

St Bernard's Catholic High School

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

Inspection dates 2–3 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Senior leaders and governors have improved the quality of education the school provides and demonstrate the skills to drive further improvement.
- The quality of teaching overall is good and some teaching is outstanding. This is having a positive impact on students' attainment and progress.
- Leadership of mathematics, English and science is successfully transforming the learning and progress made by students in those subjects.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, which is well supported by independent careers guidance.
- The library is a hub of the school, driving learning and using imaginative, creative approaches to improve reading for all students.
- Literacy is strongly promoted across the school and effectively develops the spelling, reading and verbal skills of many students.
- The pastoral system provides strong and inclusive support, ensuring all students are equally valued and well cared for across the school.
- The school's work to keep students safe is effective in all aspects.
- Students' behaviour is good; students take pride in their appearance and build good relationships with their peers and with staff.
- Students' social, moral and spiritual understanding is excellent. This is reflected in their work and in their attitudes and relationships around school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small amount of teaching requires improvement and not enough teaching is outstanding.
- Middle leadership is not of a consistently high quality; this results in varying achievement across subjects and between different groups of students.
- Students with special educational needs are not tracked and monitored rigorously enough. As a consequence, they do not always make rapid enough progress.
- The most-able students do not make consistently excellent progress.
- The gap between the performance of the disadvantaged students and their peers is narrowing but has not yet closed.
- Teachers' marking of students' work does not always provide detailed advice that is powerful enough to ensure that all students improve and make significant gains in their progress.
- Students are not routinely given opportunities to reflect on their progress and personal targets.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a range of lessons. Two lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors spoke to students about their work and progress and looked at students' work in books. A further scrutiny of work took place in which inspectors sampled students' work across a range of subjects and year groups.
- Inspectors observed students' behaviour in lessons and around the school throughout the day. Inspectors visited form time and an assembly. They also listened to a sample of students read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, members of the governing body, middle leaders and support staff. Inspectors held telephone discussions with representatives of the diocese and the local authority and the School Improvement Partner. Inspectors also met with three groups of students as well as having informal discussions with students in corridors, in lessons and during social times.
- Inspectors considered documents including: the school's view of how well it is performing; development planning; school policies and procedures; records showing students' progress; records of leaders' monitoring of teaching; arrangements for the appraisal of teachers' work; staff training; and records of governors' meetings. Inspectors also reviewed records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, as well as a wide range of information uploaded on the school website.
- Inspectors took into account 82 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) received in the last 365 days and 53 questionnaires completed by staff.
- A small number of students are educated off-site at The Pitstop Project and The Dropzone where they study mathematics, English and practical work-related courses. An inspector had telephone discussions with both providers.

