

INSPECTION REPORT

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**Inspection carried out Under Canon 806
and in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

Name of School: **St. Ambrose Barlow RC High School and Sixth Form College**
37 Ash Drive, Wardley, Swinton, Salford M27 9QP

Inspection date: 1 March 2019

Reporting Inspectors Martin Reynolds, Andy Bridson, Janet Burns

Type of school	Catholic High School
URN	105989
Age range of pupils	11-19 years
Number on roll	1110
Appropriate authority	The Governing Board
Chair of Governors	Karen Whitehead
Headteacher	Ben Davis
Religious Education Subject Leader	Ben Davies
Date of previous inspection	25 September 2013

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	
The quality of Catholic Leadership	2	
The Catholic Life of the school (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness)	2	
The quality of Religious Education (incorporating Word)	2	
The quality of Worship	2	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St. Ambrose Barlow is an 11-19 Roman Catholic High School in Salford. The school experienced turbulence in moving to a new site in 2013 and amalgamating with St George's RC High School in Salford in the following year. The current Headteacher has been in post since July 2015 and the Chair of Governors since July 2017. Amalgamation increased the school roll above the national average. The Sixth Form, opened in 2013, is smaller than average. Amalgamation has affected the traditional demographic of the school. The percentage of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium is broadly average. The percentage of pupils with SEND is above average the number of Catholic teachers on roll is close to 50%. The school has developed strong relationships with six partner primary schools forming the St. Ambrose Barlow Learning Community. The school has developed close links with local parishes, particularly St. Charles', Swinton, but have also held Masses for leavers, new parents and pupils at St. Mark's, St. Luke's and St. Edmund's.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- **The Headteacher offers a clear and inspiring vision for a highly inclusive, Catholic school.**
- **The exemplary quality of relationships between all members of the community has created a family atmosphere in which each person is valued.**
- **The exceptional quality of pastoral care is founded on highly inclusive Catholic values.**
- **Governors know the school well and are clear and confident about how the school's ambitions will be realised.**

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS GOOD

St. Ambrose Barlow RC High School is a good Catholic school. Although the school experienced some disruption in moving to a new building and merging with another high school, the headteacher, supported by his team, has shown intuitive leadership in redefining the Catholic values and vision of the school in such inclusive terms. The school's imaginative mission statement permeates all areas of school life, shapes decisions and interactions and is beginning to be lived out by many in the community. The Catholic life of the school is good and is at its strongest in the exemplary relationships between staff and pupils and the excellent care staff give to all pupils, especially the vulnerable and potentially marginalised. As one parent commented: "I cannot speak highly enough of the support for vulnerable pupils in this school". Pupils recognise that staff "go the extra mile" in ensuring they are safe, happy and well-cared for. Students in the sixth form who had left to attend other colleges had returned in a short space of time citing the care of staff being the reason. Pupils enjoy school and behave well. Religious Education delivers the required 10% of curriculum time and under the enthusiastic leadership of the Religious Education subject leader is establishing itself as a hub of best practice in teaching and learning. The quality of Worship, whilst good, has not maintained the same momentum of improvement as other areas. Leaders have the drive and ambition to improve Worship further but do not yet have the capacity to achieve this. The appointment of a lay chaplain is needed to improve and develop this area. Governors are knowledgeable and ambitious for the school and hold leaders to account for the Catholic mission of the school. They work closely with the headteacher and have prioritised appropriate human and material resources to maintain sustainable improvement.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS GOOD

From the turbulence of a move to a new building and subsequent amalgamation, the headteacher has provided outstanding and reflective leadership in building a highly inclusive Catholic community. Supported by a dedicated senior team and committed governors (who know the school well), leaders are investing energy and resources into delivering their ambitious "pilgrimage of faith". Whilst at the early stage of this journey, the drive and commitment are palpable, including that of the Religious Education subject leader, who is leading his team to be "the lighthouse of the school". All policies and decisions are now shaped by their renewed Ambrosian mission for all "to be the best version of themselves" This is beginning to sharpen practice by amplifying for all staff that each and every child matters. The Headteacher and his senior team model this value daily. Staff feel valued through explicit training in the school's inclusive ethos and support leaders in building up what one pupil described as something "more like a family than a school". In financially challenging times, Governors have presided over courageous decisions to ensure material and human resources serve the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised in the school community. Pupils daily experience a care from staff which goes over and above and which some

pupils were able to link to the Catholic values of the school. In lessons, pupils are increasingly experiencing the connectedness of SMSC values across subjects and are beginning to signpost Christ as the well-spring of those values.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness) IS GOOD

