

# St Bernard's Catholic High School

Rating Lane, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA13 9LE

**Inspection dates** 11–12 December 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Achievement is inadequate. Since the last inspection, overall standards have fallen to below average; in particular there was a decline in English in 2012 and 2013. Despite booster work, the gaps in attainment and progress have widened to more than a grade between students supported by pupil premium funding and those not.
- Many students are slipping behind and not meeting their targets. Given their ability, too few are aiming high enough and too many show little pride in what they do.
- English has a low profile in the school; too little is done to celebrate students' best work or to lead and drive programmes to resolve persistent errors in the basic skills of spelling and punctuation which undermine students' work across the curriculum.
- Teaching is inadequate because inconsistencies result in too much variability in students' engagement, learning and progress. Too many teachers accept poorly presented work of mediocre quality, and fail to deal with low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons.
- Weak monitoring, with insufficient evaluation of the impact of teaching on learning, has in the past given too rosy a view of the quality of teaching. Some subject leaders have been slow to drill down into available information to identify exactly where problems lie and the factors that account for them.
- Departments are not working in concert; some staff have been reluctant to accept changes in ways of working or to acknowledge their accountability for students' progress.

### The school has the following strengths

- Governors, headteacher and senior leaders continue to take action to halt the decline and resolve staffing issues. They are holding staff rigorously to account for students' progress and have clear expectations of subject leaders. Some departments, such as mathematics, continue to improve.
- Students are generally polite and positive. When their interest is caught, as in science, drama and design and technology lessons, they work hard and make good progress.
- Parents and students value this caring school. Good pastoral support, especially for those with special educational needs, enables students to feel at ease at school.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 23 lessons taught by 23 teachers. Four observations were carried out jointly with either the headteacher or the deputy headteacher. Inspectors also visited two English and three mathematics sessions with the leaders of those subjects.
- With the respective subject leaders, inspectors scrutinised samples of written work in English, mathematics and science from students in Years 8 and 11. They also looked at work from other subjects and records of students' attainment and progress from this and previous years.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, all members of the senior leadership team, the subject leaders of English, mathematics and science, the special educational needs coordinator, school counsellor, education welfare officer and members of the teaching support team.
- Inspectors took account of a wide range of documentation including; school and subject self-evaluations; school and subject development plans; information from assessment; policies and data relating to attendance, behaviour and safety; minutes from meetings of the governing body, senior leaders, middle leaders and departments; the monitoring of teaching and learning; professional development and performance management.
- The lead inspector met with five students from Years 7 and 8 to hear them read and to discuss their views about the recently introduced programme to accelerate reading.
- The lead inspector met with the Chair and two members of the governing body and spoke by telephone with a representative from the local authority. An inspector also spoke with the deputy headteacher of the local pupil referral unit.
- The inspectors took into account the views of a sample of students from Years 7, 9 and 11, as well as those of 24 members of staff who returned the questionnaire and the responses of 116 parents via Parent View, the on-line Ofsted questionnaire. One parent submitted a written response.

## Inspection team

Sonja Øyen, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jane Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

Naomi Taylor

Additional Inspector

Alison Thomson

Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005 (amended), Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.*

### Information about this school

- This voluntary aided school is similar in size to most secondary schools in England. Since the last inspection, the number on roll has risen slightly reflecting the school's popularity. Numbers vary in each year group. Some students travel considerable distance to attend.
- Nearly all students are of White British heritage.
- One in four students is eligible for support through pupil premium funding (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after the local authority and children of service families) which is below average.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs supported at school action is slightly above average but is below average for those at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard which sets the minimum for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of students in Year 11 attend the PitStop Project (car mechanics) or Lancaster and Morecambe College. A few students are being taught at home or at the pupil referral unit.
- St Bernard's is part of the Furness Education Consortium and currently has two trainees on the School Direct teacher training programme.
- The school has a recognised specialism in science and holds several awards including Healthy Schools and International School.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good in all subjects, but most especially in English, by:
  - raising staff's expectations of what students can achieve and how their work should be presented
  - ensuring that teachers identify clearly the key concepts, skills and knowledge to be gained, and the steps which will ensure secure learning and progression
  - using information from assessment to ensure that all learning is at the right level of challenge, particularly for the most-able students
  - sharing best practice in managing students' behaviour and in encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their own learning and behaviour
  - improving the quality of marking so students know exactly what they need to do to lift the quality of their work, and that effort and progress are being acknowledged.
- Accelerate students' progress in all subjects but most especially in English by:
  - raising the profile of English throughout the school and across the curriculum so that students see value in developing their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills and are motivated

