

Bishop Walsh Catholic School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103536
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	376926
Inspection dates	14–15 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Robert Barbour 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	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1034
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bryan Holden
Headteacher	John Farrell
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2009
School address	Wylde Green Road Sutton Coldfield B76 1QT
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 34 lessons taught by 34 different teachers; there were also several briefer visits to lessons. Inspectors held meetings with students, staff, governors and representatives of partner organisations. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school improvement plan, governing body minutes, a wide range of other documentation, 328 questionnaires completed by parents and questionnaires completed by staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What is the quality of middle leadership and of self-evaluation at every level of school leadership?
- Do students play a significant role in extending their own learning during lessons?
- Does work in lessons match the differing learning needs of all students?
- What is the impact of the student tracking and intervention systems on the progress of students?

Information about the school

Bishop Walsh Catholic School is an averaged size secondary school situated in a residential area in Sutton Coldfield. The school has specialist status for the performing arts and a second specialism in mathematics and computing. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. A very large majority of the students are of White British background and the remainder are from different ethnic groups including White Irish. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is low, although the proportion with statements of special educational needs is average. The school has received the Sportsmark and Arts Mark Gold Award.

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

Bishop Walsh Catholic School is a good school. The quality of teaching in the school is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, have clear objectives for their lessons and explain concepts clearly. Where the teaching is outstanding there is a high level of involvement by the students themselves in their learning. In these lessons, also, teachers enable students to develop their understanding through skilful questioning. This gives students time to answer questions, probes for deeper understanding and encourages wider debate. Teachers also adjust the pace and direction of the lesson in response to their informed assessment of their students' understanding. Where the teaching is satisfactory or good, these aspects may be present to a degree, but with instances seen of students learning passively, or the teacher accepting the first answer that students give, for example. The need for students to take a greater role in extending their own learning in lessons was noted also in the last inspection report in January 2009.

The school's success is anchored in a very strong ethos that has led to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students being outstanding. This ethos was summed up by a partner of the school in this way: 'The school embraces the unique, precious nature of every student in its ethos and this becomes an integral part of each student.' A parent described the school as having 'a strong ethos to support children to learn and reach their full potential'.

This ethos is actively fostered by the outstanding leadership of the headteacher and his senior team who ensure that the care, guidance and support provided by the school are also outstanding. The students themselves feel outstandingly safe as a result and appreciate the pastoral care of the school highly. The support that each student receives, combined with the good teaching, has led to the overall achievement of students being outstanding. In particular, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress as their needs are assessed early and accurately, there is a wide range of intervention strategies available, teaching assistants provide good support and teachers plan effectively for their needs.

The school links outstandingly well with a range of partner organisations, and these links provide rich opportunities for students to develop wider skills. These skills, together with students' high skills of literacy and numeracy and high attendance, mean that they are outstandingly well prepared for their future economic well-being. These opportunities, combined with the wide range of activities and responsibilities

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available within the school, also help to promote the students' outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community.

The specialist status of the school continues to be significant. The focus on the performing arts in particular has widened the personal skills of students throughout the school as well as contributing to academic success. The school also hosted a significant drama festival for secondary schools in the area.

Since the last inspection, the attainment of students has improved and has become more consistent. School leaders have a good insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the school and plan effectively for further improvement. This is demonstrated by improvement in the monitoring of students' progress and subsequent intervention strategies, although improvement in the quality of teaching has been slower. Middle management has become consistently good in quality. The capacity for further improvement is therefore good. The value for money provided by the school is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by
 - engaging students more actively in their learning
 - ensuring that teachers' questioning is more effective in assessing and reinforcing students' understanding.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enter the school in Year 7 with attainment that is above average. They make good progress and by Year 11 their attainment is high and has been consistently so since the last inspection. Boys and girls make similar progress. Those students with lower attainment on entry to the school make particularly good progress. Students demonstrated good progress in class. For example, in an outstanding religious education lesson in Year 8, students used terminology clearly and precisely and were able to formulate perceptive questions on the nature and meaning of suffering and sin. When they have the opportunity to work in pairs or small groups they collaborate well, as for example when exploring visual codes in English and matching cards to explore prime factors in mathematics. However, in many lessons opportunities like these for collaborative work are too limited.

Students behave well, both in class and around the school. They understand how to keep themselves healthy and the participation rate in sporting activity is high. Students take an active part in raising funds for charities. Not only are they conspicuously successful in this, but they gain valuable insights into the needs of others. The programme of sports leaders is very successful. These students make a very valuable contribution to local primary schools and in the process gain a wide spectrum of accredited skills. Students participate in a wide range of drama activities,

