

INSPECTION REPORT
The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College, Manchester

Inspection date 27th September 2016

Reporting Inspector Mr Michael Wright
 Mr Richard Woods
 Mr Martin Reynolds

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic High School

URN 105581

Age range of pupils 11-16 years

Number on roll 882

Appropriate authority The Governing Body

Chair of Governors Mrs Marion Meakin

Headteacher Mrs Claire McCarron

Date of previous inspection May 2011

| The Inspection judgements are: | Grade | Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Requires Improvement |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Overall effectiveness of the school | 2 | |
| The quality of Catholic Leadership | 2 | |
| The quality of the Word community | 2 | |
| The quality of the Welcome community | 1 | |
| The quality of Welfare | 1 | |
| The quality of Worship | 2 | |
| The quality of Witness | 1 | |

The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

The Barlow is an 11-16 voluntary-aided Catholic School with 882 pupils on roll. The school serves the parishes of St Ambrose Barlow, St Bernard's, St Bernadette's, St Catherine of Siena and St Cuthbert's and is over-subscribed. The proportion of children eligible for the pupil premium is high and constitutes just under half of the student population (49%). The proportion of students whose first language is not English is similar to the national average. 60% of teaching staff and 40% of support staff are Roman Catholic. 71% of pupils who attend the school are baptised Catholics, 11% are from other Christian religions and 7.5% are Muslim. Prior attainment of pupils before joining the school is broadly in line with the national average and the attendance of pupils is above the national average. The school has achieved a number of externally verified awards including the Healthy Eating Award, CEIAG Gold Award and Anti-Bullying Bronze Award.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS GOOD

The Barlow is a good and improving Catholic high school with many outstanding features. Pupils at the school value the care and support that they receive and are proud of their school community. Since the previous inspection the school has made significant progress to address the areas of weakness that were identified and there is a determination at all levels in the school to ensure that all pupils are provided with an excellent education rooted in the Catholic faith. This is highlighted in the school mission statement, which states that the school's aim is to 'bring out the best in everyone within a safe and happy environment' and that 'everyone should know that we are followers of God by what we do, not just by what we say.' The headteacher and the school leadership team are committed to delivering this mission, highlighted by the priority given to supporting some of the most vulnerable pupils through the excellent pastoral, wellbeing and support team and there is a high level of staff commitment to the purpose of the school. The governors make a highly significant contribution to the work and the Catholic life of the school, providing a good balance of challenge and support. Pupils are able to put their faith into action through a range of charitable works and demonstrate compassion and justice through raising funds and awareness for local, national and global charities. The GIFT pupil chaplaincy team is starting to enhance the spiritual life of the school and there is a great deal of potential for them to develop and enrich prayer and worship. Parents feel welcome at the school and value the swift and effective manner in which the school deals with any concerns they have.

KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- The vision and commitment of the headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body, which has provided the catalyst for change and the determination of all who work at the school to provide a successful Catholic learning community.
- The quality of relationships, the care and welfare of all students, including outreach and support for the most vulnerable.
- The highly skilled RE team, with excellent leadership, which is fully committed to providing an outstanding Catholic education for all pupils and which has led to sustained improvements in GCSE results in Religious Education.

THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP IS GOOD

The headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body demonstrate a clear commitment to the church's mission and offer witness to Gospel values. The Catholic ethos permeates policy and practice and the priority given to the most vulnerable is apparent in the resources provided to the high number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, including the establishment of a nurture group and the recent developments in an alternative curriculum for older pupils. Safeguarding and pupil welfare have a high

priority and are strengths of the school's provision. Under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, who is well-supported by the leadership team, the school has made strong progress since the last inspection. Governance is excellent and the governing body provides rigorous monitoring of the school through subject links. Governors have undertaken a range of training courses run by the diocese and the local authority, which have enhanced their skill set and allows them to provide the right balance of support and challenge to the headteacher, particularly through the Rapid Improvement Group which meets on a regular basis to review progress against the school improvement plan. Parents and pupils speak highly of the leadership of the school and recognise the school's desire for each pupil to achieve their best. A number of parents commented on the smooth transition from primary school, while others described the school as having 'a strong, natural, spiritual and moral ethos'. Pupils were enthusiastic about taking on leadership roles and to act as mentors and role models for younger pupils. Not all school leaders were able to articulate how Gospel values drive the school's mission and this aspect of the vision of the governing body and leadership team is an area to highlight when the school's mission statement is next under review.

