

Archbishop Blanch Church of England VA High School

Mount Vernon Road, Liverpool, Merseyside, L7 3EA

Inspection dates 13–14 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The percentage of students who gain five good passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is consistently well above the national average.
- All groups of students, including disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs, make good progress overall. This is particularly the case in English, science and physical education.
- Leaders are using successful strategies to raise achievement in the few subjects where students do not make consistently good progress, including mathematics.
- Teaching is continuing to improve due to a new focus by leaders on linking the performance management of staff to the quality of assessment.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress, leaving with standards higher than expected given their starting points.
- Leadership and governance continue to improve the school. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the new leadership. The majority of parents are also supportive of the new direction of the school.
- Governors are increasingly astute in holding school leaders and other staff to account. They are better able to determine progress across the school because they now monitor teaching and performance more closely.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to their learning are good across all areas of the school. They say that they feel safe and that they know how to seek help, should they need it.
- The pastoral care of students is excellent. There is strong support for the promotion of British values such as the democratic process, as was seen in the recent internal school elections.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders have historically concentrated too much on the standards students reach in their GCSE examinations rather than focusing on the progress they make from their starting points.
- Marking and assessment remains inconsistent, resulting in students sometimes being confused about how to improve their work.
- New data systems to record students' progress are not yet fully established across the school. Some staff are confused about using these to improve teaching and identify students' underperformance.
- Occasionally, teaching does not excite or inspire students to do their very best because tasks lack challenge.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons and parts of lessons, one of which was a joint observation with a senior leader.
- Formal discussions were held with four groups of students, the local authority, the school’s assigned police liaison officer, governors, senior and middle leaders.
- Additionally, informal discussions were held with students at break time and around the school to gather their views about behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work in students’ books both as a formal exercise in mathematics, English and science as well as in lessons observed during the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of supporting documentation in regard to safeguarding and child protection, minutes of governors’ meetings, performance management, progress data and external reports.
- Inspectors took into account the 98 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the 55 responses to the staff questionnaire, emails and letters and telephone calls from parents.

Inspection team

Colin Scott, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Peckett	Additional Inspector
Christine Veitch	Additional Inspector
Debra Wood	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Archbishop Blanch Church of England VA High School is a slightly smaller than average girls' secondary school with a mixed gender sixth form that operates in partnership with other sixth forms in Liverpool.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for extra support from the pupil premium funding is below the national average. The pupil premium supports those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The majority of students in the school are of White British heritage. An average and rising proportion of students come from a minority ethnic background.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for Year 11 students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school makes some use of alternative provision for a small number of girls in Years 10 and 11 on a part-time basis in vocational studies. These providers include:
 - Hugh Baird College for travel, hair and beauty
 - TPM for childcare
 - Kensington for information technology
 - Harmonize for performing arts
 - RLCF for horticulture
 - SALT for sports
 - Michael John for beauty
 - Cornerstone for construction.
- The headteacher has been in post for nine months and is overseeing comprehensive changes in leadership at all levels.
- The school is moving to a completely new site and building in September 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching, so as to inspire students to make the most rapid progress and achieve their very best, by:
 - enabling the few relatively less successful subject areas to learn from the very successful ones, such as science and physical education
 - ensuring all staff use the school's new marking policy to inform students of how they are doing and what they need to do to improve, so that students are able to respond to the challenges marking gives them
 - increasing students' excitement for and love of learning
 - ensuring teachers use the information available to them about students to create lessons that generate interest and are always pitched at the right level to challenge them.
- Further develop assessment and data tracking systems, so that all staff can use them effectively to guide lesson planning, track students' progress and identify the need for further support for learning, by:
 - giving staff further training, where necessary, to understand how to assess and input data onto the school's new systems and how to use it to guide them in their lesson planning
 - ensuring all leaders know how to use that data to identify the progress groups of students are making and use timely intervention to reverse any decline.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has already begun to make changes at all levels of leadership. She has quickly identified areas of priority for the school. She is focused not just on headline examination results but also on the progress students make during their time with the school. She has introduced new policies and procedures, such as the new marking policy, to ensure that teachers are rightly held to account for the progress their students make.
- Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the new direction of the school and give leaders their unequivocal support for the way it is led and managed.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively to support readers to make rapid progress in their literacy by ensuring that they read appropriately in lessons.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Senior leaders know where the expertise lies within the staff and regular training to develop teaching further is effective. However, processes are still being developed so that teaching is monitored more accurately against published criteria.
- Support for literacy is extremely strong and the English department is one of the strongest in the school. The school has gained the Gold Quality Assurance Mark for reading, the first secondary school in Liverpool to reach that standard.
- Leaders promote strong relationships with students and parents. The majority of parents feel that the school is well led. However, a small number believe that communication with them about new policies and routines could be better, so that students are better prepared for what lies ahead.
- School leaders work hard to promote equal opportunities for all. The curriculum is wide and varied, allowing for students' interests. Gaps in progress have narrowed over time, allowing those from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach the same standards as their classmates.
- The work of leaders to tackle discrimination is good. Students say that inappropriate language is tackled quickly by staff and that they receive strong support for understanding those of different faiths and backgrounds.
- Leaders at all levels know the progress all groups of students are making. However, the new data tracking systems employed by the school are not yet fully established, meaning that some leaders are not clear about what that data is telling them. This is leading to occasional confusion among staff.
- The curriculum meets the needs of students well overall. Leaders have been extremely successful at further increasing attendance at the school, which already had levels above the national average. This is in part due to the good curriculum, which students say they enjoy.
- Leaders commission external challenge and are supported by the local authority, which they say is valuable to them. The support given to the school from the local authority is effective.
- Leaders monitor attendance and behaviour extremely accurately. New systems employed to track behaviour patterns, in response to a local authority review, have been fully established quickly.
- Attendance at alternative provision, students' behaviour and the progress students make while on placement, is tracked systematically. As a result, these students attend as regularly and make the same good progress as their classmates.
- Leaders were quick to identify that progress students made in mathematics last year was not as high as in previous years. Governors quickly responded to this by identifying funding and support to add capacity to the department, which was experiencing some staffing difficulties at the time. Despite this and the fact progress levels fell slightly last year in mathematics, students still made progress close to the national average. School leaders have ensured that staffing has now stabilised within the department and are confident that progress and standards are rising.
- Middle leaders know, and are effective in, their roles. They relish their responsibilities and are extremely supportive of their senior leaders, governors and their students.
- Leaders have been extremely successful in closing the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and that of their peers nationally. In the case of English, this gap was completely eradicated in 2014; in mathematics, it has been closing over the last three years. Within school, the gaps are also closing over time and there are no gaps in progress in English. The pupil premium funding has been astutely used by governors and senior leaders to provide disadvantaged students with appropriate support and intervention.
- Leaders promote a caring and calm ethos across all areas of the school. The support for both British values and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding of students is very strong. One parent remarked how their child had returned home excited about the recent national elections after the school

