

St Bede's Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119792
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	379891
Inspection dates	1–2 March 2012
Lead inspector	Sally Kenyon 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	689
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cathy Jenkins
Headteacher	Richard Varey
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2009
School address	St Anne's Road Ormskirk L39 4TA
Telephone number	01695 570335
Fax number	01695 571686
Email address	admin@stbedes-ormskirk.lancs.sch.uk



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Introduction

Inspection team

Sally Kenyon
Bimla Kumari
David Woodhouse
Johan MacKinnon

Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 34 teachers in 37 lessons and conducted seven learning walks. Meetings were held with parents and carers, groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a variety of documentation including a work scrutiny. They also took account of the views from 128 parental questionnaires.

Information about the school

St Bede's is a smaller than average sized mixed secondary school. It is a specialist visual and performing Arts College. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is low. The percentage of disabled students and those with special educational needs is below average. The school meets the current floor standard. Since the previous inspection, the school has been awarded a high achieving schools award from the Special Schools and Academies Trust, gained the Youth Sports Trust silver award and the cultural diversity gold standard. It is a partner school with the English Cricket Board and Lancashire County Cricket Club.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- St Bede's Catholic High school is a good school. One member of staff commented, 'It is a privilege to work in such a positive school; a family community where staff and students pull together.' The school is not yet outstanding because there remains variation in achievement and while the quality of teaching is strong, it is not outstanding.
- Students make good progress in many subjects and the proportion of students leaving with five A*-C, including English and mathematics, remains significantly above the national average. Progress is stronger in English than mathematics but there is clear evidence that mathematics is set to make much better progress this year.
- Teaching is good with some outstanding, creative and innovative practice seen. There have been clear improvements made since the previous inspection due to well-focussed leadership and the astute use of performance management. Nevertheless, opportunities to monitor explicitly and comment on the progress of groups during feedback are sometimes missed. However, in a small minority of lessons, students do not make good progress because planning takes insufficient account of their individual abilities and learning needs, it is too teacher-led, thus the pace of learning wanes. When students are set to work in groups, whilst there is adequate challenge for all, many of them could make even better progress if they were given more challenging tasks so that individuals and the group achieve more.
- Behaviour and safety are good and attendance is above average. Students are typically considerate, well-mannered and caring. The overwhelming majority of students say that they feel safe in school and that there were a number of adults they could turn to if they had a problem.
- Leaders and managers at all levels are involved in monitoring and tracking achievement. Students are known and supported well as individuals, however, opportunities are missed to take a strategic approach to interventions where groups of students are concerned. Middle leaders hold their departments to account through a range of monitoring activities. However, their expertise is not yet used to monitor progress through lesson observations across different departments. Members of the governing body are pro-active and highly committed to improving the school. Yet they are not fully involved in reviewing progress and there are missed opportunities to use their expertise with regard to reviewing risk assessments.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure consistently good or better progress for all groups, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in mathematics by:
 - using published prior attainment data to inform all lesson planning so that students of all abilities are well supported and challenged, especially in group and pair work
 - building upon good practice in extended independent and experiential learning
 - taking a more strategic approach to interventions with groups of students.

- Enhance the quality of monitoring, evaluation and review by:
 - expanding the role of middle leaders and the governing body in monitoring progress across the school
 - ensuring that diagnostic feedback from lesson observations focuses upon the progress of all groups
 - increasing the regularity of review, particularly risk assessments.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment is above average. Progress in English is good, as is progress in mathematics at Key Stage 3. However, due to past staffing issues, progress at Key Stage 4 in mathematics is historically less strong. Students can also opt for English and mathematics 'express' in Year 9. This means that they will lose one option in favour of extra English and mathematics to help reduce the achievement deficit from weaker teaching historically. Due to early entry examinations, the school has already achieved the same results as last year in mathematics and the school's forecasts show that results are set to rise considerably in the summer exams which will have a positive impact on many other outcomes.

Students of all abilities perform significantly above the national average in many subjects, such as English, physical education, religious studies and science. Many other subjects have seen a year-on-year increase in their results. This is due to the unrelenting focus upon improving the quality of learning throughout the school. The school now has robust systems in place for setting challenging targets and monitoring progress towards them.

Almost all parents and carers feel that their child is making good progress at this school. Parents and carers welcomed the new virtual learning environment where they can check their child's current programme of study and support them with their homework. This is a view shared by the inspection team. Students were observed making good and better progress in the large majority of lessons. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make the same progress as their peers overall. While some good support was seen, particularly for literacy, for example, in a Year 7 group for less confident readers, there remains some inconsistency.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers who responded to the survey feel that their child is taught well and the very large majority of students who responded to the survey agree. While some satisfactory teaching remains, no inadequate teaching was seen and the large majority was good. In the best lessons, students have opportunities to learn in independent and experiential ways which make a strong contribution to their social, moral, spiritual, and cultural education. For example, science students were observed taking swabs of bacteria around the school to grow their own cultures. Similarly, Year 7 English students were all very engaged in a Parliamentary style debate. Students report that they very much enjoy these kinds of lessons where learning is 'fun'.

