

St Bernard's High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137312
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	395694
Inspection dates	31 May–1 June 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Walker

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	883
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	158
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Calton
Headteacher	Patricia Barron
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
School address	Milton Road Westcliff-on-Sea SS0 7JS
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Walker Additional Inspector

Peter Dannheisser Additional Inspector

Anthony Felsenstein Additional Inspector

Brenda Watson Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 56 lessons and observed 36 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, senior leaders, staff and groups of students. The 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 range of evidence, including: the school development plan; the tracking system to monitor students' progress; safeguarding documentation; and a sample of students' work. They also analysed questionnaires completed by staff, students and 115 parents and carers.

Information about the school

The academy is a Catholic school for girls in Key Stages 3 and 4, with a mixed sixth form. It is of average size and is currently oversubscribed. It serves students from the local community and beyond, so a significant number travel some distance to the academy. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds, although nearly a quarter of students are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds including Black African, Asian and East European heritage. The percentage of students with English as an additional language is average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average. The academy has specialisms in the arts and science. It meets the current floor standard, which sets the government's minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

There have been recent improvements to the buildings, including extensive refurbishment and the development of the main dining room and the sixth form study area. The school became an academy in August 2011. The school has received the Artsmark Gold, Activemark, Leading Edge and National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) Challenge awards, and has achieved National Healthy Schools status.

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	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school that provides an exceptionally safe and happy atmosphere. Despite some significant strengths, it is good rather than outstanding because achievement is not as good in mathematics and modern foreign languages as it is in other subjects, and the quality of teaching and learning is good but not yet consistently outstanding across the school.
- Students are making good progress overall given their starting points. Attainment at GCSE is above average and currently high in English, drama, music, technology and religious education. Progress is consistently outstanding in English.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Students are considerate, polite and courteous to staff and each other, and this has a very positive effect on learning. Attendance is well above average and reflects the students' enjoyment of their time at the academy.
- Teaching is good overall, with some outstanding and some satisfactory practice. There is a positive learning atmosphere in lessons and teachers have high expectations for all students. However, not all teachers are using marking or questioning effectively enough to support learning or encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has a precise understanding of the areas for development, including the performance and professional development needs of staff. Senior leaders and subject leaders provide good quality leadership of teaching, although not all teachers are regularly reviewing the progress of their students towards their subject performance targets. The curriculum contributes exceptionally well to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form is good as there is a range of courses on offer and most

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students make good progress in their AS and A2 examinations. There are many opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership and make a contribution to the whole school. Most students progress to higher education or employment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise levels of achievement so that students gain standards at GCSE that are well above the national average in all subjects by:
 - focusing on faster rates of progress in mathematics and modern foreign languages
 - ensuring that all subject teachers are consistently reviewing the progress of their students towards challenging performance targets.

- Raise the overall quality of teaching and learning from good to outstanding by making sure that all teachers are:
 - marking work consistently well to show students exactly how they can improve their work
 - developing the use of questioning to support and challenge students in their learning
 - taking every opportunity to encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The inspection found that achievement is good for students during their time at the academy, as parents and carers confirm. Students enter the academy with standards that are broadly average. The 2011 GCSE results are above the national average with 64% of students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. The results indicate a dip from previous years when standards had been consistently well above the national average. Progress in English is outstanding with over 85% of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE in English Language. Tracking of progress in the present Year 11 indicates that there should be an improvement in results in the summer examinations. However, the accelerated progress in English and a number of other subjects, including the specialist arts and science, has not been matched by the same rate of improvement in mathematics and modern foreign languages partly due to a high rate of staffing changes. Girls and boys alike make good progress in the sixth form and the majority are meeting their minimum target grades in the AS and A2 courses.

In lessons, students typically learn well and make good progress. Their attitudes are excellent and they work well with others, respecting their opinions and views.

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Students are able to reflect on what they are learning and persevere with challenges. They enjoy taking responsibility for their own learning when given the opportunity, for example through project work and group work. Students make excellent progress in the development of literacy skills. The accelerated reading programme in Key Stage 3, the well-resourced library and the weekly reading period for the whole school greatly support the high standards in literacy.

The newly-developed tracking system and range of intervention strategies are increasingly being used to identify and support any students who are at risk of underachieving. The academy is presently providing considerable additional support for students, such as revision classes for Years 11 and 13 as well as individual mentoring. However, not all subject teachers are consistently reviewing the progress of their students towards challenging performance targets. Most disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with their peers. This is because effective additional support helps them to overcome barriers to learning and take part in lessons with the other students. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who have English as an additional language, also make good progress.

Quality of teaching

Most teachers plan interesting activities and create a positive learning atmosphere in their classes, as students confirm. Students demonstrate enthusiasm for learning and sustain high levels of concentration. Most teachers make sure that the activities are well matched to the different abilities of the students. Disabled students and those who find learning difficult or have special educational needs are well supported by teaching assistants in class. The vast majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires feel that their children are taught well.

A small minority of lessons were judged as satisfactory rather than good when students' progress slowed because teachers talked too much and often did the problem-solving for the students. Some teachers are less effective when using questioning in lessons to engage students and encourage them to think more deeply about the subject matter. There are examples of excellent marking of work in some subjects, but marking is not always detailed enough to show students exactly what they have to do to improve their work.

