

Archbishop Blanch Church of England Voluntary Aided High School
A Technology College and Training Centre
Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104705
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	308655
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Chambers 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	916
6th form	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Frank McFarlane
Headteacher	Miss Jane Griffiths
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2004
School address	Mount Vernon Road Liverpool Merseyside L7 3EA
Telephone number	0151 7091452
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Age group	11–18
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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

Archbishop Blanch is an average-sized school, with a relatively stable community of pupils. It provides sixth form courses in partnership with four other local schools. The 11 to 16 school is for girls only. The sixth form admits boys and girls, but the number of boys is very small. The school draws its pupils from across the diocese of Liverpool, but the majority come from the Church of England communities of south and central Liverpool. Pupils come from areas with above average levels of deprivation, but the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is in line with national figures. Relatively few pupils need additional help with their learning. Over 84% of the pupils are of White British heritage. The remainder of the school population contains small numbers of pupils from several different minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than in most schools, but few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The school has had specialist status in technology since 1996 and achieved training school status in 2007. Other awards held by the school include Investors in People, Healthy Schools, Eco-schools and Financial Management Standard in Schools. The current headteacher has been in post since September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Archbishop Blanch is a good school, where good teaching and pastoral care of an outstanding quality enable pupils to achieve well. Pupils show outstanding levels of personal development, demonstrated by their excellent behaviour and maturity for their age. They treat each other with respect, cooperate in their work and show positive attitudes to their studies. The school's Christian values are at the heart of all that it does and contribute positively to pupils' spiritual and moral development. In their response to the questionnaire, almost all parents recognise this as a good school and are overwhelmingly positive in their support.

Teachers and pupils are rightly proud of the school's success in promoting its mission to, 'nurture academic potential, individual talent, respect and self-worth in each person'. Pupils of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds feel comfortable and safe. The school's positive ethos effectively promotes high levels of attendance and encourages pupils to take part in all aspects of school life. It is to the pupils' credit that they respond with so much enthusiasm.

The headteacher leads the school well and has a clear focus on school improvement. She builds effective teams of staff and manages change well. Self-evaluation is strong and well coordinated: this is a school that knows its strengths and recognises where improvements are needed. Middle managers are valued and influential in determining school policy. They also value the support and encouragement that they receive from the senior leaders and refer to a 'whole team approach'. The benefits of specialist college status are used to good effect. The recent accreditation as a training school has increased the opportunities for teachers' professional development and has improved access to the resources of the partner institutions. Good systems for monitoring pupils' progress are now in place and managers are beginning to use them effectively. Governance is good: frequent meetings with the headteacher ensure that governors are well informed about the school.

Standards are consistently at least above average and they are rising in Key Stage 4. Pupils achieve well overall, but their rate of progress varies between key stages: satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 is followed by good progress in Key Stage 4. One reason that pupils make more progress in Key Stage 4 is because older pupils receive more consistent guidance from teachers about how to improve their work. Younger pupils are less aware of the targets they are working towards or ways that they can improve their work. Teaching is good. Many teachers enliven their lessons through using a variety of stimulating activities. They encourage pupils to take a good degree of responsibility for their own learning and pupils respond well to this challenge. The broad and balanced curriculum meets statutory requirements and provides well for the needs of all pupils, including those who are very able.

Improvement since the last inspection has been good, particularly in the school's accommodation and resources. Recently introduced systems of data analysis and the upward trend of results at Key Stage 4 demonstrate good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is an effective sixth form, where students benefit from good teaching and high levels of guidance and support. A large proportion of Year 11 students choose to continue their studies into the sixth form. Additional students who join from other schools enhance numbers by about 20%. Retention levels are high and students' achievement is good.

Recent results have fluctuated more than would be expected. In some years achievement has been excellent. Managers responded quickly to a dip in achievement in 2007 and current students are progressing well. Standards are above average. Students value their lessons and benefit from their teachers' considerable subject expertise. Students receive excellent pastoral care and, as a result of good guidance from their teachers, they understand how to improve their work. Good collaboration with local schools helps to provide a wide variety of A-level courses including textiles and geology, together with a limited range of vocational options. The sixth form is well led and managed, with the head of sixth form building on established strengths to improve, for example, students' understanding of how they can achieve the higher grades in their examinations.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure, including through marking, that pupils know more clearly how they can improve their work.
- Improve pupils' rate of progress in Key Stage 3.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are consistently at least above average in both key stages and pupils achieve well. In Key Stage 3 standards have remained steady, though the school's targets have not always been met. In Key Stage 4, however, standards are rising and statutory targets are met. In 2007, the proportion of pupils who gained five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics was 72%, compared with a national average of 44%.

Pupils' achievement reflects a similar picture. They enter the school with attainment that is generally above average and build on this as they move through the school. The progress they make is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and, as a result, they too achieve well. Measures taken by the school to address underachievement in English in 2006 have been successful and pupils' achievement in this subject is now in line with other subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' excellent personal development is evident in lessons and around the school. Their courtesy and outstanding behaviour were apparent throughout the inspection. They are able to work independently and collaboratively and can sustain their concentration over long periods of time when the task demands it. Pupils thrive in positions of responsibility, particularly on the well established school council and this contributes considerably to their increasing maturity. Their involvement in decision-making helps pupils to feel valued, safe and well cared for. As one pupil said, 'This school really listens to us.'

