

St Bernard's Catholic High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112400
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	378485
Inspection dates	13–14 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean Kendall 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	923
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Hackett
Headteacher	Mary Page
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2006
School address	Rating Lane Barrow-in-Furness LA13 9LE
Telephone number	01229 894620
Fax number	01229 894622
Email address	head@st-bernards.cumbria.sch.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 41 lessons and saw 41 teachers. They held meetings with groups of pupils, governors and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school's monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress, including the most recent examination results. They took account of 342 parental questionnaires, 112 pupil questionnaires and 48 returns from staff.

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

- The quality of teaching and progress of pupils in mathematics.
- The quality of leadership and management of departments, including the effectiveness of monitoring, evaluation and planning for improvement.
- The capacity of leadership to secure further improvement.

Information about the school

St Bernard's Catholic High School serves Furness and the surrounding area. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are a few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average overall although the proportion with a statement of special needs is above that usually found.

The school gained specialist science status in 2006 and gained a second specialism as a Training School under the High-Performing Specialist School programme. It has gained a number of external awards including the International School Award, Healthy School status, Sports Award and Investors in People. A new headteacher took up post in September 2011.

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

St Bernard's is a good school that promotes good achievement for all its pupils. It provides good value for money. The school is a highly-cohesive community with a strong Catholic and caring ethos. Staff are supportive and clearly focused on helping all pupils achieve their best. Pupils enjoy school and are keen to participate in all aspects of school life. They make an excellent contribution by taking on positions of responsibility and offering their ideas to improve provision. They are well-behaved, showing good attitudes to learning, respect and consideration towards each other. The caring and welcoming environment ensures all pupils feel safe. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, stating for example, 'My older children left the school with goals, dreams and ambitions thanks to the outstanding experiences the school provided'.

Pupils enter the school with slightly higher than average attainment. They make good progress in their learning because teaching is good and the curriculum is effectively adapted to meet individual needs. Attainment has been significantly above average in most subjects for a number of years. Pupils' progress has been slower in mathematics recently because of disruptions to staffing. This has now stabilised and achievement in mathematics is improving. Teachers work hard to provide good-quality learning experiences for all pupils. However the use of data and assessment information to plan activities and help pupils improve is inconsistent. This means that activities are not as well-matched to pupils' needs in some lessons. There is however, some very good practice which can be shared across the school.

The headteacher is new to the school and has a clear vision to ensure consistently high standards and promote further improvement. The senior leadership team is in the process of reviewing its roles and responsibilities. They provide good leadership. Their high ambitions for the pupils and for the school as a whole are shared by all staff. There is some good practice in the leadership of teaching and learning but it is not consistent across departments. For example, departments are using different criteria by which to grade and promote improvement in teaching. Assessment is used to better effect in some departments than it is in others. As a consequence, the best practice is not fully embedded across the whole school.

Staff are fully committed to improving and have taken full advantage of training opportunities to improve their practice. This is reflected in the good-quality teaching and care which promote good pupil progress and personal development. School

leaders and governors set challenging targets to ensure high standards are maintained. They have clear priorities for further improvement and an accurate view of school performance. Good provision and the collective drive to further improve practice secure good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain high levels of attainment and further improve achievement in mathematics by:
 - rationalising progress data so that it provides a succinct overview which teachers can use to inform planning and monitor pupils' learning
 - using assessment information to plan challenging activities in all lessons so that all pupils make the best possible progress
 - embedding the most effective practice in assessment across the whole school.
- Strengthen leadership, self-evaluation and improvement planning by:
 - clarifying roles of the senior leadership team in monitoring and strategic planning
 - ensuring that the best practice in subject leadership, evaluation and leadership of teaching is shared and embedded across all departments.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy learning and are highly motivated to achieve. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their higher than average attendance, good punctuality and enthusiastic participation in extra-curricular activities. They enjoy a challenge in lessons and show perseverance in completing tasks. Their good attitudes help them make good progress and achieve above-average standards in examinations. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similarly good progress and enjoy a range of personalised learning experiences. They are well-supported in lessons and with more specialised provision in the school's learning support unit.

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C and above has been significantly higher than average for a number of years. The proportion achieving C grades and above in English and mathematics is slightly above average, with mathematics lagging behind. The school has taken appropriate steps to stabilise staffing and strengthen leadership in mathematics.

The vast majority of pupils are well-behaved in lessons and treat each other with consideration and respect in communal areas. They are keen to take on leadership roles as prefects, PE buddies, sports leaders, language leaders and buddies to Year 7 pupils. These initiatives help to raise the self-confidence of all involved. Pupils contribute their views through various pupil groups including the school council and 'SCOFF' group which monitors healthy meal options and advises on menus. They respond well to the school's health promotion strategies and develop a good understanding of how to maintain their own health and safety. Smoking on school premises is not tolerated and although this has led to a high number of short-term exclusions in the last year, pupils are supportive. They say the environment has

improved. Pupils are rightly proud of their fund-raising to support charities in the local community and abroad.

Pupils' understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues is effectively integrated into all aspects of school life. They collaborate effectively in lessons and are keen to debate social issues. However opportunities to use imagination and creativity in learning are limited in some lessons. They have a good understanding of ethical issues and respect for different cultures and beliefs. Staff and pupils greatly value the contribution made by the school chaplain. Their above-average achievement in English, information and communication technology (ICT) and mathematics, together with good enterprise, social and leadership skills prepare them well for the next stage of education or employment.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good in the majority of lessons and there is some that is outstanding. Good lessons are supported by teachers' strong subject knowledge, effective use of ICT and a range of interesting activities. The most effective lessons build on pupils' prior learning and are well-balanced between teacher guidance and pupil activity. They give pupils good opportunities to contribute their ideas, work in a sustained way on challenging tasks and reflect on their learning. Where teaching is less effective, it does not take enough account of pupils' prior learning. There is more teacher talk and less opportunity for pupils to be actively engaged in challenging tasks. The use of assessment is satisfactory overall. There is some very effective practice but it is not consistent across the school. Pupils often understand how they can improve their work in general terms but they lack detailed understanding of what they need to do next. The use of level and grade criteria varies between departments. There is also variability in the effectiveness with which teachers assess pupils' progress and use the information to plan lessons.