THE QUALITY OF WORD IS GOOD

The religious education department is well led and has a clarity of purpose which, supported by the school leadership team, has addressed the issues raised in the last inspection. In terms of the curriculum and the quality of teaching, assessment, marking and feedback, the department demonstrates excellent progress and outcomes for children have seen sustained improvement. Results in GCSE religious education have increased markedly, with pupils now achieving around the national average and comparing favourably to other core subjects in the school. The curriculum leader is ambitious for the department. Assessment follows a newly introduced whole-school system using new GCSE grades and pupils know their targets and what they need to do to improve. It is important that the assessment model provides sufficient scope to encourage and motivate pupils who may initially be working at the lowest grades. The quality of teaching observed in RE was never less than good and in one of the best lessons observed on the topic of stewardship, the teacher had high expectations for pupils and provided individual challenge with a blend of activities that supported progress for the class, who were able to link the theoretical aspect of the lesson to the values of the school. Pupils spoke highly of the quality of teaching and relationships in their RE lessons, identifying the good progress that they make in those lessons. The school has prioritised resources and staffing in this area with the addition of two specialist RE teachers since the last inspection. The required curriculum time for religious education is complemented by 'Family Time' at the end of every day, which gives pupils an opportunity to reflect upon and celebrate their achievements, gather for acts of collective worship and study spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) topics. SMSC was observed to be strong in RE lessons, but more variable across the curriculum and all teachers must take the opportunities afforded in their subjects to engage in the 'big questions' and provide a Catholic context to their teaching. The school mission statement, while written in 2009, is regularly reviewed by the school community and the school motto 'If you believe, you can achieve' is known and lived out by the pupils. The school environment is enriched by displays and scripture quotes.

THE QUALITY OF WELCOME IS OUTSTANDING

The culture of welcome at the school is a strength with pupils and staff recognising, valuing and celebrating diversity at all levels. The quality of welcome ensures that pupils, staff, parents and visitors feel respected and valued, while subject to the stringent safeguards that the school has in place to keep the pupils safe. Pupils of different faiths expressed a strong sense of belonging and a joyful, holistic approach to daily life was evident from morning prayers to 'Family Time' in the afternoon. The transition of pupils from a wide range of primary schools is excellent and pupils and parents alike spoke of the care that the school takes to make sure that all felt welcome. Older students felt a strong

sense of responsibility for the younger pupils and were able to discuss how these positive relationships were linked to the school mission statement as followers of God, judged by their actions. Pupils also described how their views are sought and valued by adults in the school and how their opinions have impacted on the daily life of the school, most recently to improve security. One notable feature is the work of the school's parent volunteer who champions the families of pupil premium students and encourages attendance at parents' evenings and other events.

THE QUALITY OF WELFARE IS OUTSTANDING

The commitment of the governors and the senior leadership team to the welfare of all within the school is outstanding. Significant resources are committed to the pastoral and welfare teams to look after the most vulnerable pupils within the school. The nurture unit, which is in its third year, provides a safe environment for a number of pupils who find the demands of secondary school challenging. The school has also recently taken the decision to provide on-site alternative provision to ensure that pupils receive continuity and support in their learning. The school provides art therapy, drama therapy, and music therapy for pupils and also works with numerous external agencies such as CAMHS, Reachout, Catch 22 Catalyst, MASH, Prevent and Manchester Youth Offending Team to ensure that pupils facing difficulties are given the advice and care required to support their education. The school has excellent data systems, which identify the additional needs that children have and monitors their performance carefully. The number of fixed term exclusions has reduced significantly over the last four years. Parents and pupils described how staff respond swiftly to any inappropriate behaviour and the school has been awarded the National Anti-Bullying Bronze Award. Sex and relationships education is delivered in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church through the RE and science departments and supported by TenTen Theatre Company visits. Staff welfare is well supported by the leadership team and a number of staff described the school as a positive environment in which to work with a real sense of togetherness; as one member of staff commented, "small gestures recognise the value and worth of all in the staff community".