Pupils understand the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle. They appreciate the provision of affordable healthy meals at lunch-time and many take part in sports or use the fitness suite in school. Pupils take good advantage of the rich variety of extra-curricular activities that are available. They are active in raising money for local, national and international charities.

Enterprise activities and work-related learning, together with the high standards of their key skills, mean that pupils are very well prepared for the world of work. Pupils demonstrate a strong commitment to equality for all and respond positively to opportunities to reflect on religious beliefs, racism and cultural diversity. As a result, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good and this confirms the school's judgement. All teaching seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory and much of it was good or outstanding. In the best lessons pupils enjoy a wide range of activities: they take an active part and learn quickly. In these lessons, pupils work enthusiastically and with a good degree of independence. They show maturity by taking considerable responsibility for their own learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson pupils were motivated by a 'message in a bottle' activity, where their curiosity was engaged and the level of challenge increased as they solved successively more difficult problems. In the small number of satisfactory lessons, teachers tended to talk to the full class for too long. In these cases, pupils' interest diminished, the pace of learning slowed and the more able pupils were not challenged.

The quality of marking varies too much. There are examples of good practice where teachers provide useful, and often detailed, written feedback that helps pupils to know how well they have done and gives constructive advice about how to improve. However, there are also instances where marking is superficial.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides a good curriculum which is well matched to pupils' abilities and aspirations. In addition to the Year 7 curriculum seen in most schools, pupils benefit from a course on how to become more skilled learners and they start to learn Latin. At Key Stage 4, pupils have a good range of academic subjects to choose from. The range of vocational courses is limited and the school has appropriate plans to develop these further.

The school's specialist status as a technology college has had a positive impact on the curriculum, especially on improving facilities across the school. Better provision is particularly evident in design and technology and information and communication technology, where improved teaching accommodation and resources are helping teachers to modernise the way they work and the way pupils learn.

The school's broader provision contributes strongly to pupils' social and cultural development. This is exemplified in the excellent range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities that is available, including voluntary work. Out of school visits promote cross-curricular links that extend pupils' learning and enjoyment. Pupils value these opportunities and rates of participation are high. Pupils participate in a wide range of challenging enterprise activities that contribute to their very good understanding of the world of work. The school has an impressive record of success in competitions both locally and regionally.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides outstanding pastoral care and support and satisfactory academic guidance. Staff are highly committed to meeting the needs of individual pupils and pay close attention to preparing them well for the future. Procedures for safeguarding pupils and ensuring health and safety are rigorous. School-based staff maintain good links with specialist agencies for pupils in need of additional support and, as a result, the school successfully meets the needs of its most vulnerable pupils. This helps the school to develop as a truly inclusive community. The care offered to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding and, as a result, these pupils enjoy school and know that they can always get the support that they need. Learning mentors play an effective role in helping pupils to maintain emotional well-being as well as in supporting their safety and good achievement. Good transition arrangements enable Year 7 pupils to settle well and those finishing Year 11 to move confidently into the sixth form, training or employment. Parents speak highly of the school's taster days, induction arrangements and presentations which keep them well informed about the courses that are available.

A thorough programme of general academic guidance is in place, but the quality of guidance for individual pupils is inconsistent. Consequently, not all pupils are clear about their targets and what they need to do to improve. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 3.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher is passionately committed to make this good school outstanding. There is a sense of purpose running throughout the leadership group and an expectation that all pupils, whatever their abilities and backgrounds, should be given opportunities to achieve success.

School leadership has identified a number of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and is helping teachers to share good practice through a carefully planned and valuable programme of professional development. However, there are some inconsistencies in the monitoring of teachers' performance and more could be done to improve the quality of marking. Rigorous procedures have been established to improve pupils' achievement through setting challenging targets. Good systems for monitoring and evaluating progress towards these targets are in place, but the school is not yet making full use of them to support the progress of individual pupils. Financial management is good. The business manager and senior leaders have moved from a position of weakness, with a large deficit budget, to one of strength, with a healthy reserve. Funds are managed with great care to ensure that spending is directed to supporting pupils' achievement. The governing body has a good level of involvement in the life of the school and a secure understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It effectively fulfils its role as a critical friend, offering strong support and constructively challenging the school's leadership as appropriate.

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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	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	
How well 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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

As you know, a team of inspectors and I recently inspected your school. This letter is to tell you the results of the inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views. Many of your parents gave us their views via the questionnaires and these were most useful.

We judged Archbishop Blanch to be a good school, where standards are above those seen in most other schools. You make good progress in your work because of the high quality of teaching that you receive. We were impressed by your excellent behaviour, the way you cooperate in lessons and your positive attitudes to learning. Many of you demonstrate something unusual among young people: you can work well independently and take responsibility for your own learning.

You benefit from outstanding levels of pastoral support which help you to feel safe in school and enjoy your time there. You take full advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are on offer. The headteacher and her team run the school well. In order to make Archbishop Blanch an even better school, we have asked her, the governors and staff to:

- ensure, through marking and other guidance, that more of you understand clearly how to improve your work
- improve rates of learning in Key Stage 3.

You can help to keep your school improving through continuing to work hard and making the school council even more effective than it is. I hope that you will strive to achieve the very best qualifications that you can and wish you well for the future.