Inspection team

Dawn Platt, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Claire Hollister

Additional Inspector

Linda Foley

Additional Inspector

Jonathan Smart

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- St Bernard's Catholic High School is an average-sized voluntary aided school. Since the previous inspection, the number on roll has risen slightly. Numbers vary in each year group. Some students travel considerable distances to attend the school.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The vast majority of students speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students identified by the school as disabled or as having special educational needs is below the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for extra support through pupil premium funding is below the national average. The pupil premium supports those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- A small number of students in Year 10 and Year 11 attend off-site provision at two providers: The Pitstop Project and The Dropzone.
- St Bernard's School works with Queen Katherine's Teaching School Alliance and The Catholic Teaching Alliance North.
- The school holds the Healthy Schools Award and the International School Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership further by ensuring that the best practice in middle leadership is shared across all subject areas, with the provision of high quality development opportunities for staff to support outstanding learning for students.
- Improve teaching, so as to drive students' progress and attainment further, by ensuring that:
 - all students take ownership of their progress and attainment and understand the next steps needed for improvement
 - all students receive and act upon high quality appropriate guidance on how to improve their work
 - all teachers consistently provide high quality learning opportunities which challenge and support students of all abilities
 - strategies to raise the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students have greater impact
 - the most-able students are consistently challenged effectively and make faster rates of progress with learning
 - the tracking of progress made by students with special educational needs takes place rigorously.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders and governors have rapidly improved the quality of education the school provides and have the skills to drive further improvement. The headteacher has tenacity and leads a skilled team using new sturdier systems established within the school.
- The school has worked in partnership with the local authority and the diocese to improve leadership and teaching, and raise students' achievement.
- Senior leaders have reflected critically on students' attainment in past examinations and have accurately identified strengths and areas for improvement. Their actions in response to this focused analysis have had a positive effect on raising achievement. Leaders promote equality of opportunity and this is seen in the improving results among different groups of learners and the narrowing of attainment gaps. More remains to be done to close the gaps completely between the achievement of disadvantaged students and their peers.
- Senior leaders drive change and carefully scrutinise the teaching and learning that takes place through well-organised checks and measures throughout the academic year. Systems and policies are consistently applied to support the strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Time is provided for teachers to meet and learn from each other; however, the provision of more bespoke, tailored, high quality development opportunities are not always provided for teachers.
- Middle leaders of English, mathematics and science have worked hard to transform their subjects, engaging staff in a learning revolution, raising standards and students' achievement further. They are focused, knowledgeable and committed to the school's ethos and vision of improvement. A close eye is kept on students' well-being and progression. However, this approach is not mirrored across all school leaders and, as a result, progress and attainment are inconsistent across subjects.
- The special educational needs coordinator ensures that teachers have appropriate information and guidance regarding students' individual needs. The effective work of teaching assistants means that students' needs are often addressed successfully. Students' attainment and progress is not used effectively by the coordinator to evaluate the strategies used and to recognise areas for improvement.
- There is effective use of the pupil premium funding. Leaders use it in a variety of ways to increase the support given to disadvantaged students, to help accelerate their learning. While leaders analyse the impact of this funding to identify which strategies are the most effective and worth future investment, this process is not always meticulous enough.
- Achievement leaders carefully analyse and monitor students' progress across year groups. These leaders work alongside subject teachers to ensure that timely and appropriate intervention is provided. Blended in this process are non-teaching pastoral staff who provide vigilant and robust student support. Together, they form a pastoral system which successfully supports and guides all students toward academic success and well-being.
- The curriculum is well-designed to meet the needs and interests of students and makes the best of their individual talents. Students' personal development is prioritised by leaders and they ensure that students can elect to participate in many additional activities to develop their interests and raise aspirations: science fairs, school productions and a variety of school trips are offered. Many engaging opportunities are provided for students to explore the values of tolerance, democracy and other elements which prepare them particularly well for life in modern Britain. For example, inspectors saw a lesson on 'What is Britishness?' that helped students explore the reasons why people of different nationalities visit or migrate to Britain.
- Students are well prepared for the next phase of their education or training due to high quality careers education and independent advice.
- The school has well-organised arrangements for supporting the arrival of Year 7 students when they make their transition from primary education. Leaders' communication with primary schools is good and the school provides effective summer learning support programmes which boost the attainment of students before they start Key Stage 3.
- All aspects of safeguarding, including those related to the appointment of staff, are monitored meticulously by leaders. The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and are effectively implemented.
- A small number of students in Year 10 and Year 11 are educated off-site at alternative provision; leaders work very closely with providers and check systematically on their attendance, safety and progress.
- Staff are held to account for their performance by leaders. Teachers' impact on students' progress is closely linked to pay progression.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are knowledgeable, committed and proactive in school improvement. They contribute strongly to school development and work well with the senior leadership team. They have an accurate perception of what needs to be done to improve the school further.
- Governors challenge leaders and hold them to account at regular meetings. They ensure that clear appraisal arrangements are in place so that staff are appropriately rewarded depending on their contribution to securing students' progress. Governors work with senior leaders to decide teachers' salary progression and reward those who perform well. They support the leaders' actions in addressing under-performance.
- Governors ensure that the school's resources and finances are well planned. They are aware of how the pupil premium funding is spent. They monitor the progress of disadvantaged students and recognise that, although gaps are narrowing, this aspect of the school's work needs to remain as a key focus.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. The vast majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school. Students are polite and courteous to each other, staff and visitors.
- The school's ethos and values underpin good behaviour and encourage students to become respectful and courteous citizens. Students are given opportunities to grow spiritually and morally by exploring their values and beliefs. For instance, students are regularly encouraged to raise money for charity throughout the academic year.
- Students arrive to lessons equipped and keen to learn. However, students do not always display a thirst for learning due to the lack of appropriate challenge provided for them by their teachers.
- Students are rewarded in school for their work and for making the right choices. Students enjoy gaining access to a 'rewards room' and staff use various commendations and certificates to celebrate success. The school involves parents and the community in celebrating successes. For example, an annual awards evening is held to highlight students' achievements in all areas of school life.
- Bullying is infrequent and incidents of racist and homophobic bullying are extremely rare. When they do occur, the school deals with these effectively. The school educates students well about how to stay safe and protect themselves online.
- The school's attendance officer is effective in building community relationships and promoting good attendance, which continues to improve for all groups of learners. Persistent absence and exclusions are also reducing. The use of internal attendance league tables is raising the importance of attendance among students.
- Students have many opportunities to develop leadership and take on further responsibilities. These can be through the student council, as form representatives, as prefects or by taking a role as a sport leader. These roles prepare students extremely well for the next phase of their education.
- Some students participate regularly in an active school council; this promotes students' understanding of democracy and demonstrates how students can contribute to shaping school development.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students say they feel very safe because they are well cared for by teachers and other adults. They feel particularly pleased with the adjusted pastoral system and say that it has improved the school; they like the easy access to advice and support that they now have. Students have a clear understanding of the different forms of bullying and report that bullying is rare. When any instances of bullying do occur, students say that these are quickly resolved. Students know that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- Students who are educated at off-site provision behave well due to the close and regular contact with the school's pastoral team.
- Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example by learning about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and how to use the internet safely. Students' awareness of child exploitation has been raised through a visiting theatre group.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of students, including checks on the recruitment of staff, are rigorous and monitored regularly and closely. All staff, including those recently appointed, have received statutory