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS GOOD

Prayer and worship are at the heart of school life with time for prayer in the morning and during Family Time in tutor groups in the afternoon. The structure for weekly assemblies follows the church's liturgical year and during the inspection high quality collective worship was observed during a year 10 assembly on St Francis of Assisi, together with a year 11 form group in the school chapel and with a year 8 form group during Family Time. There is an opportunity to develop resources for form prayers to follow the weekly assembly theme and the newly introduced 'Word and thought of the week', based on scripture. This would support this aspect of school life. The school encourages links with local parishes and families, and pupils contribute to parish life through regular attendance at Mass on Friday at St Catherine's church and through other events such as an annual Christmas carol service and participation in the local Marian procession. There is a voluntary prayer group led by the chaplaincy coordinator, which is attended by a group of younger pupils. Pupils expressed a desire to participate in residential retreats and school trips with a focus on spirituality if they were available. The school's GIFT chaplaincy team have taken part in a number of Diocesan events and the school has identified the development of pupil led chaplaincy as an area that could be enhanced; building on the work of GIFT pupil chaplaincy in primary schools. The school is well placed to move worship from good to outstanding by further developing pupil confidence in creating and leading times of prayer and worship.

THE QUALITY OF WITNESS IS OUTSTANDING

The Barlow RC High School is a vibrant community which places Christ at the heart of its mission and witness was found to be outstanding. Pupils of different faiths were proud to belong to a Catholic school and could articulate why it was important for them to be part of the community. The school supports the pupils to live out and to give witness to the mission statement in their everyday experiences. Gospel values are clearly evident in the relationships within the school and staff and pupils provide Christian witness to justice, reconciliation, stewardship and forgiveness. The respectful relationships across the school as well as the good behaviour and care for one another are a testimony to the centrality of the school's mission statement. Pupils and staff are generous with their time and are committed to a wide range of charities including Cafod, Francis House, St Joseph's Penny, The Christie Hospital, Macmillan Cancer Care, Cornerstone and support for an orphanage in Bolivia. Pupils understand how their charitable works impact on the lives of others and how this gives witness to Christ's message. Pupils also contribute to the school and the wider community through acting as Barlow buddies, peer reading mentors, junior sports leaders and through the National Citizen Service. Throughout the school, quotes from Pope Francis, information about the lives of saints and inspirational pieces of scripture are highly visible in displays and corridors. Within the school's own self-evaluation, it is recognised that the scope of the GIFT pupil chaplaincy team is somewhat restricted and that it must now involve more pupils in this aspect of school life. The school also intends to re-launch the Saint Vincent dePaul group which would enhance the work of the pupils in the local community.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

- Encourage pupils to take a greater lead in the prayer life of the school and develop the size and scope of the GIFT pupil chaplaincy team.
- Ensure that all departments engage with the 'big questions' and that all staff are able to articulate that policy and practice are driven by the school's mission.
- Sustain the rapid progress in teaching and learning in RE; allowing the department to become the leading area of learning across the school.

Summary Report to Parents

On 27th September 2016 the school was inspected in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The full report has been made available to the school and can also be accessed via both the school website and the Education section on the website of the Diocese of Salford.

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27th September 2016

Dear Pupils

Thank you so much for the wonderful welcome you gave us when we came to visit you. Together with your teachers, support staff and helpers, you belong to a good Catholic school with some outstanding features. This is because you are really striving to live up to the challenge of the Gospel and to follow your school motto, 'If you believe, you can achieve'.

Your work is of a high standard and we could see that you take your learning very seriously and are proud of your achievements. You have excellent RE teachers who are clearly helping you to feel confident in your learning and ability to discuss complex religious and moral issues.

Your governors and Mrs McCarron want to continue to take your knowledge and understanding of the teaching of the Catholic Church further and see how the school can offer all pupils more opportunities to go on retreats and pilgrimages. We were impressed by the work of the pupil chaplaincy team and hope that more pupils will get involved in leading the Catholic life of the school.

We were very impressed by many aspects of your school. It was good to see that you make good use of your beautiful chapel and the way you care for the school buildings. However, we were most impressed by how you care for each other as a community in which everyone values and respects each other for who they are.

God bless you all.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Michael Wright, Mr Richard Wood and Mr Martin Reynolds
Section 48 Inspectors