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and over a tenth of the school population was involved in last year’s performance of ‘We will Rock You’. Twenty students volunteer each year for a pilgrimage to Lourdes on which they support sick and disabled pilgrims. A parent described this experience as highly significant, and the contribution that students make to Masses with music and drama as ‘awe-inspiring’.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Relationships between teachers and students are strong. Teachers plan well for lessons, particularly to meet the needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers maintain a good pace in their lessons and have high expectations. Some teaching goes further and is highly successful in engaging students in their learning. For example, in an outstanding music technology lesson with Year 10 the teacher grabbed the attention of students with an activity where they responded to the opening sequence of the film ‘Jaws’ with different musical tracks as backing. An interactive whole class discussion led to the types of music that can communicate a genre of horror. Students then engaged in pairs in activities to compose such music and assess each other’s work against the required grade criteria. The lively approach, the active participation of students and the high quality of questioning and dialogue led to students making exceptional progress. Such high levels of engagement were less evident in some of the lessons observed. Weaker features of those lessons judged to be satisfactory overall included a more passive role on the part of students and limitations in teachers’ questioning techniques.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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The curriculum provides breadth and balance and is enhanced by partnerships with other schools which provide wider experiences for students. The provision for extra-curricular activity is strong and receives wide take-up. Literacy skills are developed well, and there is particularly good development of numeracy in business studies lessons.

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are outstanding. Strategies to encourage regular attendance have been very successful. The arrangements for transition between primary and secondary school are exemplary. Links between the schools are so strong that a parent described her child as having changed ‘just the building’ when moving to the secondary school. Procedures to find the needs of primary pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are especially strong, and this provides the foundation for the outstanding progress that they make. Teachers are trained to look for warning signs that might indicate that students have deeper problems, and to alert senior staff. The learning support unit ‘Damascus Centre’ is making a significant contribution to further improving the behaviour of students.

Teachers track the progress of students accurately as they move through the school. Support for students is then carefully targeted and this has made a major contribution to the high attainment that students now achieve. While this aspect of assessment is strong, the assessment of students during class time is limited in those lessons where teacher questioning is too superficial.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and his leadership team have been highly effective in generating high morale and a sense of common purpose in the mission of the school. Parents, students and staff all expressed their very strong support in the questionnaires. This effectiveness is demonstrated in improved middle management, outstanding partnerships and outstanding care, guidance and support. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are good. A good policy is in place for teaching and learning and good plans for further development have been made. However some of these plans are too recent for the impact to be apparent.

The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. Governors know the school and have adopted regular ‘learning walks’ to obtain first hand information. A rigorous

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process of departmental monitoring enables the governing body to monitor the quality of curriculum provision.

Safeguarding is good. Many procedures go beyond statutory requirements in ensuring the safety of students, and the monitoring and care of vulnerable students is assiduous. Similarly, school leaders promote equal opportunity and tackle discrimination well. There are no groups showing patterns of underperformance, and indeed the more vulnerable students make particularly good progress.

The school’s ethos and partnerships are major vehicles for the good promotion of community cohesion. The programme for religious education gives students a good understanding of other faiths represented in the United Kingdom. Students take an active part in local charity groups and in international links with a school in Zimbabwe.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form provides a good curriculum with a wide range of options and enrichment activities. Students respond with enthusiasm. Their attendance is high and they take an active part in the life of the whole school, including mentoring younger students. Students are taught well and make good progress. There are excellent relationships between teachers and students and the pastoral care is outstanding. One student described the sixth form as ‘a friendly, welcoming, family community’.

The newly appointed head of the sixth form is a determined leader supported by an enthusiastic team. Recent improvements include clear and consistent systems to

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track student progress and intervene where necessary to ensure that students remain on track to achieve their potential.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A far higher proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire than is usually the case. They expressed very strong support for the school, both in absolute terms and when compared with other schools. There were some written comments, which were mostly positive. There was no pattern to the small number of negative comments that were made.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bishop Walsh Catholic School 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 328 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1034 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	203	62	108	33	7	2	6	2
The school keeps my child safe	222	68	98	30	3	1	1	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	196	60	111	34	7	2	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	192	59	115	35	5	2	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	181	55	135	41	1	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	164	50	137	42	14	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	140	43	158	48	13	4	2	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)	162	49	134	41	11	3	1	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	162	49	145	44	7	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	209	64	98	30	5	2	3	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	146	45	141	43	11	3	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	221	67	90	27	7	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	218	66	100	30	3	1	2	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 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' 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 pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. 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 pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



16 September 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Bishop Walsh Catholic School, Sutton Coldfield, B76 1QT

Thank you for your welcome and for taking time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to tell you about our main findings.

We believe that your school is a good school, and one that you are right to feel proud of. You achieve outstandingly well, both in terms of the academic results you obtain and also in the other activities you take part in: sports teams, drama, sports leaders in primary schools and working for charities, to name but a few. Your behaviour is good and your attendance is high.

You are well taught. We have recommended however that this teaching could be even better if you are engaged more actively in your learning; and if teachers are more consistent in asking questions that probe and deepen your understanding.

Your headteacher and his senior staff lead the school outstandingly well, and we noted that you strongly support them in this and also that you appreciate the very high quality pastoral care you receive. You can play your part in helping the school to develop further by continuing with your hard work, good behaviour, high attendance and the full part you play in the whole life of the school.

Yours sincerely

Robert Barbour
Her Majesty's Inspector

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