

Prestwich Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105362
Local authority	Bury
Inspection number	336483
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Mr Vincent Ashworth HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community School
Age range of students	11–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	845
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ray Austin
Headteacher	Mr Geoffrey Barlow
Date of previous school inspection	February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 33 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence. This included assessment information, students' work, key policies and practices including those on safeguarding and health and safety, records of monitoring of the quality of teaching, school improvement plans and arrangements to support vulnerable learners. In addition, 123 parental questionnaires, 124 students' questionnaires and 49 staff questionnaires were reviewed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which learning and progress are consistently good for most groups of students by the end of Year 11
- the extent to which students, especially lower ability boys, make good progress in lessons as a consequence of improvements in teaching and assessment
- the extent to which students know how to improve their work in order to achieve targets that stretch and challenge them
- how well managers at all levels use information about performance to improve outcomes for students
- the impact of improvements in curriculum and care, guidance and support on outcomes for students, especially those at risk of not achieving.

Information about the school

Prestwich Arts College is a smaller than average school that is growing in popularity. It attracts students from both the local area as well as from the inner city areas of Manchester and Salford. There are more boys than girls. Around 38% of students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Pakistani origin. Around a quarter of students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who take free school meals is twice the national average. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly higher than average. A relatively high number of students join the school at other times than the start of Year 7. The school has secured a number of awards including Investors in People, the Financial Management Standard, Artsmark Gold and Healthy Schools. It has been a specialist arts college since 2004.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Prestwich Arts College is a good school that provides its students with a firm foundation for adult life. Certain aspects of the school, for example pastoral care and guidance, are outstanding. The school's mantra 'at the heart of the community where everyone matters' is a thread that runs throughout all aspects of school life. The school values its students enormously. Exemplary policies, strategies and procedures for safeguarding students are meticulously implemented to ensure their welfare and well-being. The very large majority of students enjoy their time at school and make the most of the many opportunities made available to help them to achieve and thrive.

Leaders and managers at all levels show a passion and determination to bring about sustained improvement. The headteacher provides strong leadership and inspires students and staff to give of their best. The school's approach to self-evaluation is well-established and appropriately self-critical. As a result, the school knows what it does well and where it needs to focus attention to make things even better. This is an improving school. The school's specialist arts status is flourishing and the quality of students' learning has been enriched by the facilities and opportunities this affords. The management of this aspect of the school's work is excellent. Students speak with enthusiasm about their increased levels of confidence and the skills and aptitudes they have gained from being involved in arts-related activities.

Following a decline in 2008, examination results are on the rise. Overall pass rates at GCSE have increased. Students' achievement in English has improved significantly but mathematics lags behind. Most students are making at least good progress. Girls and Pakistani students in particular have responded particularly well to various initiatives to accelerate students' progress. The school is successfully closing the achievement gap between boys and girls. Nevertheless, a small minority of lower ability White British boys still lags behind other groups of learners. Liaison between appropriate staff in the school, including the pastoral team who provide mentoring support, ensures that vulnerable children, including those at risk of exclusion, have early intervention and support. Students with social and emotional difficulties and students who are in public care are supported extremely well. As a result, they move seamlessly and confidently onto the next stage of their education or training. Senior leaders are not resting on their laurels; they recognise that more work needs to be done to ensure that students are provided with greater challenge to achieve their very best.

There are pockets of excellent teaching that inspire students to achieve and engage in their learning. Some teaching remains dull because teachers do not plan their lessons sufficiently well to ensure that learning is sufficiently challenging for students across the full ability range. Similarly, written feedback on students' work does not always include clear and precise comments about how they could improve their performance. Consequently, not all students are clear about what they need to do to achieve higher marks or grades. The school does not make sufficient use of the skills of the very best teachers. There is further scope for harnessing and spreading these skills of the very best teaching and assessment that inspectors saw in subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT), food technology, textiles, performing arts, drama, business and English.

Strong management, happy and achieving students, supportive parents and a committed staff ensures the school provides good value for money. The school has made improvements in all of the areas identified for action at the last inspection. Effective arrangements for quality assurance, rising standards and improvements in teaching and learning indicate good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to raise the attainment and achievement of all students, and in particular that of lower ability White British boys, by:
 - ensuring that marking consistently provides students with the detailed information and guidance that helps them to improve their work
 - ensuring that in every lesson, teachers devise clear learning aims that are tailored to students' differing levels of ability and against which students learning and progress can be systematically measured
 - making better use of the skills of the very best teachers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of students

2

Inspectors saw good learning and progress in the majority of lessons visited. Learning is best when students are engaged in practical activities which are supported by access to computers, which allows them to research and discover things for themselves. In science, for example, the fun and enjoyment in practical work led to a pupil saying, 'this practical work makes me feel like a scientist'. In such lessons, all students are keen to answer questions and to complete the tasks set by their teachers. Students' learning is less effective in lessons where the pace is slow and tasks are not well understood. This is often because teachers have not given enough thought to how they can get the best out of all students when they plan their lessons.

Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly average overall. Following a dip in examination results in 2008, the strategies that were put in place during 2009 were successful in harvesting a much improved crop of results in 2009. At 63%, the proportion of students achieving 5 or more good GCSE grades was an all time high for the school. This represents good learning and progress when students'

starting points are taken into consideration. The increase in the proportion of A*/A grades is testimony to the fact that higher ability students are provided with greater challenge. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well motivated and engaged in their learning. School data indicate that most students currently in Year 11 are on track to reach their challenging targets. Nevertheless, a small but significant proportion of White, lower ability boys are reluctant to learn. Their progress, although generally satisfactory, sometimes falters and they find it difficult to break through the C/D borderline when they sit their GCSE examinations.

Students behave very well both around the school and in lessons. They get on very well with their teachers and value highly all the help and guidance they receive from them. Students are highly motivated and are able to make well-informed and mature decisions about their lifestyle and future prospects. They have a clear sense of fairness and respect the views of others. The majority of students are respectful of the school's rules and regulations, even if they do not always like them. Fixed-term exclusion rates are high. However, the school underpins short periods of exclusion with a raft of support strategies. This means that students who persistently break school rules are able to return with dignity, catch up and start with a clean slate. Invariably, they subsequently choose to moderate their behaviour for the better. The school makes strenuous efforts to improve attendance and the number of persistent absentees has declined significantly over the last three years. Nevertheless, not all students attend as regularly as they should and overall attendance rates are average.

Students feel particularly safe in the school and instances of bullying are very rare because adults are very quick to stamp it out. Students are very well informed about how to keep themselves safe and are acutely aware of the dangers presented by the internet. The school council is effective in voicing students' views and has effected changes for the better. It has good links with the governing body and the representation of students' views is mature and considered. The good range of work-related and enterprise opportunities prepare students well for life after school. The number of students who leave school and do not progress into education, training or employment is relatively low. The strong management and delivery of ICT in the school ensures that students leave well-equipped with important skills for the world of work.

These are the grades for students' outcomes

Students' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Students' attainment	3
The quality of students' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which students feel safe	1
Students' behaviour	2
The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which students contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which students develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Students' attendance	3
The extent of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The proportion of good or better teaching has increased since the last inspection. Nevertheless, the extent to which students experience consistently high quality teaching is variable. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of their students and provide a range of structured and varied tasks at a good pace. Well-structured activities offer increasing levels of challenge so that all students are able to access the tasks and make at least good progress. Learning outcomes are clearly differentiated and provide stretch for all levels of ability. The most skilled teachers make good use of assessment criteria to not only make regular checks on learning and progress, but to encourage students to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. This empowers students to accept more responsibility for the quality of their work and gives them greater independence. In less effective lessons, teaching does not meet the needs of all students because learning aims lack precision and students are not able to assess their progress. Teachers' marking is inconsistent between and within departments. There are examples of good practice, for example, in English, but marking often lacks the detail to help students to identify their strengths and know how to improve.

The school continually reviews and amends its curriculum to meet the needs of all its students. The range of options and vocational courses available in Years 10 and 11 are increasingly meeting the diverse needs and interests of older students. Opportunities for work-related learning are developing. Collaboration with local colleges of further education on 14-19 developments is good and supports students' transition into post 16 opportunities. The school's extra-curricular provision is the jewel in its crown. Students' participation in sporting and arts activities, homework clubs and cultural pursuits is high; the school is starting to monitor this provision to ensure that all groups of students are broadening their experience. Students who are gifted and talented take part in special projects to extend their skills and raise their aspirations. A high number also attend after-school lessons to take additional qualifications in mathematics and statistics; their results are impressive.