Reading and writing are taught well across the academy and are seen as the responsibility of all subject teachers. Teaching actively supports students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students mentioned that they were always encouraged to think about and express their own beliefs and values, particularly in religious education and personal and social education lessons. Teaching in the specialist subjects particularly encourages the use of technology in lessons and greater employer engagement.

Outstanding teaching was seen when teachers challenged their students with high quality questioning and tasks, as well as encouraging them to take greater

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responsibility for their own learning. For example, Year 13 students made excellent progress in biology when they were set the task of working on the different combinations of chromosomes and then explaining their findings to the rest of the class. Similarly, Year 9 students enthusiastically worked in pairs and made rapid progress during an English lesson when identifying key aspects of the Great Depression by analysing the issues raised by a number of writers.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of students is excellent and this contributes to a calm and orderly environment which is ideal for learning and personal growth. In lessons, students consistently meet the school's expectations and, typically, students respond extremely well to teachers' good use of praise and encouragement to promote high standards of behaviour. The vast majority of parents and carers are highly positive about behaviour in the academy. Students as a whole are highly proficient in managing their own behaviour in lessons and around the school. For example, students could be trusted to work on their own, move around the corridors and socialise at break and lunchtimes with minimum supervision. They make every effort to ensure that the other students learn and flourish in an atmosphere of respect and dignity.

Although students say that bullying of any kind is extremely rare, parents and carers agree with them in saying that any unkind behaviour, such as name calling, is dealt with quickly and effectively. Students are very aware of the different forms of possible bullying such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sexual orientation, gender, race and disability. The 'Big Sister' sixth form group and a buddy system provide very effective support for younger students. Teachers and other adults take good steps to ensure that all groups of students have an equal chance to thrive in an atmosphere of fairness and trust, and without fear. Students show considerable respect for others so that all students feel valued as individuals within the academy. The academy is fully inclusive in integrating students from different ethnic and social backgrounds. Students feel very safe in the academy and display an excellent understanding of the issues relating to safety in the wider world. They talk confidently about how they would keep themselves safe in a variety of situations such as using the internet, talking to strangers and maintaining healthy lifestyles.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong leadership and a clear vision for improvement. She is well supported by the deputy headteachers and senior leadership team. The systems of monitoring teaching and tracking students' progress are generally effective, although tracking in some subjects is less rigorous. The leaders of the subjects and the restructured pastoral care system are developing their evaluating and monitoring roles. The school development plan is a comprehensive working document with clear actions and targets which already have a focus on improving the rate of students' progress and the quality of teaching. Professional development

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is a key focus so that teachers are continually encouraged to reflect on their practice in order to improve further the quality of learning in their classes. These factors demonstrate that the academy has the capacity to improve further.

Members of the governing body are well informed and are effective in their evaluating and monitoring roles. They have been particularly active in supporting the application for academy status and the recent improvements to the building. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements and underpin its very caring approach. There is a strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination.

The academy has developed an imaginative curriculum which is very relevant to students' needs and provides an exciting range of activities. The academy's specialist status ensures there is additional provision in the arts and science. A variety of visits provide effective enhancement for the curriculum, as do the large range of extra-curricular activities which greatly increase students' enjoyment and experience of school. The academy is active in developing the aspirations of the students by emphasising the opportunities which are available for women in a range of careers. The gifted, able and talented programme provides challenging enrichment across all year groups, and is acknowledged by the NACE Challenge Award.

The broad range of experiences within the curriculum contributes well to students' achievements and to their exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, students' social development is particularly encouraged through the high level of participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Leadership Award Scheme. Students gain confidence and self-esteem, experience being part of a team and develop excellent social skills.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



4 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of St Bernard's High School and Arts College, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 7JS

Thank you for making us so welcome and for sharing your views with us during the inspection and through your questionnaires. We greatly enjoyed watching your lessons, looking at your work and seeing you during break and lunch. Your school is a good one that continues to make significant improvements. We know that your parents and carers are very supportive of the academy and value the education provided for you.

There are many positive things about your academy. The strong tradition in your academy greatly supports your excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You enjoy the academy, attend regularly and work hard in your lessons. You make at least good progress in all your subjects and excellent progress in English. You are exceptionally well behaved and feel very safe in the academy. You are considerate, respectful and courteous to staff and each other. Your teachers provide a range of interesting activities through both the lessons and extra-curricular activities. Your academy is well led by the headteacher and the senior leadership team.

The headteacher, governing body and staff are always looking at ways to make your academy even better. We have asked your teachers to help and challenge all of you to make even better progress in mathematics and modern foreign languages. We have particularly asked your teachers to regularly review your progress towards your performance targets and to make sure that marking always shows you exactly how to improve your work. We have also asked them to give you more opportunities to take responsibility for your own learning. You can all help by trying hard in all subjects and particularly when you are asked to work on your own or in groups.

We trust that you will continue to work hard and benefit from the impressive range of opportunities in your academy. We wish you every success in your future education and careers.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Walker
Lead inspector

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