

# St Monica's RC High School Specialist Language College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105366
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bury
<b>Inspection number</b>	324212
<b>Inspection date</b>	21 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Wareing 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)	1110
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Martin Browne
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr F McCarron
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	29 March 2006
<b>School address</b>	Bury Old Road Prestwich Manchester Lancashire M25 1JH
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 7736436
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 7736650

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; aspects of teaching and learning; the curriculum and leadership and management. Inspectors collected evidence from lesson observations, assessment data, documentation and discussions with key staff, the chair of governors, the school improvement partner and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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 this report.

## Description of the school

St Monica's Roman Catholic High School Specialist Language College is a larger than average sized comprehensive school in south Bury close to north Manchester. It is very popular within the community: there are more applications for places than the school can provide and it draws students from a wide area. The school acquired specialist status as a language college in 2004 and added its applied learning specialist status in 2007. The school has the Sportsmark award, Healthy School status and International status.

Most students are of White British heritage and come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, but the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than average, as is the proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## 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 Roman Catholic High School Specialist Language College is an outstanding school that lives out, in a practical way, its mission statement of 'providing a caring, supportive environment where everyone is of equal worth.' The school has an excellent reputation in the local community. Parents are overwhelmingly delighted with its commitment to the academic, social and emotional needs of their children. One parent's comment is typical of many received by inspectors during the inspection: 'Pastoral care at St. Monica's is second to none; I am so grateful for the school's sensitive support and ability to meet my son's individual needs. He could not ask to go to a better school.'

The strong moral and spiritual ethos gives the school a sense of community that is shared by the whole staff and students. Students are rightly very proud of their school. One student's comment reflects the view of many: 'The teachers and students are a family. That's what makes the school so special.' In this happy learning environment, all students are helped to develop into exceptionally mature, confident and articulate young people. Their exemplary behaviour and attendance demonstrate their great enjoyment of all that the school offers.

Students' achievement is outstanding and standards are consistently and exceptionally high. They enter the school with standards that are above average. By the end of Year 9, students consistently reach high standards and make good overall progress. They make exceptionally good progress in mathematics. In Years 10 and 11, students consistently reach exceptionally high standards and make outstanding progress. All groups of students, including boys and girls, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the few students who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as others.

The school is highly inclusive and a range of professionals, including learning mentors and outside agencies, provide students with outstanding care, guidance and support. This helps students to feel very safe and secure in school. Excellent transition arrangements between Years 6 and 7 ensure that vulnerable students are identified early in primary school, so that very effective strategies to meet their particular academic and emotional needs are quickly put in place. All child protection and safeguarding arrangements are in place and meet current requirements.

Students are very well informed about how to lead safe and healthy lives. One student remarked how her teachers' emphasis on safety had increased her confidence to work in laboratories and workshops and helped her to progress well in practical work.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have many opportunities for reflection and particularly relish the many real responsibilities that the school provides for them to care for each other as prefects, peer mentors and members of the school council. In these ways they gain real influence on decisions about the school that affect them. Students have brought about improvements in the school's environment, healthier lunch menus and a new reward system. These opportunities contribute much to students' outstanding academic and personal development.

Students' cultural awareness is enhanced by links with a Chinese partner school and language assistant. Students also benefit from close links with a local school for Jewish students, from performances in school by African musicians and from links with a school in Gambia, which they support.

Teaching is good and has many outstanding features. This reflects the commitment of senior leaders and governors to its improvement since the last inspection, through key appointments to the teaching staff and high quality professional development. Most lessons seen during the inspection were well structured, with a rapid pace that encourages students' active participation in, and enjoyment of, their learning. The school's specialist language college status has enhanced the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and contribute to the outstanding progress that students make. Outstanding lessons are characterised by the many opportunities for students to work independently of the teacher on stimulating activities that set a high level of challenge. Significant features of these outstanding lessons are the opportunity for students to discuss the quality of their own and other's work, and the very careful matching of tasks to students' specific learning needs. In the good lessons, work is not as precisely tailored to the needs of groups and individuals. The school's systems for setting targets and tracking students' progress are very sophisticated and well used by teachers. Students generally know their current levels and targets and how to improve their work. However, there is some inconsistency between subjects in the helpfulness of marking.

The curriculum is of outstanding quality and caters exceptionally well for the needs of all the students. It is enhanced by the school's specialist status in languages and applied learning. In addition to National Curriculum subjects, students in Years 7 to 9 have the chance to study an extra language and performing arts. They also have a weekly lesson in ICT.