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

The curriculum provides a good range of academic and vocational courses. The flexible approach at Key Stage 4 enables pupils to pursue a range of programmes which closely meet their individual needs, interests and aspirations. The curriculum is enhanced through the school's science and training school specialism and links with local businesses. It includes a good range of Enterprise and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) activities which enhance pupils' thinking and investigative skills. Literacy, ICT and mathematical skills are effectively enhanced in a range of subjects. Pupils are keen to participate in the wide range of after-school clubs and activities including sport, dance and music.

Pupils make good gains in their personal development because they receive good care, guidance and support. Very good induction and transition arrangements make pupils feel welcomed and well cared for from the start. Pupils from ethnic minority groups are fully integrated and supported. Those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive very good support from all staff. Parents are full of praise for the school's 'fantastic SEN team' and 'the marvellous support and help' their children have received. Pastoral systems and effective links with outside agencies support their welfare well. Effective steps have been taken to help pupils attend and participate fully in school life. The caring and supportive approach of staff ensures that all pupils keep safe and grow in self-esteem. However, the systems to record and track pupils' progress in personal development and monitor their care needs lack coherence and strategic oversight.

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 pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership across the school is fully focused on ensuring pupils achieve to the best of their ability. Each department undertakes self-evaluation based on regular monitoring and review of provision. This is largely accurate and identifies key areas for improvement. However opportunities to share and develop best practice across different subjects are limited, particularly in the leadership and management of teaching and learning. Staff are keen to participate in regular professional development and training but there is no systematic follow-up and evaluation of the impact it has on teaching and learning.

The governing body has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have undertaken training and have a good spread of expertise to help them challenge and support leadership. They are keen visitors to the school and meet frequently with pupils. They make a good contribution to planning and evaluation through various committees. Procedures to protect and keep students safe are rigorous and staff and governors have undertaken relevant training. They are fully aware of their responsibilities and provide good care and support. Good liaison with other key agencies effectively reduces the risk of harm to pupils.

The school makes a strong contribution to community cohesion. It actively engages with a wide range of community groups and with other communities beyond the immediate locality. Provision is enhanced by good partnership working with local primary schools, high schools, college and employers. These give pupils increased opportunities to take on leadership roles and follow alternative curriculum routes suited to their needs and interests. Engagement with parents is good, as reflected in the unusually high questionnaire response rate and extremely positive evaluations from parents. Pupils from different backgrounds get on well together. Equality of opportunity is promoted well in all areas of the school's work. Those with particular barriers to learning are given personalised support to ensure they make good progress.

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	3
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	2
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	2

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents who returned questionnaires are extremely positive about the school. They are happy with their children's experience and feel the school keeps their children safe. They express high levels of confidence in the school's leaders and teachers. Many parents made positive comments, stating for example that they are 'happy with all aspects of this very good school', 'well impressed with teaching' and their children have 'made great progress'. A very small minority expressed concern about the consistency of behaviour management in some classes and some disruptive behaviour. No disruptive behaviour was observed during the inspection but school leaders are nevertheless reviewing the behaviour policy to ensure complete consistency in approach. A few parents also felt they could be better informed. Again the school is looking into its communication policy.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Bernard's Catholic High 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 342 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 926 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	142	42	185	54	12	4	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	164	48	165	48	2	1	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	140	41	175	51	11	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	136	40	180	53	5	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	149	44	181	53	1	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	99	29	208	61	18	5	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	98	29	212	62	19	6	1	0
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)	125	37	190	56	6	2	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	127	37	191	56	5	1	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	131	38	175	51	17	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	94	27	193	56	23	7	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	127	37	189	55	5	1	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	167	49	157	46	6	2	1	0

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



Thursday 15 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Bernard's Catholic High School, Barrow-in-Furness, LA13 9LE

Thank you for your helpful contribution to the inspection and your warm welcome. We found St Bernard's to be a good school with good capacity for improvement. Your school is a caring and welcoming community. You make an excellent contribution by taking positions of responsibility and contributing your ideas. Your good behaviour and the good care you receive ensure that everyone feels safe.

It is clear you enjoy school. This is reflected in your very good attendance, punctuality to lessons and wide participation in after-school activities. You make good progress in your learning because teaching is good and the curriculum is effectively adapted to meet individual needs. Teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and meaningful. However, the way they use assessment to plan activities and help you improve is variable.

Your good attitudes to learning help you attain high standards in the majority of subjects. Your progress in mathematics has been slower because of some disruptions to staffing in the department. We were pleased to see this has been resolved and achievement is improving.

We were pleased to see how welcoming you have been of your new headteacher. She has clear vision to promote further improvement. All teachers are fully committed to helping you achieve your best. Leadership is generally good but the leadership of teaching is not consistent across departments.

We have agreed a few areas for improvement with school leaders to sustain your high levels of attainment and raise achievement further in mathematics. These are:

- using assessment information more consistently
- clarifying roles of the senior leadership team
- ensuring the best practice in subject leadership is shared across all departments.

We would like to wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Kendall

Her Majesty's Inspector, on behalf of the inspection team

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234**, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.