has held its own elections. This promotes the value of democracy well. There are also ample opportunities for students to experience other cultures through extra-curricular activities and international visits to New York and Shanghai.

- The school ensures that safeguarding procedures are in place, meet statutory requirements and are effectively implemented.
- The school provides its students with sound careers guidance and advice which helps them to make informed choices about their next steps.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is effective. Governors know the school well. Many of them have been committed to the school for more than fifteen years and their passion and enthusiasm for students and staff are exemplary.
- The diocese is currently working with the governing body to carry out a review of governance to ensure that the governing body remains sharp and focused, and is equipped with the right skills for the future.
- Governors accept that in the past they may not have always been rigorous in challenging all the information about school performance they were given to ensure its validity but are confident that newer systems have corrected this.
- Governors now monitor the quality of teaching and staff performance management well. They ensure teachers progress through the pay scale only when appropriate through the strong guidance of the headteacher and the more accurate reporting of how teachers are performing.
- The governing body monitors the pupil premium funding well and has used it effectively to narrow the progress gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students' understanding of different faiths, cultures, background, lifestyles and beliefs is good. They demonstrate empathy for all who may be different to themselves.
- Students display care for their classmates and are often seen to autonomously give help and support to their friends in lessons when their teachers are busy with other students. They are polite and courteous to each other and to staff and visitors; students willingly offer a smile to other people they pass in corridors.
- Students' attitudes to learning are often exemplary and their books are tidy, neat and clearly written. Sometimes students are not inspired by their work and, as a result, they do not demonstrate an excitement or interest for learning new things in some lessons. When this is the case, their progress slows.
- The overwhelming majority of both staff and parents believe that behaviour is managed well across the school.
- All students interviewed in meetings stated that behaviour is not a problem and that in lessons their learning is rarely disrupted. When, occasionally, misbehaviour does occur, students say staff quickly deal with it so that they can continue to work.
- Inspectors were impressed with the calmness of the school and the behaviour observed in lessons and at break times during the inspection. Students attending the alternative provision behave well.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students say that they feel safe and are kept safe in school. The overwhelmingly majority of parents and staff also believe that students are safe in school.
- Students are supported well in their practical lessons and when using online technologies to keep themselves safe. Recently, the school has worked with the assigned police liaison officer to deliver assemblies and training to both staff and students in regard to using social media safely. Additionally, the school and local police have ensured that students are very aware of the issue of child sexual exploitation so that they can recognise danger signs and report anything suspicious that they see.
- Students were keen to tell inspectors about how happy they are with the school links to the local police force. The relationships that have been built through the assigned liaison officer have resulted in them being very confident about speaking to the police.
- Further support is being given to broaden the students' understanding of safety issues surrounding life in