by seeing displays of high quality work from all year groups

- identifying gaps and persistent weaknesses in students' reading and writing skills at year group, set and individual levels, and ensuring all staff take action to resolve them and narrow the achievement gap for those students supported by pupil premium funding
  - ensuring that members of the English department work effectively together to boost students' progress.
- Improve the impact of leadership at all levels in driving improvement by:
- ensuring that all staff embrace the need for urgent change and readily implement agreed policies and practices
  - holding firmly to account all senior and middle leaders for students' progress, the quality of provision and the carrying through of development plans
  - injecting even more rigour, frequency and critical evaluation into the monitoring of teaching and its impact on students' learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is inadequate

- On starting Year 7, students' attainment is broadly average or just above. The school's data for 2013 show that at the end of Year 9, there is considerable potential for students to excel, with a fair proportion working at levels above those expected for their age in English, mathematics and science. However, this potential is unfulfilled by the end of Year 11. Senior leaders accept that students underachieve and that this is due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and in teachers' expectations across the curriculum.
- In 2013, the school's unvalidated results indicate that the target for five or more good GCSE passes was not met. The proportion gaining at least five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics fell to below the national average. This was in large part due to the poorer results in English where the average points score is now lower than in 2011 and well below the national average. Girls did markedly well whereas boys did not, despite considerable pastoral and academic support which boosted grades for a good number, particularly from grade D to C. No pupil gained an A\* grade in either English literature or language. Performance in history and religious studies also dipped.
- The gap in attainment between students known to be eligible for free school meals and others widened considerably in English whereas nationally it narrowed. In both English and mathematics, the attainment gap is close to a grade. The adverse impact of the English results was also evident in the marked fall in the average points score of the best eight subjects and in the proportion achieving the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc). As a result, many former Year 11 students now taking BTEC courses at college have had to enrol on GCSE programmes in English.
- There were some successes in 2013. In mathematics, for the first time, 69% pupils achieved a good grade. As in 2012, the highest numbers of A\*/A grades were in the sciences and there was an improved profile of results in modern foreign languages and geography. Students with a statement of special educational needs, and the few students taught at home or at college also gained GCSE passes. As in previous years, only a very few students have not moved into employment or further education.
- . Too few students make expected progress in English let alone exceeded it, whatever their starting points. Only one in three eligible for support through pupil premium funding made expected progress, compared with half of students not eligible – however, both figures are well below national averages. In contrast, the proportion making expected progress in mathematics rose slightly. In science, progress was the best in the last three years, especially for girls.
- Current targets for students' progress by the end of Year 11 are more ambitious in mathematics and science than in English. Concentrated support for Year 11 is paying off in improving attainment in English and more so in science and mathematics. However, inspection evidence and the school's data show not all students are making the progress they should in this and other year groups because of weaker aspects in the teaching. In English, the strong emphasis on teaching the features that typify different grade levels for controlled assessments constrains students' originality. In mathematics, variation in how teachers promote understanding and problem solving is narrowing progress, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Too much of students' work is poorly presented with a decline in neatness since the start of term. Errors in spelling and punctuation undermine the quality of work across the curriculum. Although most-able students have often covered and completed a good deal, the less able have much that is incomplete. Students with special educational needs often make expected progress with evident strides in personal as well as academic progress due to one-to-one tailored support that fosters small steps in learning and plugs gaps in previous learning. Younger students, for example, working in the learning support unit not only moved on quickly in learning about prefixes but also took great care in presenting their work.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is helping to accelerate progress in reading. Students from Years 7 and 8 talked about how they have read a good number of books this term, both at school and at home. Some have successfully completed lengthy books and are now choosing to read all the

others written by their preferred author.