The excellent guidance that students receive before making their choice of courses for Key Stage 4 ensures that the curriculum is particularly well tailored to their individual needs, interests and aspirations. They have a wide range of GCSE and other courses from which to choose and are free to combine vocational and more traditional subjects. New applied courses have been introduced in performing arts, ICT, physical education and science, and a health and social care course is provided in partnership with a local sixth form college.

Students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are well developed across a wide range of subjects. The school now also places great emphasis on work related learning across the curriculum. Students in Year 10 now have the opportunity for a period of work experience. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Students' excellent achievement, combined with very high standards, ensures that they are outstandingly well prepared for the next stage in their education or for employment.

The rich variety of extra-curricular activities is a strength greatly appreciated by students, who say that there is always something to do at lunchtimes and after school. There is a well attended morning breakfast club and also revision clubs and language classes after school. The take-up of sports and musical activities, including dance, is extensive. There are also art and ICT clubs and a wide range of visits. There are exchanges to Spain, France and China, including the chance for older students to undertake work experience in French primary schools.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding in the impact they have on students' achievement and personal development. The headteacher and senior leaders have a very clear sense of purpose, together with drive and energy. They foster leadership throughout the school, including at student level, because students are at the centre of their vision for the school. This encourages the whole staff to seek continuous improvement. Middle managers express much respect for the way in which their leaders and managers listen to their views while being prepared to take difficult decisions when necessary.

The school's self-evaluation is incisive and has contributed much to its current outstanding effectiveness. It actively involves students, parents, staff and governors. This gives the school a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and allows it to intervene swiftly on any underperformance, so that there are no barriers to learning for any student. The process of setting targets is very rigorous and results in well judged, very challenging targets which drive the school forward. The specialist status in languages and applied learning is extremely well managed to support an excellent range of partnerships; for example, work with local partner primary schools on transition, and the teaching of languages. The school has International School status and has, through its languages specialism, developed many links with schools in Europe and Mexico, as well as in China. The school's involvement in its local 14-19 strategy group has forged important partnerships for further curriculum development.

Service to its immediate community is an integral part of the school's mission statement. Students engage in charity work for their local community, especially amongst the elderly. They also take part in local Holocaust Memorial events. They are well taught about the wider community, although there is scope for more work to ensure that what the students have learned has more impact on their daily lives.

Governance is outstanding. Governors are very fully involved in the life of the school and play an active role in supporting and challenging the school management. They have shown particular commitment to the recruitment of high quality staff and this has played an important part in the school's success. The school manages its finances very astutely to provide outstanding value for money. The excellence of leadership and management and the continued improvements since the last inspection demonstrate the school's outstanding capacity to improve still further.

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

Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:

- ensuring that tasks are always precisely matched to the learning needs of individual students
- improving the consistency of marking across departments.

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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>	2
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**

I would like to thank you, on behalf of my colleagues and myself, for the very warm welcome you all gave us when we visited your school during its recent inspection. We would particularly like to thank all those of you who gave up part of your lunchtime to tell us how you feel about your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you and other students whom we met in lessons and around the school.

You are right to be proud of your school. We found it to be outstanding. The headteacher and his senior colleagues lead the school very well and we were pleased to hear how hard the staff work to support you. We know, because of your excellent attendance and behaviour, how much you enjoy all that the school offers, including lunchtime and after-school activities.

We saw the great confidence and maturity that you develop, which helps you to achieve excellent standards and make outstanding progress in your work. You are also helped to do this by good and, sometimes, outstanding teaching. Your school has worked hard to improve this, and your enjoyment was clear in lessons that have a quick pace and give you chances to work in pairs and groups. We know that you find it helpful when the teacher plans special activities for those of you find the work difficult or who need even more of a challenge. You have good opportunities to take part in visits and exchanges and even to do work experience in a French primary school!

You have a real sense of responsibility towards each other. It was a pleasure to see how keen you are to look after each other, especially younger students, for example, by being prefects or peer mentors. We were also very impressed by what you have achieved for yourselves and your fellow students through the school and pupil councils; for example, healthier lunch menus, outside seating and new systems for effort grades and merits. You work hard for your local community, too, with primary schools and elderly people and support for a village in Gambia.

We agree with the school that it should continue to improve teaching even further, so that all your lessons are always as good as the best ones. We think that more of your lessons should be as challenging as the best ones and that in some subjects marking should be more detailed.