safeguarding training and are knowledgeable about the procedures to be followed if any concerns arise.

- Inspection evidence supports the view expressed by the majority of parents that their children feel safe and well cared for by the school.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is typically characterised by good classroom relationships that enable students to work respectfully with each other. Students listen and respond to teachers well, making good strides in their learning.
- Teachers usually have appropriate subject knowledge and set tasks that are suitably matched to students' abilities, supporting gains in students' progress. Teachers have high expectations and make it clear to students what they are going to learn. However, some teachers do not always match learning opportunities to students' ability and starting points, resulting in a lack of progress and challenge. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching sometimes occur in information technology, music and modern foreign languages.
- The best teaching in the school is characterised by teachers meticulously helping students of all abilities to learn successfully, so deepening their understanding as well as consolidating what they have learned. This strong practice is most evident in technology, English, science and mathematics.
- Teachers provide opportunities for students to work well together and to share and develop ideas. For example, in drama students demonstrated enthusiasm and engagement on their performance piece, collaborating in groups and contributing to each other's learning.
- Students take pride in their work and present it well. Teachers' marking provides students with clear comments on what they need to do to improve. However, this good practice is not consistently found and students are not always encouraged to act upon the advice and comments their teachers provide. Inspectors saw some excellent examples of students responding to written feedback on assessments that led to clear gains in learning. These were most apparent in English, mathematics and science books.
- Students say they are well taught in the vast majority of their subjects. However, they are not always clear on how well they are doing; students' knowledge of their own progress and targets is not consistent in all subjects.
- Homework is set within subjects but it is not always finely tuned to have significant impact on progress for students.
- Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and make a significant contribution to students' learning, particularly to support those who have special educational needs. They are used effectively to support vulnerable students joining from primary school by supporting pre-visits, meeting parents and ensuring that all information is understood by students. This work reduces anxiety and ensures well-planned and appropriate learning takes place.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is similar to the national average. The proportion of students who attain five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, at the end of Key Stage 4 is just above average. The figure for 2014 was the best ever result attained by the school and internal school data indicate that the positive trend is set to continue. Achievement is not yet outstanding because, although attainment is quickly improving, not enough students make very rapid progress, particularly the most able.
- Students' achievement in English and mathematics is good. Figures for the proportion of students making expected progress in English and mathematics in 2014 were close to the national average. Internal data for the present Year 11 supports a positive picture of improvement; achievement shows more students making better-than-expected progress.
- School data shows that students in Key Stage 3 are making good progress in English and mathematics and are therefore well equipped to start their GCSE courses.
- Disadvantaged students attained a grade lower in English and approximately a grade and a half lower in mathematics at GCSE when compared with their peers in school in 2014. They attained a grade lower in English and approximately a grade lower in mathematics at GCSE when compared with their peers nationally in 2014.
- The progress made by disadvantaged students in 2014 from their relative starting points was less than that of other students in school and nationally, particularly in relation to the proportions of students

making more-than-expected progress in mathematics.

- The school's data indicate that gaps in performance between disadvantaged students and their peers are narrowing. This is as a result of good teaching, closer tracking and focused intensive support by leaders at all levels.
- The most-able students in 2014 did not make enough progress from their starting points. Internal data for the present Year 11 reveals much better progress due to improved teaching and rising challenge and expectation from teachers.
- Students who have special educational needs achieve well; they are set realistic targets and staff work effectively together to provide them with support. School leaders do not monitor and evaluate rigorously the impact of strategies used to raise achievement.
- Literacy is a continuing focus across the school, including an effective drive to improve reading. Students follow a reading support programme at Key Stage 3 and those who enter the school with a lower reading age make good progress. Catch-up funding is used effectively to support the use of reading strategies and resources across the school. The head of English is also injecting a focus on oracy across the school, implementing competitions and rewards that are raising the confidence and skills of students.
- The few students following courses in establishments away from the school site receive good support and achieve well.

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

Unique reference number	112400
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	462635

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	897
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Andrews
Headteacher	Mary Page
Date of previous school inspection	11 December 2013
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