This is a welcoming school. Over the last five years staff have worked hard to overcome the hurdles of a school amalgamation and the establishment of a sixth form to create a harmonious community. Pupils spoke positively about the vertical house system with younger pupils feeling safe and cared for by older pupils and older pupils articulating the responsibility they now had to support them. The welfare of pupils is paramount from policy to practice. Relationships between pupils and staff are exemplary at all levels. When a pupil became visibly upset during an observed assembly, the spontaneous care of a teacher was typical of the attention to welfare seen elsewhere. Pupils who might feel marginalised in less inclusive schools feel welcome and valued and were able to cite systems and people they could rely on to share their problems. Students in the sixth form recognised the high quality of care and two who had attended a sixth form elsewhere had returned within weeks citing the pastoral care and guidance they receive as the reason. Parents share the same viewpoint, proud of the school and its family atmosphere. A parent council meets every half term to provide challenge and support for the headteacher. Although a pupil school council is in its infancy, the headteacher meets with different groups of pupils each week for a hot chocolate and chat in order to give value to their voice. Each of the six pastoral houses has a designated charity and school bears witness to its Catholic mission in charity fund raising and service such as the senior citizen's Christmas party. Explicit Catholic values are promoted across the school and some students are able to link this to the teaching of the Gospel. For example, a Year 11 student working on an Art project on street graffiti was able to link her moral reaction to racist graffiti to The Golden Rule of treating others as we would want to be treated.

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (incorporating Word) IS GOOD

Religious Education is now the core of the curriculum delivering 10% of curriculum time. Through the enthusiastic drive and leadership of the Religious Education subject leader, teaching in Religious Education is routinely good and sometimes outstanding. The team of specialist teachers work collaboratively and are establishing Religious Education as the core of the core curriculum. GCSE Attainment and progress in Religious Education does not yet fully reflect the impact of improved teaching. Leaders have identified the need to make the challenges of GCSE Religious Education more accessible to middle and low attainers. The Religious Education team is building stronger foundations in Key Stage 3 and they are confident that improved outcomes for middle and low attainers will follow.

Pupils enjoy Religious Education, particularly the opportunity to debate social issues. In one lesson about modern saints, all pupils were engaged through skilled questioning and were seeing the links between Religious Education and other subjects. Their spontaneous questions and considered answers showed a good level of religious literacy. Feedback in books was varied. In the best examples, pupils acted on feedback and showed improvements over time. Beyond curriculum Religious Education, SMSC is becoming well-developed. There were some good examples of teachers drawing moral issues back to Catholic values. The explicit teaching of oracy which was observed in a Year 7 lesson, demonstrated outstanding practice in building pupils' oral confidence but also in linking this confidence to the Gospel mandate to speak out against injustice and inequality. The oracy curriculum is impacting positively on pupils' confidence in expressing considered views at the same time as creating a culture of mutual listening and respect.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS GOOD

Leaders recognise that Worship is not as far along the improvement journey as other areas of the Catholic life of the school. Having had the services of a lay chaplain up until last year, a replacement has not yet been appointed which has limited their capacity to maintain sustainable improvements. The school enjoys a well-resourced chapel used for prayer groups, staff masses and liturgies. There are plans to commence class masses and to put the Eucharist at the heart of worship. Staff, on a rota, take turns to lead staff prayer twice a week in a before-school briefing. In the briefing observed there was a missed opportunity (given the space and resources available) to participate in something more meditative or spiritual. Pupils are respectful of prayer and collective worship and take some part in planning and delivering liturgies and assemblies. Leaders are working to establish a higher level than compliance and are working to ensure pupils are more immersed in worship so that they become naturally more engaged. In the House assembly observed, key elements of prayer, Sacred Scripture and moral teaching were all included. The GIFT chaplaincy team acts as much as an inclusive haven for vulnerable pupils as a hub of liturgical creativity. They help write bidding prayers for school liturgies and with support of the drama group and strong musical contributions, liturgical celebrations are often creative.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **To ensure improved and sustainable outcomes in Religious Education for all pupils.**
- **To ensure the school's inclusive, Catholic mission is reflected in a rich, challenging curriculum and teaching strategies appropriate for all pupils.**
- **To extend pupil leadership and ownership of Worship across all key stages so that the spiritual life of the school continues to grow.**