The outstanding care, guidance and support provided to students reflect the school's strongly inclusive ethos. Exemplary arrangements for pastoral care and mentoring contribute significantly to students' enjoyment of school life and the progress they make. Teachers know their students particularly well and monitor their academic and personal development systematically. When individuals are not achieving their challenging targets, they receive help quickly and, as a result, they get back on track because of highly effective one-to-one mentoring. After-school homework clubs are particularly popular with students. Both the mentoring and additional academic support have been particularly beneficial for some of the less-able students, especially the boys who are trying to improve their grades or levels. Support for vulnerable students and their families is exemplary because of the strong, specialist provision in school and close links with various agencies.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3

The extent to which the curriculum meets students' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides strong direction and is well supported by the senior management team and school governors. Staff relationships are excellent and the whole school shares a common purpose focused on raising achievement. Systems and procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are robust. Senior leaders have an accurate view of teaching and learning in the school. The school is developing the use of validation panels involving external partners to monitor the quality of its own processes. Parents' views are regularly sought through questionnaires and their views are taken into account when important decisions are made. Governors are highly committed to the school and have a clear vision for its future direction. However, they have not held managers sufficiently to account in the past for variation in the school's performance. The school has yet to evaluate the impact of its work in relation to community cohesion in a coherent and meaningful way.

Equality of opportunity is at the very core of all decisions that are made and is given a very high priority in all aspects of school life. Information about the performance and well-being of different groups of students is used meticulously by managers to make sure that there are no barriers to learning and enjoyment for any group or individual. Consequently, the attainment gap between boys and girls is narrowing very quickly. Students' differences and individuality are celebrated within a harmonious and safe environment. There are very clear management responsibilities and significant numbers of knowledgeable and committed staff deployed in relation to child protection and safeguarding. This enables the school to monitor and structure individualised programmes highly effectively. As a result, these are having a significantly positive impact on improving the outcomes for many vulnerable students.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers are highly supportive of the school's management and are happy with the quality of education the school provides for their child. Most parents feel that the school provides well for their child's safety and that the school keeps them well informed about their child's progress. Few parents made negative comments. A small minority of parents feel that the school could do more to advise them on how they can support their child's learning. Similarly, a small minority feel that more could be done to help their child lead a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors noted that the school is working hard to address these concerns and new school dining facilities are currently under construction. These will further enhance the already healthy eating options that are available to students.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Prestwich Arts College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received **123** completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 845 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	50	41	70	57	2	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	49	40	69	56	5	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	51	43	64	54	4	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	41	63	52	7	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	43	37	71	61	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	36	30	68	57	14	12	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	28	64	54	20	17	1	
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	44	37	69	58	5	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	42	35	70	58	7	6	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	39	59	49	11	9	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	34	28	69	58	13	11	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	58	48	55	46	6	5	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	54	45	63	52	3	2	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its students' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its students well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its students.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its students. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the students' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well students acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>the following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of students.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets students' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress	the rate at which students are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the students' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.



26 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Prestwich Arts College, Prestwich, Manchester, M25 1JZ

Thank you for the warm welcome when I came to inspect your school recently. Inspectors found it particularly helpful to hear your views about the school. Many of you told us about changes for the better and how much improved your school is since it was last inspected. We agree with you. We judged that your school is good and that some aspects, for example the pastoral care and arrangements are now outstanding.

What struck the inspectors the most was the extent to which students from a very wide range of backgrounds and cultures get on so well together. Thank you also to those of you who completed questionnaires. You told us that you felt particularly confident in your headteacher and his senior management team. You also said that the staff at the school care about you and your teachers help you to improve. I wasn't surprised by how many of you feel well-prepared for when you move on to college, work or training. I saw first-hand how good your ICT skills are and how much you grow in self-confidence through your involvement in specialist arts college initiatives. I was disappointed, however, to see that not all of you do your very best to attend school regularly. This is a real pity as it means you miss out on so many good things your school has to offer. Examination results are already on the increase and the majority of you are making good progress. Nevertheless there is still room for improvement for some boys who are aiming for a grade C in their GCSE examinations. Sometimes they do not achieve as well as they can and slip to a grade D.

Your headteacher and all the staff have high aspirations for the future development of your school and are committed to improving your achievement. In order to help you do even better and reach higher standards, I have asked them to concentrate on some key things:

- to ensure that comments on your work give you enough guidance on what to do in order to improve and achieve your challenging targets
- to ensure that all teachers plan lessons that are suited to your different needs so that you can all make good progress in your learning, especially those of you, particularly some of the boys, who are struggling on the C/D borderline
- making better use of the skills of the very best teachers.

You have an important part to play by continuing to attend school regularly and doing your very best at all times. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Vincent Ashworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

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