### **The quality of teaching**

### **is inadequate**

- Inadequate teaching over time results in students' inadequate achievement. During the inspection, teaching in lessons varied from good to inadequate. As students themselves commented, their progress depends very much on the teacher and the set they are in. Scrutiny of students' work since September and analysis of the school's data show that teaching is not having a consistently positive impact on learning in all subjects. In science, this is less of a concern.
- In English, teaching is not ensuring the systematic development of key skills in analysing and interpreting text for all students. The most-able fare well although they are not always challenged by their work. Although the school has a key focus on developing reading, writing and communication in other subjects, and was well emphasised in some teaching seen, it is poorly coordinated and, more importantly, is not having a strong enough impact on raising the quality of written English.
- Inspectors' observation of lessons and scrutiny of students' work identified a number of effective features in the teaching which carried over into learning: a focus on relevant subject vocabulary and concepts; the use of mnemonics in English to remind students of key features; open questions to probe understanding and to encourage students to explain and justify their thinking; clear indications of how content and skills link to targets; timely feedback on students' learning and marking that is precise in identifying how students can improve.
- Inspectors also identified elements that help to explain students' underachievement particularly in English, mathematics and the humanities; low expectations regarding the rate of progress and the quality of what students can produce; teachers being too quick to direct and give information rather than allow students to come to their own understanding; missed chances to focus on the key elements in English; inconsistency in the marking of students' work, both in the frequency and in the quality of teachers' comments; rare acknowledgement in marking of how well students act on the points made; unchecked students' self-assessment which is sometimes superficial; a lack of variety of challenging tasks for students of differing abilities or extension for those who finish quickly.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils**

### **requires improvement**

- The good behaviour and positive attitudes of many students are offset by the poorer attitudes and disruptive behaviour of a small minority. During the inspection, students were polite and helpful, holding open doors and offering assistance. In conversation and discussions, students often showed a good level of confidence and mature views. These qualities were less evident in lessons especially when teachers dismissed students' responses out of hand or when only a same few students were selected to answer questions. Students are not gaining and rehearsing the skills of being independent learners.
- In lessons, students were usually compliant and willing participants. Only occasionally, most often when they were involved practically, such as in design technology and after-school art club, were they truly engrossed and striving to do well. This is underlined by the school's finding that 20% of the 'reward points' lost by students is due to poor attitude and lack of effort. Some students said they see little value in trying hard as no points can be gained by it.
- Just under a third of parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire disagreed that students are well-behaved and that bullying is dealt with effectively. Students were more positive. They said that bullying, rough behaviour, and silliness do happen but that they know who to tell and incidents are usually dealt with satisfactorily. Students of all ages are well aware of the dangers of social networking, an aspect which is high on the school's safety agenda. Students referred to hearing occasional homophobic language and their perception that some staff were unsure of how to challenge it.

- Students commented on knowing exactly in which lessons and year-groups disruptive behaviour is likely to occur and the inconsistency in how teachers manage such behaviour and apply sanctions. Too many staff rely on the on-call system and the intervention of senior leaders rather than pre-empting and dealing with incidents themselves. Although the number of resultant fixed-term exclusions has reduced, it remains too high.
- Older students provide good role models for younger ones; friendships between students in Years 10 and 7 help the settling-in process especially for those students with little self-confidence or who find the move to secondary schooling unnerving. Similarly, the physical education buddy system was a key factor in vulnerable students feeling able to undertake an overnight stay.
- Attendance is broadly average. Punctuality is not an issue although occasionally is affected by the late arrival of buses.

