



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

BELLERIVE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL FCJ

Unique Reference Number: 104709

LEA: Liverpool

Inspection Number: 269306

Inspection Dates: 11-13 MAY 2004

Reporting Inspector: Jane Jones HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 12(3) under the same act

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Bellerive School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

Bellerive Catholic High School FCJ is a voluntary-aided comprehensive school for girls aged 11-18. There are nine boys in the sixth form. 890 pupils attend the school, including 110 students in the sixth form. The numbers have risen over the last few years, reflecting the high regard with which the school is held in the local community. The pupils come from a diverse range of social and cultural backgrounds. There is high unemployment in the region; 44 per cent of the pupils (well above average) receive free school meals. Recently, the pupils entering the school achieved better results in their primary schools than previously; they are now close to average. 17 per cent of the pupils (broadly average) have special educational needs.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Effectiveness of the school

This is a school in which every individual matters. It benefits from inspirational leadership and a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The school's aims embrace its Catholic ethos which pervades its work. Relationships reflect the value placed upon individuals and the mutual respect between members of the school community. The care, guidance and support for the pupils are outstanding. The pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. Teaching is good and often very good. Standards at GCSE/GNVQ are average - they have risen every year since the last inspection and pupils achieve well. The school is continuing to develop its curriculum and use of assessment.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness of the school's sixth form

The sixth form is well led and managed and makes a valuable contribution to the ethos and life of the rest of the school. It provides the students with a wide range of opportunities and experiences. The quality of the provision is good. The numbers in the sixth form are increasing.

Grade: 2

Improvement since the last inspection

Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection. The school's distinctive ethos has remained a fundamental strength; it underpinned the successful strategies the school adopted to address the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. The school has received national recognition for its improving examination results.

Grade: 1

Capacity to improve

The school's capacity for further improvement is very good. Its self-evaluation is accurate and realistic, and provides a clear set of priorities for future development. The headteacher and senior managers set very high standards for themselves and for others. Their deep commitment to the pupils in their care, and to ensuring that they reach their full potential, is shared by other staff in the school and by the governing body.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further:

The school has a very good understanding of its strengths, and has identified clearly the areas for improvement. Of these, it should pay particular attention to:

- sharing good practice more widely
- setting appropriate academic targets for the pupils and using them to guide teachers' and curricular planning
- continuing to develop effective strategies to improve attendance.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The pupils' GCSE/GNVQ results have shown very good improvement over the last five years; twice as many pupils now achieve five or more A* to C grades (59 per cent, which is just above average for girls). The school has won three national achievement awards for its results. A significant contributory factor has been the successful introduction of vocational courses but the improvements also include English, mathematics and science. While most pupils make very good progress in Years 10 and 11, there are some who do not do as well, especially lower-ability pupils and those who do not attend regularly. The pupils' results in the national tests at age 14 in English, mathematics and science have also improved at a good rate. Although the results were just below average in 2003, many pupils made good progress since joining the school at age 11 and most achieved the standard expected by age 14. When the school's results are compared with those from schools in similar local contexts, the results at both stages are well above average.

In the sixth form, the standards attained by the students are well below average when compared with all sixth forms nationally, but are generally satisfactory in relation to students' results at GCSE. A small number achieve the highest grades.

The school's evaluation of its overall performance is accurate. Its data show it is on track to meet the challenging targets it has set for 2004. However, while the school's analysis identifies and accounts for key facts such as the relatively high number of girls who achieved no GCSE passes in 2003, it does not probe sufficiently the variation in the pupils' performance across subjects or groups of pupils of different abilities, and then link the findings into specific actions. The school knows there is scope for more rigorous analysis of data.

Grade: 2

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Standards of behaviour are outstandingly high. The pupils' relationships with their peers and with their teachers are exemplary and very productive. The safe and very caring atmosphere in the school enables the pupils to contribute positively to all aspects of school life. Their views are respected, and where appropriate, acted upon. The pupils value the school council highly; their representatives are very active and take their responsibilities seriously. Around the school, the prefects and older pupils make a significant contribution to supervision arrangements.

The pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning; they are diligent and very attentive in lessons. These are important ingredients in their successful learning and contribute to the improving standards in the school.

Attendance is not good enough despite improvement over the last few years. The school works hard to improve attendance and punctuality and the majority of the pupils do attend school regularly and arrive on time. Although a range of effective strategies have led to clear improvements, the attendance of many pupils and sixth-form students is still too low, particularly those whose families are proving harder to reach.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The pupils' response to the spiritual life offered in the school is very honest and refreshingly genuine. They have a keen sense of right and wrong. They respond enthusiastically to the rich range of community activities available to them. Through charitable events, fund-raising

activity and community-service projects, the pupils demonstrate their responsibilities as active members of the local, wider and international communities. Not only do individuals and groups of pupils undertake extensive activities to raise money for those in need, they also take part in musical and dramatic events within the community. Students in the sixth-form make a considerable contribution to the life of the school and to the wider community. All of this improves the pupils' self-esteem and empowers their development as young people.