Some outstanding teaching was seen, for example in Year 11 English class, whose aim was to understand the varying and complex degrees of guilt in 'An Inspector Calls'. The lesson allowed students to make outstanding progress because they worked in groups to answer challenging questions requiring significant discussion and higher level thinking. They then 'signed off' each others' work before the teacher came to moderate their assessments.

Moreover, in a Year 9 physical education lesson, students were seen making good progress in badminton due to the clear explanations and demonstration by the teacher, good use of the 'vivos' reward scheme, a swift pace, efficient team and independent working. The curriculum is well-planned to meet the needs of all students and has a positive impact on achievement and their personal development.

Where progress is weaker, teaching does not inspire so well and is too directed by the teacher. Some teachers do not use information about students' individual abilities or needs to plan effectively, resulting in students making no better than satisfactory progress. On occasion, teachers played music in their lessons which was distracting to some students and it was difficult to hear the teacher.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Good relationships and a calm and supportive spirit within the school result in generally very positive behaviour. One parent commented, 'We have found all staff to be caring and fully committed to the progress of our children. The school has a welcoming attitude and ethos.' A few parents and carers reported issues with bullying and unacceptable behaviour in some classes. Inspectors followed up these comments with students and while there are some instances of poor behaviour, these are certainly not commonplace. Almost all parents and carers who responded to the survey feel that there is a good standard of behaviour at the school and the large majority of students feel that the rare instances of bullying are dealt with well.

Behaviour observed in classes was a real strength, with only a couple of instances where behaviour was less than good. The school manages behaviour effectively through its inclusion centre and fixed-term exclusions are below the national average. Attendance is above average and is closely monitored by the school's pastoral teams and educational welfare officer. Some students and parents and carers commented on the cleanliness of the school's washroom facilities and the apparent lack of soap and paper towels on occasion. This is an area that has been upgraded recently, but the school is still reviewing facilities in consultation with the school council.

Leadership and management

Expectations are high and staff are ambitious to continue the well-embedded plans for improvement. Systems for monitoring, tracking and review are in place and working well. The curriculum is good because students achieve well and the overwhelming majority go on to further education, employment or training. Teaching has improved due to the concerted efforts of many staff alongside clear and decisive leadership. While there are some examples of targeted interventions that have had a measurable impact upon outcomes at Key Stage 4, the school has really focussed its efforts in improving achievement at Key Stage 3. All staff now have a progress target set for their performance management. There is a very detailed review of achievement every September starting with the Standards Document, which is scrutinised for each department through a meeting with senior leaders. The governing body has regular presentations from both senior and middle leaders and is currently undertaking training to increase members' understanding of school achievement data. The school effectively promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination.

Significant changes to middle leadership since the previous inspection have resulted in middle leaders working more collaboratively and exploiting opportunities for continual professional development to raise achievement. A devolution of responsibilities has borne fruit as many staff readily share good practice, take part in voluntary groups to work on transition and teaching and give generously of their time, not least through Saturday morning school. The 'middle leaders' team has been strengthened to include pastoral Heads of Year and further increase the effectiveness of the care and support provided to individuals. The school successfully secured funding for a £1.5 million sports centre and has also created a new media suite. All of this, alongside the rise in achievement, illustrate that the school has clear capacity for further improvement. Arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well-developed and students give generously of their time to help others, particularly those less fortunate than themselves. Students say prayers in registration and the school chaplain celebrates a weekly mass for each year group. There are a plethora of cultural and spiritual awareness days, including a French breakfast, holocaust memorial week, harvest fast day and racial justice week.

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 pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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 pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St Bede's Catholic High School, Ormskirk, L39 4TA

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We took careful note of what you said and your comments really helped us to reach judgements. Thank you also for the time you spent completing questionnaires and for talking to inspectors in meetings and around the school.

- We found that you go to a good school and achieve well. You told us that you feel safe in school and that behaviour is generally good.
- You have positive attitudes to learning and care about helping others.
- On the whole, you behave well and, although some learning is interrupted by bad behaviour, this is rare and effectively dealt with by staff.
- Generally, teaching at your school is good and some of it is outstanding. However, there is a small minority of satisfactory teaching remaining.
- We have asked your school's leaders to ensure that you all achieve well, year on year, by ensuring that in every lesson, learning is planned to meet your individual needs so you are well-supported and challenged.
- We have also asked them to ensure that you get more and longer opportunities to think for yourselves in groups and pairs as you do in the very best lessons.
- They have also been asked to monitor, evaluate and review your progress more often and ensure that when teachers get feedback about their lessons, the key focus is the progress of all groups of students.

You can help your school continue to improve by keeping the same positive attitudes to learning and pride in your school community, asking when you are unsure about your learning or when you are unchallenged by it.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector

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