## The leadership and management

## requires improvement

- Weaknesses and inconsistency in the quality of middle leadership undermine growing strength in senior leadership. While some subject leaders are taking effective action to raise students' achievement, others are less proactive in driving improvement.
- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and is passionate in wanting the best for students. Since taking on the headship two years ago, she has shouldered a considerable workload without personal administrative support. She has dealt decisively with several staffing issues that have nonetheless detracted from moves to improve the provision and raise standards. The governing body has fully supported the headteacher in her work with staff to introduce systems to strengthen the smooth running of the school. The enlarged senior leadership team has a wider pool of skills and expertise and each senior leader has clear responsibilities in managing teams and driving improvement. The 'behaviour team', for instance, has reviewed the data regarding incidents, which has resulted in support for some teaching staff. Appointments to the pastoral team, such as the school counsellor and the careers advisor, are proving highly beneficial in enhancing links with families and the community as well as helping to lift students' aspirations and self-esteem.
- The positive impact of some changes is starting to be felt. The revised system of setting targets and tracking students' attainment and progress is providing a quicker turn-round of data and a clear overview of where progress is not good enough for different groups. In turn, the findings are being used to hold staff to account and to inform development planning for subject departments. Although these plans and the school development plan identify key relevant priorities, they rarely pinpoint exactly where weaknesses lie and how the impact of intervention and action will be evaluated. They also give too little attention to setting targets for A/A\* grade attainment and for the proportion of students making more than expected progress.
- Senior leaders are monitoring closely the work of all subject departments but especially those where students' progress and attainment gave cause for concern in 2013. The recent highly critical report on English by an external consultant rightly identified clear weaknesses in subject leadership which have been confirmed by this inspection but not fully accepted by the English team. Prudent decisions by the governing body and senior leaders, to draft in specialist staff and to appoint temporarily an experienced subject leader to quality assure provision, ensured a measure of continuity for pupils in 2012/13 when half of the English team was absent for more than 400 days. Back at full strength, the English team has been slow in unpicking why students' achievement is not better given the self-evaluation judgement that teaching is good.
- The school's role as a teacher training venue is linked well to professional development. Training opportunities are open to all staff with current courses related to key aspects including understanding the looked after child and the management of behaviour. Twenty-five staff have gained a coaching award with some coaching Year 11 students on the C/D borderline and others working with inexperienced staff. The headteacher and deputy headteacher came to well-reasoned, accurate judgements about the teaching observed jointly with inspectors. Given this positive context, the school is in a good position to continue to appoint and support newly

qualified teachers in those departments where provision is strong.

- The curriculum is being modified to meet the needs of students with developing links to other providers to ensure vocational opportunities for those who are less suited to GCSE subjects. Some recent changes, such as no early GCSE entry, additional time for some subjects, separate sciences and a compulsory weekly after-school English session, have yet to show an impact on achievement in Year 11. Other aspects are well established. Students benefit from a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. In biology, for instance, students visit a laboratory and give a presentation to a professional biologist. Astronomy for girls is a good example of how the school considers equal opportunities. The high take-up by students in Years 7 and 8 of sports activities, with participation still at 50% in older year groups, reflects the good range of activities on offer and students' willingness to partake in team events. Form-time, while a good opportunity to socialise, is not always used productively, especially by older boys.
- Links with other countries via the International School award, special days, such as the annual European Day of Culture when students explore another culture through all subjects of the curriculum, add a strong dimension to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students make educational visits among others to Auschwitz and the Normandy coast, and raise funds to enable students in Years 10 and 11 to build something for a community in Morocco.
- The local authority has had a light-touch approach since the school was judged to be good in the inspection in 2011. A monitoring visit by a representative from the local authority and subsequent report in February 2013 identified concerns regarding English and highlighted the need for the school to show the impact of external consultancy on school improvement. Since then, the local authority has had no further involvement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Since the last inspection, governance has strengthened in holding the school to critical account. The setting up of a portal for governors on the school's website has facilitated the flow of information from senior and middle leaders and the headteacher has been influential in sharpening the content. Good examples are the 2013 examination report to governors, the written evaluative summary from the science leader and the oral report from the mathematics leader explaining the reasons for continuing improvement. The governing body is also making better use of published data to compare critically the school's performance with that of others regionally and nationally. In so doing, it has heightened the emphasis on the value that teaching adds to students' progress rather than the emphasis on GCSE results which still tends to predominate in some subject departments. The governing body is in no doubt as to the seriousness of the school's current situation, particularly regarding English, and the aspects that have stymied action to resolve issues.
- The governing body ensures policies and statutory requirements are met, especially regarding equal opportunities and safeguarding, and it acknowledges that the school's website is not currently compliant. Governors manage the school's finances astutely in close collaboration with the business manager. The finance committee has supported the headteacher in strengthening the quality of teaching and leadership through drawing on reserves to fund a temporary additional appointment in English from early 2013, and recently agreeing to the appointment of two experienced English specialists from January 2014 even though only one is necessary. Given the profile of teaching found in this inspection, governors have been justified in not approving progression in pay for all eligible teachers. The report on the impact of pupil premium funding in the year 2012/13, with accompanying data, evaluative summary and check against effective features as identified in national guidance, is an excellent example of how the governing body and senior leaders are honing a critical edge in their review of the impact of teaching on students' achievement.



## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	112400
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	428814

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	956
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Steven Andrews
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mary Page
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 September 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01229 814560
<b>Fax number</b>	01229 311106
<b>Email address</b>	admin@st-bernards.cumbria.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.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 assesses 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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational 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 St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2013