The co-ordinator for life-long learning has successfully developed popular activities that bring the school into the community and vice versa. For example, joint mother and daughter events have helped to promote the value given to learning beyond the school. Participation in evening-revision and study-skills sessions is high. This, together with Saturday school, contributes to raising standards and the personal development of the pupils.

Grade: 1

QUALITY OF PROVISION

Overall, inspection evidence indicates that teaching is good. In the large majority of lessons it was good or better, and was very good in a significant proportion. The high quality of relationships between staff and pupils is a common feature; the teachers know their pupils well. The best teaching is exciting and the pupils' resulting sense of enjoyment and achievement are clearly evident. The teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and pitch their explanations and questions at the right level to interest, support and challenge the pupils. They plan a variety of tasks, and move the lessons forward at a good pace. In a few lessons, the chosen style of teaching did not involve the pupils actively in their learning. In the sixth form, the teaching and learning are good overall but are generally not as strong as in the rest of the school. The small numbers of students in some groups restrict the range of teaching and learning styles used. During the inspection, the lessons generally focused upon the final stages of revision. The teachers have good knowledge of the sixth-form courses and how they are assessed.

The development of assessment is one of the school's current priorities. In the best examples, the teachers' careful assessment of the pupils' work helps the pupils to understand what needs to be done next to make the best progress. It also helps the teachers plan the next steps in learning. Increasingly, assessment information is shaping planning and teaching, and the pupils are becoming involved in evaluating their work and that of others. The school does not consistently make full use of all its assessment data to set appropriate performance targets for individual pupils.

The school's curriculum is generally broad and balanced. The planned improvements as a specialist science college include the introduction of applied science GCSE and better accommodation. The curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of opportunities outside lessons that contributes strongly to the pupils' progress and personal development.

The students generally receive good advice and guidance about the post-16 courses that are available to them. The current range of courses is adequate. The students and their parents are kept very well informed about their progress. The school is working well with other local 11-18 schools to form a large multi-faith sixth-form consortium. This builds on the existing successful partnership with St Hilda's C of E School and will extend substantially the number and types of courses offered to the students.

The school's self-evaluation accurately describes the quality of care, guidance and support given to pupils as one of its greatest strengths: it is in fact an outstanding feature of its work.

There is an effective system for identifying vulnerable children who are then given a high level of support. Liaison with external agencies is good and is managed well by an inclusion co-ordinator. All groups of pupils receive high-quality pastoral care in relation to their individual needs and are supported to a remarkable standard within and beyond the school. Child protection arrangements and practices are very good; they are managed efficiently and are well understood by staff.

Transitional arrangements for new pupils, and those moving on, ensure they are well prepared for change and information is exchanged thoughtfully. The Connexions Service plays an invaluable role and works well with the staff to support the pupils in making appropriate choices for life after leaving school. This collaboration supports the school's vision for each girl to aim as high as she can.

The pupils value the welcoming and safe atmosphere that permeates the school. In the words of one pupil, "I now feel safe because of the teachers here". This is a typical response, given irrespective of the particular needs of individuals. The all-embracing atmosphere of mutual respect and kindness provides a firm foundation for pupils to grow in their spiritual, emotional and social lives.

Grade: 2

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

This school is very well led. The headteacher inspires a high level of loyalty and commitment from staff and pupils alike. She is ably supported by her senior managers, and they provide clear direction for the work of the school. Together, the staff sustain a secure and caring environment in which the pupils flourish. Under the headteacher's leadership, standards have risen significantly and are on target to improve further.

Many aspects of management are effective. The ethos of the school enables the senior managers to adopt low-key but well-judged approaches to supporting and challenging staff as the need arises. The school has improved the quality and range of assessment data held, and its analysis is becoming more robust. However, it recognises that there is work to be done to ensure that targets set for individual pupils represent suitable levels of challenge. The school also identified in its self-evaluation the need to review the system of performance management, which has stalled in recent months. All staff contributed to the self-evaluation document which sometimes described what had been done rather than what happened as a result. Nevertheless, the school's judgements on how well it is doing were accurate; it knows itself very well.

The school is developing the skills of its heads of department through a rolling programme of training. While many provide good leadership of their areas of responsibility, there are inconsistencies in how they monitor the work of their teams. Consequently, as the school introduces improvements, for example in marking, there is a lack of whole-school systems to identify what is really good and spread it more widely. The school is beginning to extend the pastoral roles of heads of year and form tutors to include the pupils' academic development and progress.

The governing body is strongly supportive of the school and committed to its role as a critical friend. It has encouraged significant developments such as the specialist science college status and the planned sixth-form consortium. The governors and senior managers have a clear vision for its future and there are high expectations of the staff and the pupils and students. There is a strong sense of pride in the school.

Grade: 2

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