaviour is effective and the number of exclusions gets lower as pupils move through the school. Nevertheless, the school acknowledges the need to continue reducing the number of exclusions and is rightly seeking to resolve more incidents within school.

The arrangements for monitoring pupils' academic progress have recently been improved and the new system currently being piloted in Year 7 is to be extended next year to the whole school. The new system gives a regular and easily accessible indication of pupils' standards in each subject and enables early identification of underachievement for intervention. Nevertheless, even with the 'old' system, teachers and heads of year are very aware of how well pupils are doing and quick to take action if there are problems.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding overall. The headteacher is passionately committed to Catholic education, knows the school very well and provides inspirational hands-on leadership. Developments in the senior management team have increased the ability of the school to monitor its work more rigorously and sustain continued improvement. The school's work on self-evaluation indicates an accurate knowledge of its work with judgements that were in line with inspectors' findings.

Teachers have good opportunities for professional development with an emphasis on dissemination of best practice in teaching and learning and increased use of ICT. Middle managers have a recognised role in both leadership and monitoring within their areas such that subject leaders have a good awareness of the work within their departments; and heads of year monitor pupils' academic performance as well as providing support and care.

St Monica's is seen as a flagship school by the local authority education services. They are confident in using the expertise and success of the school for the benefit of other schools in the authority. The work of the Governing Body is good, providing a degree of challenge as a critical friend to the school and headteacher, with effective committees monitoring the work of the school. Governors are strongly committed and very supportive with many having a long association with the school.

Specialist language college status has brought significant benefits not least in funding but also in curricular, cultural and community initiatives. The school provides exceptional value for money and has the capacity for further improvement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	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	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

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

As you know, we visited your school recently to find out how well it is doing. Thank you for taking part in the inspection by talking with us about your work, your life in school and other interests and concerns.

We agree with the school's own view that it provides excellent education and care for you.

We also found that the best features of your school are:

- you make outstanding progress and, overall gain excellent GCSE results;
- the school provides excellent care, support and guidance for you, particularly in helping you to overcome any difficulties and enabling you to learn very well;
- you enjoy coming to school and, as you told us, all the various groups of pupils get on well together;
- your attendance, behaviour and attitudes are excellent;
- teachers plan their lessons very carefully so that you know what to expect in lessons and what you need to learn; and
- the headteacher and his senior team provide outstanding leadership for the school.

In continuing to improve the school further we agree with the areas already identified by the school. These are to:

- help you make even more progress at Key Stage 3; and
- offer work experience opportunities for all of you in Year 10 or 11.

St Monica's is an outstanding school that is well placed to improve further in the future. Thank you for making us so welcome in your school.