modern Britain. For example, the next training to be delivered to staff and students is focused on the prevention of radicalisation.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching continues to ensure that students make good progress and reach standards in GCSE that are consistently well above national averages in most subject areas.
- The good relationships established between teachers and students ensure that students are comfortable in talking to their teachers and asking questions.
- Teachers know their subjects well and students respond positively to this, having confidence in what they are being taught. They plan and teach lessons that are usually pitched at the right level to ensure that students make good progress. However, some teachers do not always take into account the particular needs or interests of their students so that they truly inspire them and excite them in their learning. Similarly, some teachers do not yet make full use of the data available to them in order to fully challenge all students according to their abilities, so that they make the very best progress possible.
- The teaching of literacy has been a priority for the school and ensures that students are able to communicate effectively in all lessons. Numeracy is also supported well, particularly in science, where the application of formulae in a practical context helps students to understand how and why mathematics is used.
- Teaching in some subjects, such as science and physical education, is particularly strong. This leads to very high rates of progress for all groups of learners due to the challenge for all and the excitement it provokes.
- Students say that they receive good verbal feedback in lessons and that most marking helps them to improve their work. Teachers regularly check on students' progress and help them keep focused and on task. Teachers are skilful at judging the progress learners make during lessons. They adapt the lessons carefully and appropriately as a result of their understanding of how students are gaining knowledge and developing skills.
- The new marking and assessment systems introduced by leaders in November 2014 have not yet been fully implemented by some staff. This is leading to some students becoming confused or not making the progress of which they are capable. Leaders have incorporated assessment and marking targets into all teachers' performance management procedures but acknowledge that there is still some variability in how staff implement these procedures.
- During the inspection, work scrutiny identified very strong marking procedures, such as in English, where the new school policy has been implemented well. As a result, students are clear about their targets and are making faster progress. Most teachers have consistently high expectations and this helps to foster strong challenge and good progress in students. As a result, students themselves have high aspirations and expectations and a genuine desire to do their very best at all times.
- Other adults in the classroom are used well to support the progress students make. There is clear guidance and communication between teachers and additional staff to ensure that they are effectively deployed in lessons.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with above average attainment and over time they reach well above average by the end of Year 11. In 2014, the number of good passes students gained in their GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, once again exceeded the national average.
- In 2014, progress rates across all groups of students in English were very high compared to the national average and the gaps between the progress of disadvantaged students compared to their classmates in school narrowed further.
- In mathematics, progress for all groups fell to below the levels expected. While the gap between the progress of disadvantaged students compared to their classmates narrowed, it was still wide compared to other pupils nationally. This was as a result of mathematics not being as successful as it had been in previous years due to the instability of staffing within the department. Since September 2014, staffing has stabilised and progress data this year, confirmed by inspection evidence, demonstrates that students are now making much stronger progress in mathematics than last year.
- Current progress measures across all year groups and across a range of subjects shows students are making good progress overall.

- In mathematics in 2014, disadvantaged students were about half a grade behind their classmates and about two thirds of a grade behind other pupils nationally. In English, they were about a third of a grade behind their classmates and in line with other pupils nationally.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are supported well in their learning. Consequently, the progress they make is similar to that of their peers in school.
- The small number of students who access alternative provision on a part-time basis for vocational studies are diligently tracked by school leaders. The progress they make in those lessons is in line with that of their peers in school.
- Some subjects, such as English, science and physical education, consistently support students to achieve the very highest results across all groups of students. Results in 2014 for students in those subjects shows that the grades students in Year 11 gained greatly exceeded national averages.
- The most-able students achieve well overall. Their progress is particularly rapid in English and science. Progress in mathematics, while good overall, is less rapid.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form attracts approximately two thirds of its intake from the main school and the rest, including a number of male students, from other Liverpool schools. As a result, students join the sixth form with attainment that is broadly average overall. They leave in Year 13 having made good progress and with standards which are above average.
- Leaders have been successful in attracting students from across the city to its sixth form provision as a result of an exciting curriculum, alongside a strong reputation within the community.
- The behaviour of students is exemplary across the sixth form. They have very strong attitudes to learning which support their progress well. They say they feel safe and have received tailored instruction by both leaders and the local police as to how to keep themselves safe within the community and in school.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders are accurate in judging the standards being reached by students and are constantly looking at ways to enhance provision to increase recruitment and ensure students stay through the full two years of study. However, some students say that leaders do not always clearly communicate any changes to the courses that they are on, leading them to feel confused.
- Support for careers and guidance is strong and respected by students who say that they feel well prepared for life at university. However, a few students also say that there is not enough information given to those who do not want to access higher education.
- Sixth form students relish the many extra opportunities and responsibilities the school gives them, such as becoming peer mentors and paired readers to younger students. They say this helps to build their confidence.
- The quality of teaching across the sixth form is good. Students make the strongest progress in subjects such as science, sociology, psychology and sports as a result of teaching that excites and inspires them to do well.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104705
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	461779

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	932
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank McFarlane
Headteacher	Heather Duggan
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2012
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